

WHO'S GOING TO GIVE THEM UP FIRST?

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In January 2007, an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* called “World Free of Nuclear Weapons” said: “Nuclear weapons today present tremendous dangers, but also an historic opportunity. U.S. leadership will be required to take the world to the next stage – to a solid consensus for reversing reliance on nuclear weapons globally as a vital contribution to preventing their proliferation into potentially dangerous hands, and ultimately ending them as a threat to the world.”

Now who would have thought that I would be quoting Henry Kissinger, George P. Schultz, William J. Perry and Sam Nunn?

But perhaps you should not be surprised. The nuclear issue is not a partisan political issue. It is reassuring to see some of the most conservative figures in both the UK and the USA supporting complete nuclear disarmament.

Some of you may know that Ronald Reagan was strongly opposed to nuclear weapons. Reagan called for the abolition of “all nuclear weapons”, which he considered “totally irrational, totally inhumane, good for nothing but killing, possibly destructive of life on earth and civilisation”.

We are at an historic moment in history in a number of respects. Many hard choices lay before us, with many serious consequences if we make the wrong decisions.

The strategy of defending the manufacture and stockpiling of nuclear weapons, as an effective deterrent to others, is now recognised as a flawed argument. If they were once justified, as a means of American-Soviet deterrence, they are no longer. Nuclear weapons were considered essential to maintaining international security during the cold war, but that is no longer the case.

Former shadow Defence Secretary Michael Ancram said: “The threat of using nuclear weapons is not only illogical but incredible... the need for a genuinely independent alternative and flexible non-nuclear deterrence is if anything greater.”

Of course, the idea that the £76billion needed to finance refurbishment of the UK's Trident submarines will provide us with an independent nuclear deterrent is nonsense. Unlike China, France, India, Israel, Pakistan, Russia, the United States – and perhaps North Korea – the UK does not have and will not have an

independent deterrent. We rely on the US for logistical support, and we import components from them, too.

Independence comes at a price: France is spending four times what we are on their nuclear deterrent strategy. But if the adherents to this argument intend to be taken seriously, they could at least have presented us with a truly independent solution.

Such a solution, in any case, is totally unacceptable. Quite aside from the monumental costs involved, Trident renewal will make it far more difficult to get arms reduction around the world. As Mohammed El-Baradei, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, was quoted as saying, Britain “cannot modernise its Trident submarines while at the same time telling everyone else that nuclear weapons are not needed in the future... We need to treat nuclear weapons the way we treat slavery or genocide. There needs to be a taboo over possessing them.”

Furthermore, the replacement of the Trident nuclear missile programme in the UK is in violation of international law. Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty states: “*Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.*”

Kofi Annan has said of the UK’s policy that: “They should not imagine that this will be accepted as compatible with the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.”

Going further, The International Court of Justice, in their “Advisory Opinion on the Illegality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons on July 8, 1996, stated: “There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.”

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was intended to guarantee the end of nuclear weapons, but as the January *Wall Street Journal* op-ed points out, despite the fact that every president since Nixon has renewed the U.S.’s obligations under the treaty, and that the UK government claims to remain committed to the Treaty, non-nuclear weapon states are – justifiably – growing increasingly suspicious of the intentions of the so-called nuclear powers. In addition, four nuclear powers – India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea – either never ratified or have withdrawn from the Treaty. This is astonishing and unacceptable.

In 2005 Peacerrights, an NGO dedicated to peaceful conflict resolution, commissioned a report by legal experts Rabinder Singh QC and Professor Christine Chinkin, who concluded that a renewal of Trident would infringe on intransgressible requirements of customary international law, since nuclear weapons do not distinguish between combatants and non-combatants.

In a second legal opinion, solicited in 2006, Philippe Sands QC and Helen Law found the renewal to be disproportionate, and therefore unlawful, under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter.

But it is not only that our governments are violating international agreements that they themselves signed. They are also acting with arrogance and carelessness when it comes to handling the weapons they have already. Even the supposedly most advanced nations can be alarmingly lax when it comes to the security precautions in place for nuclear weapons.

Senator Carl Levin, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, called the unbelievable US Army security failure last August, in which six nuclear warheads were inadvertently removed from their bunkers and flown from North Dakota to Louisiana, “unprecedented”. Owing to “a lack of attention to detail and lack of adherence to well-established Air Force guidelines, technical orders and procedures”, for thirty-six hours, no-one knew where the warheads were, or even that they were missing.

