



Launch of Major Survey of Leading Opinion Formers:

**The Future for UK Defence, Diplomacy and Disarmament –
50 Proposals for a More Peaceful World**

Held in Committee Room 2A, House of Lords, Tuesday 21st May

NON-VERBATIM REPORT

Steve Barwick, Chair, Nuclear Education Trust

- Welcomed all attendees and explained that the Nuclear Education Trust (NET) is an independent charity whose mission is to inform and educate decision makers on all issues related to nuclear weapons.
- Pointed to the fact that the Atomic Scientists' Doomsday Clock is now at closest point to midnight for 50 years and said it is imperative that the world, sooner rather than later, gets back onto a path towards nuclear disarmament.
- Explained that NET commissioned the survey of leading opinion on UK defence, diplomacy and disarmament prospects because it believes the dangerous state of geopolitics needs more discussion and ultimately action
- Concluded by saying that the issues about to be discussed are extremely difficult but hopefully all here today share NET's concern that after some decades of global nuclear disarmament the main nuclear powers are now all modernising, and most enlarging, their nuclear arsenals.

Dr Tim Street, Independent Researcher and Author of the Report

- Introduced the report by explaining that the survey is a genuine attempt to open up discussion to a wide range of voices.
- Said that common view amongst respondents was that as long as Russia's war against Ukraine continues the possible use of nuclear weapons by President Putin will remain and fears of a new Cold War will grow. For many, the potential for progress on arms control and disarmament is low given the tension and distrust between the major powers.
- Despite this – or indeed because of this - a total of fifty positive actions were proposed that the UK could take to build confidence and defuse tension between the nuclear powers.
- Other key points which he highlighted were:

- In terms of managing the UK's major power relations, respondents agreed Russia and China should be treated separately and that the UK should seek to improve relations with both when the time is right.
- as a party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the UK is committed to reducing both the number of its nuclear weapons, and their role in its security policies, pursuant to disarmament. Yet the story the UK has had to tell in recent years is one of nuclear modernisation and rearmament.
- the Integrated Review Refresh overestimates the UK's ability to influence world events, and that the UK would be better off focusing on security issues closer to home.
- The Government's decision to increase the UK's nuclear warhead cap—and reduce transparency over nuclear weapons policy—raised particular concern across many respondents.

Rt Hon Dame Margaret Beckett MP, former Foreign Secretary

- Began her remarks by saying that when she was Foreign Secretary in 2007 and 2008, she had been privileged to be the first to hold that Government office to give a speech about nuclear disarmament
- Regarding Russia she says she does not entirely despair. She had worked with her opposite number Sergey Lavrov, on restraining Iran from getting nuclear weapons and he, and Russia, had meant what they said. He is still in post.
- Said that the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which brings nations together does offer a vehicle for dialogue and an opportunity to improve relations between countries. However, she does not think the U.N. Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) is a fruitful way forward
- Finally, she said that she is tired of the world beating rhetoric that is often employed by others in these Houses and although Britain shouldn't over egg itself but does have a role on the world stage and it can and should exert influence.

Richard Foord MP, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson on Defence

- Began his remarks by stating that in 2010 the Liberal Democrats had wanted the UK to go down a rung or two on the nuclear ladder, had instigated the Trident Alternatives Review and had wanted a downgrade of Continuous at Sea Deterrence
- Explained that this policy was ended, regretfully, due to Russia sabre rattling and illegal action, but the party remains supportive of the ultimate goal of nuclear disarmament.
- Said that he was not at all clear of the reasons for the UK increasing its nuclear warheads and moving towards strategic ambiguity
- Concluded by stating that UK international policy needs to be mindful of other states' policy eg NATO but more discussion and more transparency of nuclear weapons issues would be helpful including of the potential for a multilateral No First Use agreement

Deolinda Eltringham, Green Party Peace, Security and Defence Working Group

- Began her remarks by welcoming the report and by saying that the Green Party aims to reduce nuclear weapons not have new warheads
- Explained that the Green Party wants consideration of real security needs based on adherence to international law.
- Said that of course countries have right to defend themselves against aggressors, but security needs more than weapons: human security also requires action on climate change. Also pointed out that polls suggest the population is in support of UK signing up to TPNW.
- Concluded her comments by saying that she was shocked by the intention of some parties to increase defence spending to 3% yet not spending anything close to that on the climate emergency

