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After Trident: Proliferation or Peace?*

John Gittings

Introduction

This is an edited version of the 2007 Annual Lecture of the David Davies Memorial Institute of International Studies (DDMI). The lecture was delivered by John Gittings on 25 April 2007 at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. John Gittings is a distinguished journalist, having been China specialist and foreign leader writer at *The Guardian* between 1982 and 2003. His most recent book, which has received considerable acclaim, is *The Changing Face of China: From Mao to Market* (2005). A podcast of the lecture and the question-and-answer period is available at: www.aber.ac.uk/~inppwww/research/DDMI/DavidDavies.htm.

The DDMI was founded in 1951 to commemorate and carry forward Lord Davies's project of creating a just and peaceful world through international cooperation, law and organisation. The Institute's Annual Lecture is an important vehicle for raising public awareness of challenges to peace and security, disseminating new ideas and approaches to academic and non-academic audiences, and for engaging with and developing normative themes that guided Lord Davies. The 2007 Annual Lecture did all these things, and I am delighted to see it published here.

Professor Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Director, David Davies Memorial Institute of International Studies*

Abstract

The British government decision on 'Trident renewal' forms part of a much wider rebuff to the non-proliferation and peace agenda. The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty risks being discredited at its next review in 2010; new nuclear powers are setting the pace for others; another 'war' is being threatened which will last 'for generations'. There has been no post-Cold War peace dividend, and the chance to make up for lost time has been missed. War, not peace, is once again seen as the universal default mode.

It is now clear that traditional arguments in favour of peace and nuclear disarmament are never going to succeed. The view that one 'cannot predict the unpredictable', used to justify the Trident decision, will always result in decisions being reached on a worst-case scenario. New arguments need to be developed with a broader appeal based not only on strategic calculation but on a compelling alternative world view.

Looking both forward and back into history we have to rediscover peace, not war, as humanity's central concern. Just as the test of the good ruler in ancient China was to



maintain peace within the four corners of the kingdom, so today modern states have a shared obligation to exercise good governance across the globe. The effort to reshape our common goals will require a sustained exercise in the re-education of elites, and the mobilisation of multitudes.

Keywords: David Davies, good governance, mobilising for peace, no-first-use, Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, nuclear tipping point, Trident, Bertha von Suttner

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse stalked the world during the Cold War, inspiring many references in film, literature and cartoon books before a few years of respite when their shadow seemed to recede. Now they are back again, sweeping down towards us with the severe determination portrayed by Albrecht Dürer in his grim woodcut. Their names today are only slightly different from those in the Book of Revelation and the message of final catastrophe is the same: instead of Pestilence, War, Famine and Death we must now contemplate the possible, or likely, consequences of Pandemic, Terror, Climate Change and Nuclear Proliferation.

It is hard enough for our collective human consciousness to comprehend one apocalyptic scenario, let alone four. Naturally enough, we are preoccupied most of all by those threats which have visible and immediate consequences: the effects of terrorism and the bloody results of the war against it have the deepest impact. Increasingly we are alarmed by global warming which seems to be changing the daily climate in which we live. We have also become more aware of the one and a half billion – a quarter of the world's population – mired in hopeless poverty whose plight fuels the perceived threats of terrorism and uncontrollable migration. Nuclear proliferation and its likely consequences are more remote and we, or the media, tend to focus on specific actors – North Korea and Iran – rather than on the entire stage. There was far more public disquiet in Britain, whether measured in column inches or media debate, over the Iraq War, the environment and globalisation than over the renewal of the UK's nuclear weapons capability.

Trident and after

The decision in principle to renew Britain's nuclear weapons for a period of up to 50 years was taken in the space of four months (December 2006–March 2007) not with a bang but in a whisper, as though not only the government but the general public preferred not to contemplate the logic behind it or its implications for the future too closely. The chronology of the great non-debate on 'Trident renewal' is instructive.¹

In the run-up to the 2005 election the Prime Minister Tony Blair said that he was committed in principle to retaining Britain's independent nuclear deterrent, but that the decision was 'a long way off'.² The new parliament was told that such a decision would not be taken without 'an open and continual discussion in this House and elsewhere'.³ Silence ensued. A year later the Commons Defence

Committee said it was 'surprised and disappointed' that the Ministry of Defence had refused to cooperate with its enquiry into the future of Trident.⁴ Downing Street now said that decisions would be taken 'in due course' while Gordon Brown, the Prime Minister-in-waiting, declared that the nuclear deterrent should be retained for 'the long-term'.⁵ Six months later, on 4 December 2006, a fully fledged White Paper endorsing 'Trident renewal' was tabled. The cabinet was only asked to approve its publication two and a half hours in advance.⁶

In an accompanying statement Tony Blair said he hoped that there would be a 'proper debate' in the country, but there was no encouragement for this from the government. The Ministry of Defence declined to engage in debate, on the grounds that what had been published was a White, not a Green, Paper, while both No. 10 Downing Street and the Labour Party apparatus steered clear of the subject in their presentation of current policy questions. Defence was not one of the 'big issues' documented in detail on the Downing Street website and described as 'currently being addressed by Tony Blair and the government'. The 'Let's Talk' feature on the Labour Party's website, which urged members and supporters to engage in debate on a variety of issues, did not mention Trident or defence. Although there was considerable disquiet among a significant number of Labour MPs and Labour Party members, their objections were muffled: the Party's 'Britain in the World' policy commission only received eight submissions on the subject.⁷

An exchange of letters between Tony Blair and President Bush, just days after the White Paper, confirmed US support for the modernisation of the British deterrent: the letters did not mention the need for parliamentary approval.⁸ This came three months later, on 14 March 2007, after a four-and-a-half-hour debate in the Commons, with the votes of the Conservative opposition saving the government from defeat. Trident renewal occupied parliament for less than one-tenth of the time that had been spent in debating the hunting of foxes with dogs.⁹

It is hard to assess what the British public made of all this in the absence of any significant debate, but the small number of opinion polls that were conducted suggest the following conclusions: if people are asked whether Britain should keep its nuclear weapons as long as other countries have them, the majority will answer 'yes'.¹⁰ If people are asked whether Britain should renew Trident at a cost of many billions of pounds, the majority will answer 'no'.¹¹ If people are simply asked whether Britain should renew its nuclear deterrent or not, opinion will be equally divided.¹² Public opinion, on the evidence, is not fully or coherently formed – with one exception. If a poll on Trident is conducted in Scotland where the Trident nuclear submarine fleet is based, the answer will always be a resounding no, however the question is phrased.¹³

Yet however unsatisfactory the process, circumstances had at least obliged the British government to make a sustained case in favour of the retention of nuclear weapons. This was the result partly of technological circumstance – the need to plan ahead for the replacement of the submarines which carry the Trident missile. More significantly the weight of opposition to nuclear weapons particularly within the government's own party would have made a decision in secret politically untenable – and

was partly defused by the granting of a parliamentary vote. Finally, the outgoing Prime Minister appears to have been determined to hasten the decision as part of his 'legacy'. The fact remains that none of the other four major nuclear powers has set out the argument so fully, and by doing so the British government has revealed an underlying rationale which is usually concealed.

