

CND Strategy Discussion – 27/09/08

**Quaker Peace & Social Witness (QPSW) response to questions circulated in advance.
Kat Barton**

Note: Unfortunately, I am unable to attend the strategy discussion but have sent responses to some of the questions below. As I work on a number of peace and security issues – not just on nuclear disarmament – I have not been able to answer the questions as specifically as I would have liked. I look forward to reading the notes from the meeting and to considering the ways in which QPSW might take forward its work on nuclear disarmament.

1. Do you/your organisation think the current global political context is favourable/unfavourable/ neither/both to nuclear disarmament? How?

I think the past 2 years have seen some positive signs of a shift in thinking in terms of the need for nuclear disarmament by people who had previously been very much in favour of maintaining the 'nuclear deterrent'. First, there was the Op-Ed in January 2007 by US 'cold warriors' Henry Kissinger, George Schultz, William Perry and Sam Nunn which was renewed a year later. In addition, Margaret Beckett's speech in March 2007 – albeit on the occasion of the announcement of the UK government's decision to replace Trident – spoke of the need to work towards a nuclear-weapons free world. And in February this year the Defence Secretary Des Browne took the unusual step of making a speech to the UN Conference on Disarmament. Then, in June this year, former UK Foreign Secretaries Lords Hurd, Rifkind and Owen as well as Lord Robertson former NATO Secretary-General wrote an article in The Times making clear their support for the US campaign for a nuclear weapons-free world and stating that progress towards a dramatic reduction in the world's nuclear weapons is possible.

However, whilst I think these developments are extremely helpful in generating optimism and opening up the possibility of a nuclear-weapons free world, I still think we have a long way to go. The major underlying hurdle is that nuclear weapons are still regarded as fundamental to the security of the most powerful countries in the world. As Mohamed ElBaradei, Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said in 2005: 'As long as some countries place strategic reliance on nuclear weapons as a deterrent, other countries will emulate them. We cannot delude ourselves into thinking otherwise.'

The current state of the global economy could be favourable to us in terms of highlighting the stupidity of spending money on nuclear weapons. Also, the increasing tensions between Russia and the US are a further reason to work concertedly towards the abolition of nuclear weapons. And with NATO still struggling to find a role for itself, there could be an opportunity for a review of its nuclear policies – in particular, its first-strike policy.

2. What are realisable goals for the international peace movement to work for at the 2010 Review Conference? And beyond?

In order for the 2010 Review Conference to be successful, there needs to be a renewed confidence in the NPT process and in the feasibility of nuclear disarmament. NNWS need to be able to see that security can be achieved without nuclear weapons – as William Hague said recently: 'Showing that we take our disarmament commitments seriously is a vital part of winning the moral argument against nuclear proliferation.' By making progress towards the 13 steps as agreed at the 2000 Review Conference and by reducing the operational-readiness of their nuclear weapons, P5 members could go a long way to regaining the confidence of the NNWS in this fragile treaty. Although, I am unable to list specific realisable goals, I would say that the international peace movement has a role in pressing for these steps.

3. **What demands do you think we should put to the British government in advance of the 2010 Review Conference? Which are the most likely to be achievable (please rank if possible). What are the advantages and disadvantages of demanding more than we think we can achieve? Should we demand more than we think we can achieve?**

We should continue to press the British government to work on fulfilling its commitments as set out in the 13 steps and to take the lead in initiating a joint P5 statement at the conference. We should also be calling for reductions in the number of nuclear weapons possessed by NWS and for a decrease in the operational –readiness of UK nuclear weapons. Such confidence-building measures are essential if the NPT process is to move forward.

As we know, despite the government having voted to replace Trident in March last year, the 'Deal isn't done' yet and the forthcoming decisions on procurement are excellent opportunities for us to demand that the money not be spent. The first of these will be the Initial Gate decision which is due some time around 2009-2010.

We should be calling on the government to make real its commitment to the 'rules-based international system' by opposing bi-lateral agreements between states which contradict the terms of the NPT. Clearly, if the UK government is serious about non-proliferation, it should have opposed the US-India nuclear sharing deal. Our role as a peace movement should be to apply pressure on the UK when it fails to espouse the values of fairness which it so expects of others.

Although such demands as these will still be a challenge to achieve, they are much more doable than some of our more radical demands – such as to cancel the replacement of Trident. I would say that we need to be demanding both the more doable as well as the more radical – we should never forget our ultimate goal – a world free of nuclear weapons – but we should remember that different organisations, in different contexts and at different times will need to advocate different things. For example, the more softly-softly approach may sometimes be necessary when engaging with officials but in our public-facing campaigns we can be a lot bolder.

4. **What are the positive and negative factors in the current political climate/situation in Britain? Overall, how favourable is it? What are the key issues that we can use to advance British nuclear disarmament in the current political context?**

As mentioned before, recent support for nuclear disarmament from unexpected quarters is positive. However, a Conservative government within the next 2 years is looking more likely and a U-turn on the Trident decision in this context is unlikely.