Q & A and comments from the audience

- **Baroness Susan Miller, Liberal Democrat**, said that it was a positive time in 2008 which started with vision and strong leadership: how do we get back to strong leadership? Where will it come from?
- **Julian Lewis MP, Conservative**, asked whether the panel recognise those not committed to disarmament are just as idealistic – and in support of peace - as those who are? My view is that the better way to avoid conflict is to show ‘enemies’ they will suffer if use their weapons.
- **David Cullen, Nuclear Information Service**, asked Margaret Beckett why Russia had changed and when? Also asked about the practicalities of a world without nuclear weapons: what needs to be done regarding verification etc?
- **Margaret Beckett** responded to the question about what changed in Russia by saying ‘who knows’. On verification she said one has to follow the evidence.
- **Richard Foord MP** said that he does accept that both sides of the argument are idealists. He also noted that the Russian nuclear threat is now more obvious and that there does need to be a reaction to that.
- **Deolinda Eltringham** said there is a need for idealism and we do need to get rid of nuclear weapons: the longer taken to deal with the situation the more difficult it will get as the post office, and haemophilia scandal testifies.
- **Steve Barwick**, said there is not enough awareness of the existential threat of nuclear weapons. In response to Julian Lewis he said the question now before us is not whether you are a unilateralist or a multilateralist but whether or not you are concerned where nuclear rearmament is taking us.

Dave Doogan MP, former SNP Defence Spokesperson and Defence Committee Member

- Began his remarks by reminding attendees that the SNP has a different view to the Government on nuclear weapons including Trident which is based in Scotland
- Explained that having nuclear weapons guaranteed UK’s position on the UN Security Council and that if they were given up the UK’s position and status would be reduced

- Said that the world is increasingly divided between autocracies and democracies. The Russia situation is down to autocracy, lack of democracy.
- Agrees that the other side has a valid view but noted that there is a lack of quality of parliamentary debate on disarmament and the Defence Committee has not even looked in detail at the issues

Hywel Williams MP, Plaid Cymru Spokesperson on Defence

- Said that he was speaking on behalf of former Plaid Cymru MEP, Jill Evans and welcomed the report including its incremental and transformative proposals
- Plaid Cymru is clear what it is against – nuclear weapons and increase in military spending – but not so clear about what it is in favour of. He expressed interest in the TPNW initiative.
- Said there is a need to think about what security means - climate change is arguably more important and Plaid Cymru would divert some defence spending to this
- Concluded by pointing out that Ireland has a lot of influence despite being small – the UK does not need to retain nuclear weapons in order to exert influence

Steve Barwick, Chair, Nuclear Education Trust

- Steve explained that **Baroness Christine Blower**, Patron of NET, had been unable to join us due to business in the House of Lords but he was aware of a couple of the points she would have made:
 - The debate about nuclear weapons has been binary, too polarised. In the words of Lord Browne this is “very stale”. Its time all of us who are concerned about nuclear weapons – whether from cautious or more critical standpoint – to be part of a debate about way forward.
 - She agreed with the report’s conclusion that “to help the major powers escalating tension up to nuclear war the UK must act as a nation amongst nations, not beholden only to the US but building wider partnerships – in Europe and beyond”

Q & A and comments from the audience

- **Professor Paul Schulte, Centre for Defence Studies, King’s College London**, said that the report was deficient in that the authors don’t acknowledge the severity of the current situation for example that multilateral treaties aren’t holding and securing future treaties would be extremely challenging due to political realities which would make enforcement difficult if not impossible
- **Malcolm Chalmers, RUSI**, said that arms control treaties do better when nations are talking to each other. The deteriorating relationship between US and Russia has caused decline in treaties. In order to achieve nuclear disarmament, more actors than just the five nuclear weapons states have to be involved. In fact, “vulnerable” nations - North Korea, India and Pakistan, and even Russia - are most attached to nuclear weapons given their significant distrust of other states.
- **Richard Reeve, Re-thinking Security**, referred to the high cost of nuclear weapons – not just to make in the first place but also to decommission. However, these costs don’t get much discussion, despite constituting a very big proportion of defence budget. Might there come a point when they are too costly and leave not enough defence budget for conventional weapons?