The British case for 'Trident renewal', while invoking the shadowy threat of terrorists armed with nuclear weapons, and referring to the equally hazy danger of 'nuclear blackmail', relies ultimately on two propositions which are probably shared by all existing nuclear powers today. The first is the assumption of *nuclear exceptionalism*: that is, that there are special circumstances or reasons applying to Britain, but not to any would-be nuclear state, which justify the retention of such weapons. The second, only lightly veiled, is the assumption of *nuclear permanence*: that is, that these weapons are here to stay and will never be got rid of. To be fair to the British Prime Minister, he made both issues very clear, yet neither aroused significant national debate.

(1) *Nuclear exceptionalism*. In its simplest form, this amounts to placing heavy, indeed exclusive, reliance on the fact that Britain was one of the nuclear weapon powers in existence when the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was signed, and was therefore regarded as a 'Nuclear Weapon State Party' (NWS) within the meaning of the treaty. (The usual formulation that the NPT 'recognised' Britain as a nuclear power merely means that the treaty recognised the reality that Britain, along with the US, France, the Soviet Union and China, had nuclear weapons. Without such 'recognition' there would have been no treaty.) Thus, during the Trident debate, all questions about the legality of nuclear weapons, or the hypocrisy of possessing nuclear weapons while saying that other countries should not have them, were routinely rebutted with the assertion that the NPT had 'recognised' Britain as an NWS.¹⁴

More broadly, Britain is seen to have a special role to play on the world stage which would be diminished without possession of the full attributes of modern-day power, which implicitly include nuclear weapons. This was set out with unusual clarity by the Prime Minister – indeed he invited the British public to enter into a debate on the subject, in a speech two months before the Trident vote which the media largely ignored:

[T]he combination of hard and soft power is still the right course for our country, indeed more so than ever ... There are two types of nations similar to ours today. Those who do war fighting and peacekeeping and those who have, effectively, except in the most exceptional circumstances, retreated to the peacekeeping alone. Britain does both. We should stay that way.¹⁵

A week later Mr Blair's imminent successor Gordon Brown went out of his way in a BBC interview to endorse the same concept, linking it more clearly to the possession of nuclear weapons. Britain must be prepared, he said, 'to use hard power as well as soft power, by not resiling from the need in certain circumstances to both threaten and use the military power we have' – a not very coded reference to the government policy of refusing to rule out the pre-emptive threat or use of nuclear weapons.¹⁶

Little has changed, it seems, in 50 years, since Harold Macmillan argued that Britain needed to test the hydrogen bomb so that we would possess the same 'massive weapon' as the US and the Soviet Union, and then be able to 'discuss [with them] on equal terms'.¹⁷

In the same spirit, Russian President Vladimir Putin insists that 'it is impossible to discuss many issues, including international security issues, without Russia, which is a nuclear power'.¹⁸ Acquiring nuclear weapons was an important element in General de Gaulle's ambition to restore France's greatness – and the French example helped spur China in the same direction. Mao Zedong argued in 1960 that 'money, steel and atom bombs' were the key to gaining respect. 'Since France exploded two atom bombs and we don't even have one, it is understandable for de Gaulle to look down upon us.'¹⁹ More recently President Chirac has described the French nuclear programme as a matter of national pride – 'the very image of what our country is capable of producing when it has set itself a task and holds to it'.²⁰

As for the United States, nuclear weapons are seen as an indispensable part of the country's claim to possess, as described by its National Security Council, 'unprecedented – and unequalled – strength and influence in the world'.²¹

(2) *Nuclear permanence*. In his statement in support of the White Paper, Tony Blair declared that:

In the early 21st century, the world may have changed beyond recognition, since the decision taken by the Attlee Government over half a century ago. But it is precisely because we could not have recognised then, the world we live in now, that it would not be wise to predict the unpredictable in the times to come.²²

In similar terms, Tony Blair observed immediately before the House of Commons debate that 'although it is impossible to predict the future, the one thing that is certain – as I said in my statement – is the unpredictability of it'.²³ The Ministry of Defence put it concisely: 'The future is uncertain: accurately predicting events over the period 2020 to 2050 is extremely hard.'²⁴ Tony Blair's Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett told the House of Commons in the same way that one could not be sure whether or not nuclear weapons would be used 'at least for the next 50 years'. In view of such uncertainty, she said, 'the Government believe that maintaining a minimum nuclear deterrent remains a premium worth paying on an insurance policy for our nation'.²⁵

The argument that nuclear weapons are an insurance against the unpredictable was supported by the Conservative opposition for whom Liam Fox closed the debate:

We cannot predict the future. The nature of the threat that we face has changed quickly from the cold war to a range of other threats, and it could change quickly again. The onus is not on those of us who wish to retain a deterrent, but on those who want to scrap it to tell us why they believe that they can predict the risks that we will face in half a century's time.²⁶

Long-term predictions are made regularly by the British and other governments over a whole range of vital issues – current examples include climate change, population trends and energy requirements – taking into account both probability and cost–benefit factors, but questions of global strategy appear to be excluded. This removes the necessity to offer a balanced assessment of the relative risks and advantages of deciding not to renew Trident (which would still mean that Britain retained an operational nuclear deterrent for another 17 years). Such an assessment would involve, for example, weighing up the credibility of any scenario in which British nuclear weapons could be used to deter a ‘nuclear terrorist’ attack, or in which a state such as Iran or North Korea would threaten to launch a nuclear-tipped missile against Britain, rather than simply assert that such eventualities, however improbable, must be ‘insured’ against at any cost. It would also involve making a realistic calculation of the possible positive benefits of a British move towards eventual nuclear disarmament on the broader non-proliferation process, rather than simply asserting on the basis of Cold War experience that it could not possibly have any beneficial effect – indeed, according to Tony Blair, that ‘the reverse [would be] the case’.²⁷

How does the assertion that we cannot ‘predict the unpredictable’ square with the statement by Margaret Beckett that Britain was not ‘committing ourselves irreversibly to maintaining a nuclear deterrent for the next 50 years, no matter what others do and no matter what happens in the rest of the world’?²⁸ Her assurance may be interpreted in part as an attempt to appease parliamentary critics in her own party. A similar assurance to the 2007 NPT Preparatory Committee also sought to present the British decision in a more favourable light. Margaret Beckett sounded an even more positive tone in a speech in June 2007, two days before she was replaced as Foreign Secretary, when she spoke of her vision of ‘a world free from nuclear weapons’.²⁹ Even if such statements are taken at face value, they are at odds with the assumption that the future is too uncertain to be safely predicted, or at least set an extremely high threshold for the abandonment of such an assumption. It would arguably be necessary for the rest of the world to have proceeded almost all the way to nuclear disarmament before Britain could ‘predict’ that it was safe to do likewise. Short of such a remote eventuality, invoking an unpredictable future implies that nuclear weapons are here to stay indefinitely. (The only other possibility would be if the government were faced with an overwhelming budgetary crisis – but this has not deterred spending on nuclear weapons in the past.)