Each of the warheads contained ten times the yield of that dropped on Hiroshima at the end of the Second World War. No breach of nuclear procedures of this magnitude had ever occurred before. Surely it is only a matter of time before an error like this becomes a disaster. Commentators have blamed this failure on the US Army’s reduced nuclear focus in recent years. Why, I would argue, not go the whole way? Why not do away with nuclear weapons altogether?

The tolerance for error when it comes to nuclear weapons is very low – in fact, it is zero. But zero tolerance cannot realistically be achieved, which is another reason why immediate and worldwide disarmament is such an important, and a pressing, priority. Even Arnold Schwarzenegger said, “Mistakes are made in every other human endeavour. Why should nuclear weapons be exempt?”

David Krieger, President of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, notes in an article this month that “even Edward Teller, father of the H-Bomb, recognized, ‘Sooner or later a fool will prove greater than the proof, even in a foolproof system.’”

We have come to the point where something has to give. South Africa is to be heartily applauded for its total disarmament, which was officially declared in 1994, following an inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency. In order to affect real change globally, we now need one of the major powers to follow suit.

The question has now become: “Who’s going to give them up first?”

I would like to propose that Britain, as both the oldest parliamentary democracy in the world, and as one of the only countries with no independent nuclear deterrent in place, is the perfect candidate. I believe it is up to us to

lead, and let others follow. It is up to us to take advantage of this perfect opportunity to pave the way.

And Britain is uniquely positioned at this precise moment in time to act: the decision to renew Trident can still be repealed. In March 2007, a record 167 MPs from all sides of the House expressed their doubts that the case for Trident had been proven. They were unconvinced of the need for an early decision. Since March, the situation has not changed.

Imagine the circumstances in which we might employ nuclear weapons. Let's imagine the case of a rogue state that has threatened our major cities with a nuclear strike.

Are we really prepared to engage in mutual obliteration? To kill millions because of the foolhardiness of the few? I wish every defender of nuclear weapons would read a little of John Hersey's *Hiroshima*, and ask themselves again whether such devastation and suffering can ever be justified. I do not believe it can.

Last month I read an article in the Guardian reporting that a manifesto by five of the west's most senior military officials and strategists, from the U.S., Britain, Germany, France and the Netherlands, insists that a "first strike" nuclear option remains an "indispensable instrument", since there is "simply no realistic prospect of a nuclear-free world". This is a horrifying development, but we cannot and we must not allow this to dishearten us.

There is every prospect of a nuclear-free world. All that this manifesto shows is that not enough has been done to research the other options. Not enough has been done to examine the causes of increasing proliferation. We have the power to halt the spread of nuclear weapons. We have a responsibility to use that power to bring about global disarmament.

Nuclear weapons are not containable. Where they exist, innocent lives are at risk. There is no such thing as a smart bomb. There will never be a "smart" nuclear weapon. And there will never be a smart supporter of nuclear weapons, either.

Britain's international obligations, as set out in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, are clear: we are legally committed to scrapping nuclear weapons. Wouldn't it be wonderful if our leaders were, for once, brave enough to make good on their promises?

When they consider their responses to our pleas, politicians would do well to keep in mind the words of two men.

The first is Dwight D. Eisenhower, who pledged America's determination "to devote its entire heart and mind to find the way by which the miraculous inventiveness of man shall not be dedicated to his death, but consecrated to his life."

The second is a man who knows as much about nuclear weapons as anyone, Mikhail Gorbachev. He said that “that the infinite and uncontrollable fury of nuclear weapons should never be held in the hands of any mere mortal ever again, for any reason.”

The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation has launched an appeal that I urge each of you to sign. It calls on the next President of the United States to:

- De-alert all nuclear weapons;
- Commit to No First Use;
- Commit to no new nuclear weapons;
- Ban nuclear testing forever;
- Control nuclear material worldwide;
- Uphold nuclear weapons conventions; and
- Reallocate resources for peace.

I would like to extend the reach of this appeal to Gordon Brown. I urge him to answer each of these points in the affirmative. I urge him to do it now.

You can sign the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation’s appeal by visiting www.wagingpeace.org/appeal.

Thank you very much.