- **Commander Robert Forsyth** said that spending more and more on nuclear weapons rather than on conventional weapons is not popular with the military.
- **Oliver Robertson, Quakers**, if we “demonstrate” that nukes are best way to defend ourselves our traditional defence will falls into disrepair.
- **Professor Kris Stoddart, University of Swansea**, said he was very concerned that Russia is sabre rattling regarding using nuclear weapons and that this brinkmanship is working? It’s a dangerous time.
- **David Cullen, NIS**, as we spend more and more on nuclear weapons, rather than conventional weapons, there will be a temptation to continue with them. That said he said that whilst some bilateral treaties were not working, some multilateral ones were and therefore we should look to more internationalism
- **Julian Lewis MP** said that there have been very few debates about nuclear weapons in the Houses of Parliament: ‘Maingate’ in 2007 and then he and Jeremy Corbyn MP secured a debate in 2013 when there was a good discussion but no vote. He recommended people read his and Jeremy’s contributions.

Concluding comments - from speakers, author and chair

- **Deolinda Eltringham** said climate change is a greater threat than nuclear war – also that nuclear weapons are making climate change worse.
- **Richard Foord MP** said he will look back at 2013 debate. He also thought questions around posture, for example No First Use are worth exploring as well as the impact of emerging technologies
- **Margaret Beckett** said it had been an interesting discussion, welcomed the report and remarked that the re-election of Donald trump would be a potential problem. She also agreed No First Use is worth considering but said there is no point in the UK attending TPNW if don’t agree with the principle. Also pointed out that there is no equivalent of the US-Russia hotline between India and Pakistan which is very dangerous. Finally commented that Russia’s attitude is very unhelpful but there is still some momentum to the NPT, which the five nuclear weapon states have not repudiated yet.
- **Dr Tim Street** pointed out that the report does reference that some treaties have been “trashed” - to use Lord Owen’s phrase - but others do remain in place. Also that many respondents to the survey suggested that TPNW needs to be “stress tested” and that the UK’s nuclear weapons are not at all independent. Finally, he said that the money for nuclear weapons is not a bottomless pit and echoed the call of many survey respondents who called for more transparency and scrutiny.
- **Steve Barwick** said that Nuclear Education Trust were in no doubt of the difficult situation the world is in but doing nothing is not an option. This has been a really good debate regarding the future for defence, diplomacy and disarmament today and I look forward to discussion intensifying in the next 12 months given the UK General Election and US Presidential Election will take place. And there will inevitably be choices for the next Government to make on defence and foreign affairs policy as geo-political circumstances change, as change they inevitably will. He ended by saying that NET’s hope is that the report’s findings and its 50 recommendations will be helpful to those within and without Government. He then thanked the report’s author and the Marmot Charitable Trust for funding the project as well as all the speakers and attendees.

ATTENDEES (OTHER THAN SPEAKERS AND CHAIR)

Malcolm Chalmers	Contributor and Deputy Director General, Royal United Services Institute
Oliver Robertson	Contributor and Head of Witness and Worship, Quakers in Britain
Professor Kris Stoddart	Contributor and Cyber Threats, Politics, Philosophy & International Relations, Swansea University
Baroness Susan Miller	Contributor and Co-President, Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament
Robert Forsyth	Contributor and former Commander Royal Navy Submarines
Professor Paul Schulte	Contributor and Senior Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Defence Studies, King's College London
David Cullen	Contributor, in a personal capacity, and Director of the Nuclear Information Service
Rt Hon Sir Julian Lewis MP	Former Chair, Defence Select Committee
Vanessa Hanson	International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons
Richard Reeve	Co-ordinator, Rethinking Security
Sarah Medi Jones	Deputy General Secretary, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
Dixe Wills	Campaigns co-ordinator, Quakers in Britain
Anahita Parsa	British American Security Information Council
Dr Bimal Khadka	Medact Nuclear Weapons Group
Dr Marie Noelle Vieu	Medact Nuclear Weapons Group
Annie Tunnicliffe	CND
Colette Joyce	Justice and Peace Commission
Maureen J Forsyth	Nuclear Information Service
Steve Hucklesby	Methodist Church
Ian Sinclair	Peace News
Wendy Street	
Orlanda Gill	British Pugwash
Marjorie Mayo	Former NET Trustee
Linda Hugi	NET Trustee
Peter Burt	NET Trustee
Daniel Blaney	NET Trustee
Claire Poyner	NET Trustee
Bevis Gillet	Marmot Charitable Trust