There is little doubt that the US, Russia, France and China hold the same view and differ from Britain only in not having been obliged to state it so openly. All maintain, in lukewarm statements to the relevant UN bodies, a theoretical commitment to eventual nuclear disarmament. As the Russian delegate told the UN First Committee, his government assumed ‘by and large’ that total elimination of nuclear weapons was possible, while warning that this could only be achieved ‘through a gradual and phased movement forward without artificially leaping ahead’.³⁰ China routinely says it supports the intermediate measures for nuclear disarmament proposed at the 2000 NPT Conference, but stresses it will only consider implementation of

them 'at an appropriate time and under appropriate conditions'.³¹ France regularly affirms its commitment to nuclear disarmament, but focuses on measures which should be taken to prevent further proliferation by others and the need for the US and Russia to take the lead since they possess 'incomparably greater numbers of nuclear weapons'.³²

Such commitments to eventual nuclear disarmament are necessary to fulfil nominally the obligation of the five major nuclear weapon powers to head in that direction under Article VI of the NPT Treaty – but how to get there is another matter. It is this reluctance to move from the general to the particular which has long aroused the cynicism of the non-nuclear weapon states. And it is rare for any of the nuclear weapon powers to address themselves to this credibility gap except in the most general of terms.

An unusual exception was the speech by US Ambassador Christina Rocca to the 2006 UN Conference on Disarmament in which she addressed at length the question '[how can we create] the environment necessary to complete the process of nuclear disarmament?'.³³ The objective of all states, she said squarely, should be to create an international situation 'in which it is no longer necessary for anyone to rely upon nuclear weapons for security'. This sounded promising: were we about to hear a senior US spokesperson suggest putting all nuclear power under international control, or did she have in mind the more limited but still ambitious task of establishing foolproof systems of inspection of national weapons systems?

The disappointing answer was that Ambassador Rocca contemplated nothing more specific than a better world one day in which 'the lessening of international tension and the strengthening of international trust [would make] it possible' for nations to give up their nuclear weapons voluntarily. Multilateral institutions might at best impose 'consequences' (Ambassador Rocca avoided the word 'sanctions') for violations of nuclear-denying 'norms' (she avoided the word 'treaties'). There was no mention either of verification, even though Washington's UK ally had submitted a three-part paper on the subject to the 2005 Review Conference.³⁴ Ambassador Rocca merely suggested that it is up to sovereign states to behave appropriately, perhaps offering 'some sort of assurances' that their nuclear and other WMD capabilities would not be reconstituted in the future. This is a dream world of sweetness and light where, we may suppose, all nations like eating apple pie: an international environment in which nuclear disarmament can be postponed till human nature has changed. It is particularly bizarre to hear this vision set out by the United States which generally regards the world as a very evil place.

So Britain's decision to renew Trident has highlighted two more general questions for the world at large: first, must we now learn to live with the bomb, accepting that it is highly unlikely that any nuclear power will ever voluntarily give up its weapons, and, second, can some nuclear powers claim to be more legitimate than others? These questions are all the more urgent and in need of debate as we face what thoughtful observers refer to as the threat of a 'nuclear tipping point': the moment when the world may be plunged into a new round of proliferation.³⁵

The nuclear tipping point

We talk readily of an environmental crisis as we see the everyday consequences of climate change; we are alarmed by the spread of HIV/AIDS, bird flu and drug-resistant TB, and discuss the emergence of a global health crisis; we read the news of bombings in New York City, Bali, Baghdad, Kabul, Madrid, London and Algiers and nervously contemplate a terrorism crisis. But do we understand that the world also faces a nuclear crisis? During the Cold War decades we had no doubt that we faced one: if the term is used now, it applies narrowly to Iran, or North Korea, or to the hypothetical 'terrorist bomb'. Yet if we are prepared to listen, there are plenty of warnings from statesmen and strategists who believe that we are approaching a new 'nuclear tipping point'.

'The world is facing a nuclear crisis', said former president Jimmy Carter in 2000 before the quinquennial review of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. The treaty must be 'reconfirmed and subsequently honoured by leaders who are inspired to act wisely and courageously by an informed public'. He referred especially to the need to adopt a Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, to conclude negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty, to reduce reliance on nuclear arsenals, adopt a policy of 'no-first-use', and refrain from new missile defence systems which could undermine the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.³⁶

The 2000 NPT Review produced, on paper, an encouraging commitment by the permanent five nuclear powers to move forward on nuclear disarmament, as part of the agreed 13-step programme for implementation of Article VI of the treaty. This tentative commitment had entirely dissipated within the next five years: we may note the election of George W. Bush and the impact of 9/11. The 2005 Review was a total failure: the permanent five nuclear powers were unwilling even to reaffirm the 2000 decision as a basis for further work, and there was no final document from the conference. This was actually considered a better outcome than to have a communiqué which simply watered down previous commitments. A few months later, the UN World Summit made no mention of nuclear proliferation or nuclear disarmament in its final declaration, also judging that this would be too divisive.

The major nuclear powers did their best to minimise the extent of the failure of the 2005 Review Conference: thus Christopher Ford, US special representative for nuclear non-proliferation, argued that the lack of agreement on a final document was not such a disaster because at least the participants had been able to 'discuss some key issues'.³⁷ However, the British minister responsible for disarmament, Kim Howells, finally admitted that it was 'disappointing'.³⁸ UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was in no doubt and warned, in his final statement on the subject before stepping down, that the 2005 failure was a 'terrible signal' for the future:

The world [stands] at a crossroads ... One path ... can take us to a world in which the proliferation of nuclear weapons is restricted and reversed through trust, dialogue and negotiated agreement. The other leads to a world in which a growing number of States feel obliged to arm themselves with nuclear weapons, and in which non-State actors acquire the means to carry out nuclear terrorism.

The international community seems almost to be sleepwalking down the latter path.³⁹

Are we still sleepwalking? There is a comforting view around that the world has, after all, not headed down the road of nuclear proliferation as fast as many anticipated: President Kennedy's prediction that there would be between 15 and 25 nuclear powers by the year 1975 is often cited, with the reassuring comment that so far we are still only at nine.⁴⁰ Yet we should note that three of these have been added in the last decade – an increase of 50 per cent. Comfort is also drawn from the widespread theory of the 'nuclear taboo' which is supposed to have kept the (nuclear) peace throughout the Cold War. Nuclear-power leaders were no doubt inhibited at some times and to some extent, both by the awful responsibility of being the first since 1945 to use such weapons and by the pressure of adverse public opinion. But if the taboo was and is so reliable, why should there be such apprehension today over further proliferation?⁴¹ In addition, if there is a nuclear tipping point it will by definition only be perceived after it has tipped, and it will then be too late. The situation today, both in specific areas of proliferation and on the global nuclear scene, does not inspire confidence in the status quo.

North Korea. North Korea is now a de facto nuclear power, and can be expected to retain a covert capability even if the tortuous six-power negotiations succeed in limiting further development. 'It is still not clear', *The Economist* said editorially, 'that Mr Kim intends ever to give up his bombs'.⁴² That is putting the best face upon the deal. In the reliable judgement of leading Chinese strategists – who know Pyongyang better than anyone else (and have a worse opinion of Pyongyang too) – North Korea has been determined for several decades to become a nuclear power. We have to 'cop[e] with a nuclear North Korea', says Zhang Liangui, professor at the Chinese Communist Party School: the situation now requires us either to 'accept the facts and recognise North Korea's nuclear power status'.⁴³

Iran. Iran has become the lightning conductor for everyday discussion of the nuclear crisis, as if its putative (though not yet proved) nuclear aspirations dwarfed every other concern we might have. In April 2007 a senior US defence official, Eric Edelman, justified his government's plans to install missile defences in Poland and the Czech Republic almost entirely as a response to a hypothetical Iranian ballistic missile threat by the year 2015.⁴⁴ It is as hard to construct a plausible scenario for Iranian 'nuclear blackmail' as it was in the case of China in 1964 when Beijing's first nuclear test was widely portrayed as an immediate threat to South-East Asia. Yet Iran does indeed give cause for deep concern and illustrates some of the intractable issues raised by nuclear proliferation.