Concerns over the economy could be used to advance nuclear disarmament as could the public's support for development issues and concern over climate change. These issues require financial investment and if the public can be shown that we can't have everything (ie. nuclear weapons, an end to poverty and a solution to climate change) then they may call on the government to scrap nuclear weapons in favour of spending on development issues and the environment.

A major underlying question in all this relates to Britain's role in the world – both the Labour and Conservative parties seem keen to promote Britain as a force for good. There seems to be a growing understanding of the interconnectedness of issues (as was made clear in the National Security Strategy) and it is becoming more difficult for any government to claim to be a force for good whilst simultaneously making us less secure. We need to be engaged in the conversation about Britain's role in the world and should be promoting nuclear disarmament as a way for Britain to take the lead on an important issue and demonstrate a concrete way in which Britain can be that force for good.

5. How can the positive climate in Scotland make an impact on our work in the rest of Britain?

Although the positive climate in Scotland is heartening, what goes on north of the border rarely seems to make much difference in a political sense to the rest of Britain. However, were Scotland to refuse to play host to Britain's nuclear weapons, it would send a very strong message to Westminster.

6. What does nvda at bases and other facilities achieve? Can more be achieved and how?

Persistent NVDA at nuclear bases – by initiatives such as Block The Builders or Faslane 365 – can serve to focus attention on a nuclear facility – particularly if the actions are creative. Such actions also serve to build the movement against nuclear weapons and from that can spring other initiatives. NVDA can also be important in terms of maintaining the pressure and 'witnessing' to what is happening at nuclear bases which in themselves can be valuable. However, there is often very little media coverage of NVDA and they can sometimes turn workers and local people against us. As such, NVDA planning needs to happen as part of the movement's wider strategising and should preferably be linked to current events in creative ways.

7. What can be achieved through the Westminster and Scottish Parliaments? What are the best ways of doing this?

Given the possibility of a Conservative government in the next couple of years, it would be prudent to start building relationships with potential members of a future Conservative Cabinet now – after all, they are the ones likely to be taking the decisions in the coming years.

It also makes sense to engage more with officials in the MOD and FCO who are working on disarmament and non-proliferation issues. This can be done a) reactively – by responding to requests from government for input on particular issues or to attend meetings arranged by government; or b) proactively – by identifying areas of interest to both NGOs and government and setting up the meetings ourselves. These meetings are best organised by a coalition of NGOs and can be an excellent way of enabling NGOs to set the agenda whilst engaging officials on issues of mutual interest.

Identifying allies in Parliament and potentially sympathetic MPs and then building relationships with them is one way of attempting to achieve change through both Parliaments. Also, around the time of the procurement decisions, Parliamentary Questions could be used to raise specific issues in Parliament.

8. What is achieved through local and street campaigning and can more be achieved and how?

Local and street campaigning can be effective – if it is a) creative and b) relevant to people. Given the current economic situation, a broader campaign to promote a reduction in defence spending – which would necessarily include scrapping bigger ticket items such as Trident could be extremely popular.

9. How can we build stronger alliances with other civil society organisations such as trade unions and faith groups?

As a faith group, QPSW has a range of issues it works on and we tend to come together around a specific issue at particular points in time (for example over the Trident replacement decision). We do forge on-going alliances with other organisations but these tend to be within the framework of organisations working together collectively with no one organisation taking the lead, rather than as one of many secondary partners in a grouping where one organisation leads the others.

As a movement for nuclear disarmament, we can be proud of the fact that opposition to nuclear weapons is widespread and that the nuclear disarmament movement has many, many allies. But

we need to recognise the importance of engaging with organisations 'where they are'. Rather than attempting to get organisations to include nuclear disarmament in their programmes of work, we should be supporting wider campaigns. As I mentioned, a campaign to reduce defence spending – with nuclear disarmament as one part of this – is more likely to draw organisations in than trying to get broader issue organisations to support a single issue campaign against nuclear weapons. For example, the Stop the War Coalition/CND alliance over Iraq has brought other people who aren't only concerned with nuclear weapons to us. We need to link in on other issues and be willing for nuclear disarmament not to be at the very forefront of a campaign. ?

10. How do we reach the media more effectively?

We need to 'hook' things to current events and make our campaigns relevant to people. We also need to go to 'unusual', 'uncomfortable' and 'unexpected' places where we can forge new relationships with different allies. There are people who support nuclear disarmament but who have very different views from us on other issues. We should be seeking out those people and encouraging them to express their views publically – this would bring whole new groups of people into our movement.

11. How can we tie these different elements together in a coherent strategy and what is the most effective mechanism for us to coordinate our work?

I think that the question of how to tie these different elements together in a coherent strategy is one for the strategy discussion. I also think that this will inform the question of the most effective mechanism for us to coordinate our work, but I would add that QPSW favours ways of working that enable collective ownership of a project.