First, it shows how nuclear aspirations can become a matter of national pride – just as they have in previous cases, from Britain onwards – and therefore how much more difficult it becomes to reverse a decision once taken to go down the nuclear route. Let us recall the way in which President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad announced in April 2007 that his country is now capable of enriching uranium on an industrial scale. 'With great honour', he said, 'I declare that as of today our dear country has joined the nuclear club of nations.'⁴⁵

Second, Iran presents a dilemma which will be posed by more countries as, in an age of diminishing energy reserves, there is increasing resort to nuclear fuel. The problem, as so often pointed out, is that the technology of enrichment of uranium for peaceful purposes can be adapted to make bombs. There are plenty of good ideas on how to avoid this, by establishing some form of international control and supply of fissile material. Yet such a system presupposes that the nuclear powers either have the strength and unity to impose it upon the rest of the world, or that they will agree to submit their own fissile stocks to international control: neither is at all likely. Any alternative proposal, which requires a potential nuclear fuel consumer such as Iran to be dependent on an external source of supply, while exempting the NWS from scrutiny or control, is likely to be rejected as discriminatory.⁴⁶

Third, nuclear renunciation by Iran implies a pre-existing level of international harmony, and trust in the good intentions of the existing nuclear powers, which is inconceivable in the Middle East today. Only under such circumstances could there be the remotely realistic prospect of Tehran following the example of South Africa in 1991 or Libya in 2001. Yet the annual call by IAEA Director-General Mohamed ElBaradei for a diplomatic effort to rid the Middle East of all weapons is ignored as frequently as it is made.⁴⁷ Misguided or not, Iran may well be tempted to accept a window of vulnerability until it has acquired the necessary nuclear chips to put on the table. In so doing it would be following the examples of North Korea, and China before it, which suggest that it is safer to possess a nuclear weapons capability rather than a nuclear weapons potential.

There are other disturbing trends on the global nuclear scene which taken together justify our fears of an impending 'nuclear crisis':

1. A greater willingness to contemplate the pre-emptive use of nuclear weapons, as set out, for example, in the 2005 US 'Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations'. This includes the possible resort to nuclear weapons as a 'demonstration of US intent and capability to use nuclear weapons to deter adversary WMD use'.⁴⁸ The Trident White Paper expressed in similar terms the British government's argument against a policy of no-first-use: this was best summarised by *The Sun* newspaper which reported, under the headline 'Britain's nuke terror vow', that 'Britain [will] launch a nuclear strike on a rogue state to sink a terror plot.'⁴⁹
2. A corresponding loss of interest, never very strong anyway, in the concept of no-first-use. Only China still declares for the record that it will not use nuclear weapons first, and some Chinese strategists have cast doubt on the strength of this commitment.⁵⁰
3. Continued modernisation and miniaturisation of nuclear weapons which blurs the distinction between strategic and tactical use and increases the temptation to take pre-emptive action.
4. The spread of ballistic missile technologies and the development of missile defence systems.
5. The maintenance of nuclear weapon systems at a high state of readiness, with many warheads on 'hair-trigger alert'.

6. The proliferation of nuclear energy programmes which could produce weapons-usable material: 40 states have the capability to build a bomb.⁵¹

In the light of this pessimistic, but also realistic, survey of the current situation (shared by many sadder and wiser retired politicians and generals today), what are the prospects for the future of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty which – as described by the British government – is the ‘corner-stone of the non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament regime’? While the treaty itself, having been extended indefinitely in 1995, cannot actually expire, a failure of the 2010 Review Conference following that of the 2005 Review could lead to a terminal loss of confidence in the regime, taking us in turn much nearer to the nuclear tipping point.

At the 2007 Preparatory Committee for the 2010 Review, there was at least rhetorical agreement between the nuclear and non-nuclear states on the need for concerted action to prevent the collective collapse of the treaty. To translate this wish into reality will require, as Kofi Annan warned shortly before leaving office, ‘progress on both fronts – non-proliferation and disarmament – at once’.⁵² Effectively this means reaching agreement between those who put non-proliferation first and those putting disarmament first (that is, between the NWS and the NNWS) on a balanced package which will include significant items from both agendas.

Such a package could include the following:

1. On the non-proliferation front, agreement to work towards:
 - (a) universal adherence to the IAEA additional protocol;
 - (b) restrictions on the behaviour of states who withdraw from the treaty;
 - (c) nuclear fuel to be supplied solely by an international fuel-service regime;
 - (d) effective enforcement mechanisms against nuclear proliferators.
2. On the disarmament front, agreement to work towards:
 - (a) extension of international controls over those nuclear states outside the NPT;
 - (b) ratification of the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty;
 - (c) conclusion of a verifiable Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty;
 - (d) acceptance of the principle of no-first-use.⁵³

Given the lack of past progress on most of these items, and strong opposition to most of them on one side or the other, success at the 2010 Review remains very doubtful: if even a minimum agreed consensus cannot be achieved, then the NPT will be judged to have failed terminally. In this context, the British decision of March 2007 represents a lost chance to alter the prevailing atmosphere for the better by an act of ‘constructive non-renewal’ (or at least ‘constructive postponement’ of the decision to renew).⁵⁴

We may conclude reluctantly that established wisdom in favour of the nuclear status quo will always prevail if the debate is confined to the level of defence strategy and prediction. Guarding against the worst-case scenario will always win the

argument, such as it may be. Governments will be willing to run a much greater risk of war rather than countenance taking much smaller risks for peace. The objection may be made that the latter type of risk, however small, would result in devastation if it turned into reality – yet the same is true for the former, and larger, risk. It is also instructive to translate the general proposition into specific scenarios: how easily, for example, can we conceive of a situation where (a) Britain is threatened by a nuclear terrorist who is identifiable in advance; (b) the terrorist in question is ‘sponsored’ by a ‘rogue nuclear state’; (c) the rogue state in question can also be identified with certainty in advance; and (d) Britain can effectively deter the threatened action by either using or threatening to use nuclear weapons against such a state? A variety of more credible scenarios can be constructed based on the continued spread of nuclear weapons, the potential escalation of conventional into nuclear conflict in a number of international flashpoint situations (starting, but not confined to, the Middle East), plus the ever present danger of accidental nuclear war which will grow as the weapons in existence multiply.⁵⁵

Faced with an inherent – and in political terms comprehensible – bias in favour of the nuclear status quo, we therefore need to enlarge the argument to transcend strategic calculation and to situate defence and nuclear weapons within a much broader agenda of good governance and human security. And we need to mobilise public opinion, by peace education and by better use of the media, so that nuclear proliferation will be as great a concern as global warming.

Good governance

It is by no means a new concept that a world at peace can only be a world that is well governed. The emperor, wrote the Chinese historian Sima Qian 2000 years ago, must ensure that ‘all the common people prosper’. He inspects the four corners of his realm and insists on complete bureaucratic propriety:

In far-off, remote places, serious and decorous administrators work steadily, just and loyal ... Tasks are done at the proper season, all things flourish and grow; the common people know peace and have laid aside weapons and armour; kinsmen care for each other, there are no robbers or thieves.⁵⁶

This was the idealised view of what the Chinese called the mandate of heaven – the compact between the supreme ruler and his people which only held good if he could ensure peace and prosperity. There was an element of ambiguity in this equation: the passage quoted above refers to the first Qin emperor, often portrayed as China’s most bloodthirsty ruler. To what extent warfare was ‘disesteemed’ (the term used by historian John K. Fairbank) in dynastic China is still a matter of debate.⁵⁷

Yet the prevailing version of ancient history as an interminable sequence of war and conflict, and the exaltation of martial virtues in historically more recent times, has obscured the reality that for most societies at most times war was seen as perverse,

and peace as part of the natural order which kings and potentates had a supreme obligation to deliver to their people. Here too there is ample room for debate, but the traditional view of an overwhelmingly martial antiquity has been effectively challenged.⁵⁸ Without necessarily reading the *Iliad* as a pacifist tract, we cannot fail to grasp that Homer regards war as bringing 'boundless sorrow' to humankind. Eight out of the ten scenes on *The Shield of Achilles* show a society at peace, not war.⁵⁹

Today, as globalisation breaks down the confines of the nation-state, a new obligation is imposed on governments to provide human security and good governance not just, or even principally, within states, but across the whole world. The reasons for doing so are based on collective interest as well as morality. Now it is the international community as a whole, not a single Chinese emperor, who comes to realise that all the common people must prosper if there is to be peace 'across the four seas'. Especially since the end of the Cold War the invisible connections between inequality, deprivation, exploitation, hunger, migration, environmental degradation, militarisation, arms expenditure, conflict and war are much more clearly seen. Indeed in the early 1990s there were great expectations that the proceeds of a much-hoped-for 'peace dividend' would be spent for the benefit of humankind. However, the peace dividend has been unachieved or squandered, renewed pessimism has set in, and issues of war and peace have become disconnected again from the effort to satisfy global human needs.

Already in 1987 an international conference of Soviet and Western scholars had called for a 'new way of thinking' which would take the world 'beyond war'. 'The most important message', said the organisers, 'is that changes in human values, modes of thinking, and visions of the future are needed for us to live more sustainably and harmoniously – indeed to survive – in an interdependent world.'⁶⁰

The optimism engendered by the end of the Cold War was manifest in the first Human Development Report, issued by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1991:

The world community can establish a global compact for human development – one that puts people at the centre of every issue ... Most of the additional costs could be met from cuts in military spending. If industrial countries were to reduce their military spending by 3% a year, this could provide \$25 billion a year. And if developing countries merely freeze their [military] expenditure at current levels, this would save potential future increases of over \$10 billion a year.⁶¹

In 1995 the Commission of Global Governance headed by Sir Shridath Ramphal called for a 'new global ethic'. It urged that the concept of 'security' should 'accommodate the full range of insecurities that so grievously afflict human society as to compel the attention of all'. The world needed a new system of global governance that 'responds to threats to the security of people and threats to the security of the planet – in short, to human security'.⁶²

Yet even as these hopes were being expressed they were already being dashed by events. Armed conflicts within states were increasing, and insofar as the industrial

nations had reduced arms expenditure, very little of this was applied to social development. The World Social Summit in 1995 produced only a timid call for 'the appropriate reduction of excessive military expenditures ... taking into consideration national security requirements'.⁶³ Far from this happening, world defence spending began to rise again in the late 1990s.

The follow-up to the Social Summit in 2000, and the ten-year review in 2005, were equally cautious. The eradication of poverty was portrayed as dependent on debt relief, good governance, land reform, education and health care, but only in parenthesis on the diversion of the huge funds still being expended on armaments.⁶⁴ When these sensitive issues were raised there was no consequential action. The UN Millennium Declaration of 2000 set out the brave aim 'to strive for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, and to keep all options open for achieving this aim, including the possibility of convening an international conference to identify ways of eliminating nuclear dangers'.⁶⁵ This proposal became the subject of an annual resolution to the UN First Committee, as part of a text calling for the reduction of nuclear dangers. Its force was at first diminished by the fact that it was introduced by new nuclear entrant India. A simpler resolution tabled by Mexico in 2005, although passed without difficulty, attracted five negative votes, the US, UK, France, Israel and Poland, plus abstentions from many European countries. (Poland and Israel joined the abstentions in 2006, leaving the three major nuclear powers in splendid isolation.) It may safely be predicted that this conference will never be held.⁶⁶

There is much to be gained from the much richer picture of the components of society and conflict which the concepts of good governance and human security offer, yet they lose much of their meaning if divorced from global issues of peace and war. We need to question now whether we have not paid a price for this shift away from the causes of inter-state conflict to an emphasis on intra-state security and development. It leads too easily to the assumption that relationships between nations are doomed to continue to be dominated by considerations of national security and national interest in the traditional sense, and reliant in the last resort on the continued use or threatened use of force.

Veteran campaigners for nuclear disarmament in the 1960s and 70s will probably remember the literally minded Marxist argument, usually raised by an objector at the back of the crowd, that 'we have to get rid of capitalism before we can abolish the bomb'. Now we face the argument that we have to get rid of poverty, inequality and oppression first, with global warming more recently added to the list. Yet who knows which is more likely to occur in the next 50 years – environmental or nuclear catastrophe; and of course a nuclear catastrophe would also be an environmental one!

Development and aid packages should not merely patch up the wounds left by conflict and war: they should be targeted to prevent those wounds being created. The example of Iraq should be considered where between 1991 and 2003 the policies adopted by the international community made a second war more rather than less likely. Sanctions came first, humanitarian aid a poor second. The result, as noted

by Hans von Sponeck (former UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq), was that 'the civilian population [was held] accountable for the acts of armament of their Government and therefore became a tool for the punishment of innocent people for something they had not done', while the relatively limited aid only ensured the survival of Saddam Hussein and his ruling group.⁶⁷ It would have been both more humane and much shrewder to kill Saddam's regime not by bombs but by kindness, flooding the country with international aid to reduce the leverage power of his elites.⁶⁸

The same strategy should have been adopted in North Korea, instead of the grudging drip-feed of aid which kept Kim Jong Il's elite healthy but the rest of his people barely alive. In 2007 the World Food Program reported that donations to its current programme of food aid amounted to less than 20 per cent of the US\$102 million required.⁶⁹ Similarly, aid shortfalls have been regularly reported in post-war Afghanistan: in May 2006 the World Food Program warned that 'due to a critical shortage of funds and resources, WFP will soon be forced to abandon plans to provide around 2.7 million of the poorest and most vulnerable Afghans with vital food aid to help them through the winter'.⁷⁰

This failure of the rich and developed nations to provide adequate aid and support for countries and peoples who are poor and disadvantaged is not confined to these headline cases. As the *Human Development Report* for 2003 observed:

The global community, often led by the United Nations, has set many development goals since the first Development Decade of the 1960s – and has a history of many failures. For example, in the Alma Ata Declaration of 1977 the world committed to health care for all people by the end of the century. Yet in 2000 millions of poor people died of pandemic and other diseases, many readily preventable and treatable. Similarly, at the 1990 Summit on Children the world committed to universal primary education by 2000. But that target was also missed. And the failures should serve as reminders of past neglect to follow through on solemn global pledges.⁷¹

It is acknowledged that there have been some dramatic improvements in the past four decades (particularly in East Asia), and in many areas key indicators such as child mortality and life expectancy have significantly improved.⁷² There is more emphasis now on human development which may ensure that some mistakes are not repeated. Yet overall the developed world has failed, and continues to fail, to come up to the mark. The UN's review of the Millennium Development Goals in 2006, nearly halfway through the period in which they were to be achieved, found that the absolute number of people across the world suffering from chronic hunger continued to increase, and that the target of halving the number without access to basic sanitation and clean drinking water by 2015 was unlikely to be achieved.⁷³

Nearly 50 years after the first 'Development Decade' was proclaimed, we need to ask whether the persistence of global poverty and inequality does not reflect a systemic failure in the developed world's economic and political structures rather

than merely an unfortunate inability to find appropriate ways of tackling the problem. While this failure may be partly explained by inequalities in the world trading system, by the commitment to high consumption in the rich countries, and by the deterioration of the environment, the priority assigned to military expenditure, including the maintenance of extremely expensive advanced weapons systems, also plays a significant part. 'Just the increase [by the rich countries] in defence spending since 2000', the UNDP pointed out in its 2005 *Human Development Report*, 'would be sufficient to reach the ... UN target of spending 0.7% [of gross national income] on aid. Spending on HIV/Aids represents three days of military spending.'⁷⁴

The countries receiving aid also have a responsibility to reduce their arms purchases, as do their suppliers – often from the same countries which provide the aid. In sub-Saharan Africa, military expenditure rose by 47 per cent during the late 1990s, while life expectancy fell to 46 years.⁷⁵ Multilateral organisations such as the World Bank and the IMF should be less hesitant about linking the provision of aid to the reduction of military budgets: although the 'security sector' as it is now called has received more attention since the 1990s, they are still reluctant to do so, claiming that this would amount to involvement in internal politics.⁷⁶ This is a bizarre argument when conditionality is applied in so many other sensitive areas. If donors insist that water should be privatised, or that bureaucracies should be less corrupt, why not ask for military spending to be cut?

Disarmament and development, military security and human security, are inter-related problems which need to be tackled together (the report of a UN group of government experts on this subject in 2004 had disappointingly little impact).⁷⁷ Above all, we have to recognise the shared obligation of all nations, but particularly those with dominant military and economic power, to address more convincingly worldwide inequality, injustice and militarisation – the root causes of insecurity, conflict and terrorism. The majority of rich and developed nations would return much lower scores for 'good governance' if their collective failure to meet their global obligations were taken into account.⁷⁸

Mobilising for peace

A century ago, the great Austrian peace activist Bertha von Suttner began her Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech with these words:

The stars of eternal truth and right have always shone in the firmament of human understanding. The process of bringing them down to earth, remoulding them into practical forms, imbuing them with vitality, and then making use of them, has been a long one.⁷⁹

That long process continues, and in many respects the task of bringing down to earth the star of peace, one of the brightest in the firmament, and lodging it in our here-and-now existence, is even harder than it was in the first decade of the twentieth

century. Bertha von Suttner's central and driving argument was that if we want peace we should prepare for peace. Instead we have experienced a century of preparation for war, and of actual wars (both hot and cold) on a global scale which have paved the way for more (and worse) conflict. Peace has been a contested issue throughout the twentieth century, and at each reversal it has lost ground.

Yet recent research helps us to understand more clearly the extent to which the peace campaign of the 1950s and 60s generated pressure upon ruling elites which contributed towards the Partial Test-Ban Treaty and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This was not the only factor in the moves towards partial détente. Dangerous episodes such as the Cuban crisis (the full danger of which was concealed from the general public) generated a more sober appreciation, and the prospect of nuclear proliferation – in particular the impending Chinese bomb – also drove diplomacy. Yet the pressure of public opinion was much greater than acknowledged at the time. As President Eisenhower said privately in 1958, thermonuclear weapons are tremendously powerful but not 'as powerful as is world opinion today'.⁸⁰

What was it that gave the ban-the-bomb movement enough traction to tug the military-industrial juggernaut off course? The nuclear arms race and fears of nuclear war over Korea or the Taiwan Straits contributed to public unease but none provided a mobilising trigger as powerful as the fate of the Japanese fishing vessel the *Lucky Dragon* and the death of its engineer Aikichi Kibiyama after the boat strayed into the Bikini Atoll testing area. The effect of nuclear test fallout on our 'children yet unborn' was too powerful an image to be dissolved by any amount of propaganda that fallout was good for you, or at least not bad for you (as in the title of a 1955 US civil defence pamphlet: 'Radioactivity is nothing new ... the whole world is radioactive').⁸¹ In the 1980s the flagging disarmament movement was revived by the spread of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe which had their own visible symbolism in the bases, the silos, the domes and the convoys, though nothing again would quite have the impact of 'strontium 90 in our milk'.

Can we imagine a mobilising trigger in the future which would revitalise public opinion on behalf of nuclear disarmament? Let us hope it does not require the operation of an actual nuclear trigger, either by accident or design. It is not hard to construct a scenario based, for example, on the results of a pre-emptive strike against Iran's nuclear programme. There is also the continuing risk of a nuclear launch as a result of accident or misinterpretation of data, and the unpredictable consequences of an incident, real or anticipated, of nuclear terrorism. Short of such disasters which no one wants to happen, we have to find other ways of educating and mobilising public opinion as effectively against nuclear catastrophe as has been achieved in recent times against environmental catastrophe.

Why are we reluctant to treat the two on the same footing? The most obvious factor is that there is no visible by-product of nuclear proliferation – no tsunamis, droughts or melting icebergs for which it may be blamed. Deeper down there is a perception that the nuclear threat is to an extent dated: a preoccupation, one might even say, of those older peaceniks who marched with SANE or CND.

The media treatment of the news that the minute hand of the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*' Doomsday Clock has been moved forward from seven to five minutes to midnight is instructive. This was reported, in the words of the BBC, as the result of 'climate change being added to the prospect of nuclear annihilation as the greatest threats to humankind'.⁸² Yet the opening paragraph of the Doomsday Clock announcement from the *Bulletin* stated that:

North Korea's recent test of a nuclear weapon, Iran's nuclear ambitions, a renewed U.S. emphasis on the military utility of nuclear weapons, the failure to adequately secure nuclear materials, and the continued presence of some 26,000 nuclear weapons in the United States and Russia are symptomatic of a larger failure to solve the problems posed by the most destructive technology on earth.

While the *Bulletin* described global warming as 'a dire threat to human civilisation that is second only to nuclear weapons', it continued to emphasise that 'by far the greatest potential for calamity lies in the readiness of forces in the United States and Russia to fight an all-out nuclear war'.⁸³

How then can we reinstate peace and disarmament as dominant issues in public and media concern? If this were simple to achieve, it would have been done long ago. As Thomas Hardy said, 'war makes rattling good history: but peace is poor reading', or, to quote Kenneth Boulding, one of our leading peace theorists, 'The greatest enemy of peace is the perception that it is dull.'⁸⁴ Serious work in the field of peace studies (and there is plenty of it) gets less attention than the voluminous writings of war studies, and it is often harder to find in the bookshops.⁸⁵ Peace, I regret to say from my experience as a national newspaper's chief foreign leader-writer for ten years, does not grab many headlines. There was never a problem in writing editorial comment on the wars and conflicts of the 1990s, yet even with a sympathetic editor and colleagues, it was much harder to find a place for UN reform, non-proliferation, human development, etc. Fortunately on most Sundays and all public holidays there was less competition for space, and leaders on these worthy subjects were welcome then – although I sometimes wondered how many readers would want to read about global governance on a British Bank Holiday.

Putting peace back on the popular agenda, in a neo-Cold War climate where terrorism and conflict have become the default mode of discourse, will require a more explicit and coordinated effort bringing together the academic world of peace research and conflict resolution, the NGO world of governance and human security, the relatively weak pro-UN/internationalism lobby, and the more radical sections of the media. Such an objective may be taken for granted at the David Davies Memorial Institute, where 'engaging in public education activities' is the top priority item of its mission statement, and at an increasing number of other institutions, but much more still needs to be done. In conclusion, here are some areas for discussion and action which I believe could help to raise the profile of peace:

1. We need to restore the imbalance between war and peace studies, intensify peace research, and promote peace education particularly in school curricula.

Important research being done into the sources of human conflict has to be translated into more accessible forms. Is peace simply the absence of war, or is it as Spinoza said 'a virtue, a state of mind'?⁸⁶ The question has been well put by John Burton: are conflicts due to inherent human aggressiveness, or rather to 'the emergence of inappropriate social institutions and norms that reasonably would seem to be well within human capacities to alter'?⁸⁷ Such an enquiry involves challenging popular stereotypes such as the view of nature as 'red in tooth and claw' and the assumption that human societies are more often at war than at peace. It means delving far back through history to examine the evolution of peace and violence, and the study of peaceful cultures to learn what makes them peaceful as well as why they have failed to endure.

2. We need to recapture the history of the Cold War from the revisionist approach which claims that the West shared no blame for its crises, and downplays the degree of risk involved: the nuclear threats, alarms, accidents and near catastrophes of that period should be part of our historical consciousness rather than airbrushed out of the record. It is easy to dismiss the nuclear threats issued during the Cold War as mere bluff, yet if that were so what purpose would have been served in making them? Robert McNamara has recalled that 'we came within a hair's breadth of war with the Soviet Union on three different occasions',⁸⁸ and yet in film and literature and print, the dramas of the Cold War remain far less vivid than those of the Second World War. McNamara's comment should put a qualifying gloss on the theory of the 'nuclear taboo' which has gained ground in post-Cold War academic studies: even the strongest taboo may be broken, and once would have been enough.
3. We need to take seriously the warnings of those who may be regarded as 'nuclear Cassandras': senior former political and military leaders who have seen the system working – or failing to work – from the inside, but whose fears for the future are disregarded. In the words of General Lee Butler, once head of US Strategic Air Command, the leaders of the nuclear weapon states today 'risk very much being judged by future historians as having been unworthy of their age ... of reigniting nuclear arms races around the world, of condemning mankind to live under a cloud of perpetual anxiety'.⁸⁹

Those who have seen the light include some surprising figures. In March 2007 a bipartisan study group at the Global Security Institute in Washington warned: 'Current efforts by the administration to stem proliferation fail precisely because they do not uphold the principal bargain of the non-proliferation treaty – a clear commitment to nuclear disarmament in exchange for non-proliferation'. The GSI group endorsed a recent Op-Ed article calling for new efforts to achieve the goal of 'a world free of nuclear weapons': it is a sign of the times that the article had been published in *The Wall Street Journal* and co-signed by Henry Kissinger.⁹⁰

4. We need to educate the public in the relative order of magnitude expressed in our budgets for war preparation and budgets for peaceful development, using statistics in support of peace and disarmament in the same way they are now

deployed on behalf of the environment. A sixth of the world's population subsists on the equivalent of less than one US dollar a day: including them, more than half lives on less than two dollars a day. Three million children are living with HIV/AIDS and four million more have died of it since the epidemic began. In a world where global military spending reached one trillion US dollars in 2003, 10 per cent more in real terms than at the peak of the Cold War, the problem needs to be stated in starker terms. When we support the call for the doubling of development aid to meet the Millennium Goals, we should also be demanding a halving in military expenditure – it is very doubtful whether one can be achieved without the other.

5. We need to rescue the internationalist values of the United Nations from the cynicism and despair into which they have been cast by the way that its authority has been flouted or undermined or proved deficient. Let us recall a now forgotten document, Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali's *Agenda for Peace*, written on the instructions of a special summit of the Security Council in 1991. It urged that the new opportunity offered by the end of the Cold War to achieve the 'great objectives' of the UN Charter 'must not be squandered. The Organization must never again be crippled as it was in the era that has now passed.'⁹¹ Yet ten years later, the follow-up Brahimi Report commissioned by Kofi Annan admitted that the UN had 'repeatedly failed to meet the challenge' of protecting people from war, and that it could 'do no better today'.⁹² This is not a judgement on the UN, whatever its organisational shortcomings, but on the member states who have failed to bolster its authority or who have flouted it. We should not abandon core issues such as reform of the Security Council or the establishment of a permanent peacekeeping force merely because they have so far appeared intractable.

If these five recommendations sound a shade starry-eyed, what better place to make them than in a memorial lecture for David Davies, who argued between the wars so passionately in favour of the League of Nations and for the establishment of an international police force. Lord Davies said that he was writing not for the 'wise and prudent' but for the ordinary person, and he believed strongly that public opinion must be enlisted in the struggle for peace.⁹³ We can still learn from him not always to be too wise and prudent in our deliberations, and to address our arguments to the public as much as to the specialist audience.

Davies's metaphor for the collapse of civilisation which, writing at the end of the 1920s, he feared would result from the recurrence of world war, is both prescient and disturbing:

How thin and meagre is the partition which divides sheer barbarism from modern civilisation! The one is as far removed from the other as the basement of a New York skyscraper is from its roof-garden, but it only requires a bomb of sufficient magnitude to shatter the entire edifice.

A new world war, waged with the weapons which ‘applied’ science has now placed at the disposal of man, may easily produce the wholesale annihilation of man within the space of a few months ... Internationally we walk along the edge of a precipice.⁹⁴

We are still walking on the edge of that precipice, and are threatened by vastly more powerful weapons that could destroy humanity not within months but within days – or even hours.

Notes

* I am grateful to four anonymous *International Relations* readers for their helpful comments, and to the David Davies Memorial Institute for giving me the opportunity to explore this theme.

- 1 Strictly speaking, what is to be ‘renewed’ or replaced is not the Trident missile system but the Vanguard-class submarines carrying the system which will start being withdrawn from service in the early 2020s. However, the commonly used phrase ‘Trident renewal’ is not entirely inaccurate. The US Trident missiles on which Britain depends are likely to be phased out by 2042, while it is said that the new submarines whose construction is planned will remain operational till 2055. The consequent need for a successor to Trident was the subject of an exchange of letters between Tony Blair and George Bush in December 2006: see further note 8.
- 2 Tony Blair, interview on *BBC Newsnight*, 20 April 2005.
- 3 John Reid, Defence Secretary, in foreign affairs and defence debate, *Hansard*, 18 May 2005, column 196.
- 4 House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Future of the UK’s Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: The Strategic Context* (Norwich: The Stationery Office, June 2006).
- 5 Downing Street briefing, 22 June 2006; Gordon Brown, Mansion House speech, 21 June 2006.
- 6 *The Future of the United Kingdom’s Nuclear Deterrent: Defence White Paper 2006* (Norwich: The Stationery Office, December 2006). The limited role of the cabinet was revealed – reluctantly – by the Prime Minister’s spokesman at the morning press briefing on 4 December.
- 7 Ann Black, constituency member of the National Executive Committee, website report on February 2007 National Policy Forum, available at: www.annblack.com/npf_Feb2007.htm (accessed 1 May 2007).
- 8 Exchange of letters between the Prime Minister and the President, 7 December 2006, published on the 10 Downing Street website on 19 December when – a few days before Christmas – they attracted little media attention.
- 9 The government won the main vote by 409 to 161: 95 Labour backbenchers had voted for an amendment to delay the decision. If the Conservatives had voted for, instead of against, this amendment, the government would have been defeated.
- 10 Populus poll for *The Times*, results published 13 December 2006.
- 11 Mori poll conducted for Greenpeace, question 2, results published 24 October 2005.
- 12 Mori poll as above, question 1.
- 13 ICM for Scottish CND, conducted on 26–29 January 2007.
- 14 The White Paper addressed the charge of hypocrisy as follows: ‘The NPT recognised the UK, the US, France, Russia and China as nuclear weapon States and established other signatories as non-nuclear weapon States.’ In fact the treaty contained no such list, but defined the NWS as a state ‘which has manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive device prior to January 1, 1967’. This avoided any mention of China – the treaty was signed by Taiwan (Republic of China) and the People’s Republic did not accede until 1992.
- 15 Tony Blair, speech of 12 January 2007, Plymouth.
- 16 Gordon Brown, BBC interview, 19 January 2007.
- 17 Quoted in Lawrence S. Wittner, *Resisting the Bomb, 1954–1970* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), p. 163.
- 18 Vladimir Putin, press conference after G8 summit, RIA Novosti, 11 June 2004.

- 19 Mao Zedong, talk to Algerian delegation, 17 May 1960.
- 20 Jacques Chirac, speech at L'Ile Longue, 19 January 2006.
- 21 National Security Council, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, issued by the White House, 1 June 2002.
- 22 Tony Blair, parliamentary statement on Trident, *Hansard*, 4 December 2006, column 21.
- 23 Tony Blair, *Hansard*, 14 March 2007, column 277.
- 24 *Defence White Paper 2006, Fact Sheet 1*.
- 25 Margaret Beckett, *Hansard*, 14 March 2007, column 310.
- 26 Liam Fox, *Hansard*, column 395.
- 27 Tony Blair, *Hansard*, column 279.
- 28 Margaret Beckett, *Hansard*, column 309.
- 29 Statement by UK Ambassador John Duncan to First Preparatory Committee for Eighth NPT Review Conference, Vienna, 30 April 2007; Margaret Beckett, 'A World Free of Nuclear Weapons?', address to the Carnegie International Non-Proliferation Conference, Washington DC, 25 June 2007.
- 30 'Statement by the Russian Representative on Item "Nuclear Weapons"', 10 October 2006.
- 31 Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Fact Sheet on Nuclear Disarmament*, issued 27 April 2004.
- 32 'Statement by the Head of the French Delegation', NPT Review Preparatory Committee, Vienna, 8 May 2007.
- 33 Ambassador Christina Rocca, Statement to the Conference on Disarmament, 'Creating the Environment Necessary for Nuclear Disarmament', Geneva, 6 February 2007.
- 34 'Verification of Nuclear Disarmament: Final Report of Study into the Verification of Nuclear Warheads and their Components', UK working paper submitted to the NPT, New York, 18 April 2005.
- 35 See Kurt M. Campbell, Robert Einhorn and Mitchell Reiss (eds), *The Nuclear Tipping Point: Why States Reconsider their Nuclear Choices* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).
- 36 Jimmy Carter, 'A Nuclear Crisis', *Washington Post*, 23 February 2000.
- 37 Christopher A. Ford, 'The NPT Review Process and the Future of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime', remarks at the NPT Japan seminar, Vienna, 6 February 2007.
- 38 Kim Howells, Statement to the Conference on Disarmament, 22 February 2007.
- 39 'Secretary-General Kofi Annan's Address to the Conference on Disarmament', Geneva, 21 June 2006.
- 40 President Kennedy, press conference, 21 March 1963, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1963* (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1964), p. 280. See further, Peter R. Lavoy, 'Predicting Nuclear Proliferation: A Declassified Documentary Record', *Strategic Insights*, 3(1), January 2004.
- 41 See further Nina Tannenwald, 'Stigmatizing the Bomb: Origins of the Nuclear Taboo', *International Security*, 3(4), Spring 2005, pp. 5–49. Kurt Campbell has suggested that there may also be an 'enduring taboo against discussing latent nuclear ambitions in polite company' which inhibits recognition of the new dangers of nuclear proliferation, 'Nuclear Proliferation beyond Rogues', *Washington Quarterly*, 26(1), 2003, p. 8.
- 42 'How to Get a Handle on the Axis', *The Economist*, 12 April 2007.
- 43 Zhang Liangui, 'Coping with a Nuclear North Korea', in *China Security* (Washington DC: World Security Institute, Autumn 2006), p. 8. Another specialist, Shen Dingli (Institute of International Studies, Fudan University), suggests that if North Korea can acquire as few as 10–20 nuclear warheads, this will force the US to accept it as a de facto nuclear nation, 'North Korea's Strategic Significance', *China Security*, Autumn 2006, p. 29.
- 44 'Special Department of Defense news briefing with Secretary Edelman', *DefenseLink* (Washington DC: Pentagon), 3 April 2007.
- 45 'Iran defies UN to Join Nuclear Club', *The Independent*, 10 April 2007.
- 46 E.g. the proposal for an IAEA-administered fuel bank, with nuclear materials provided by, for example, the US and Russia, for supply to countries such as Iran. For this and other proposals see further 'Spotlight on the New Nuclear Framework', *IAEA Bulletin*, 48(1).
- 47 ElBaradei repeated his call for a Middle East nuclear-free zone, including Iran and Israel, when he met King Abdullah II of Jordan on 15 April 2007. See further Rene Wadlow, 'Middle East Nuclear-Weapon Free Zone: A Serious Start?', *New Europeans Magazine*, 16 May 2007.
- 48 Cited in Hans M. Kristensen, 'The Role of U.S. Nuclear Weapons: New Doctrine Falls Short of Bush Pledge', *Arms Control Today*, September 2005.

- 49 *The Sun*, 7 February 2007.
- 50 Shen Dingli (see note 43) has suggested that 'if China's conventional forces are devastated, and if Taiwan takes the opportunity to declare *de jure* independence, it is inconceivable that China would allow its nuclear weapons to be destroyed by a precision attack with conventional weapons, rather than use them as a true means of deterrence', *China Security*, autumn 2005, p. 13.
- 51 In 1996 the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty named 44 NWS and other nuclear-capable states whose ratification is required for the treaty to enter into force.
- 52 Kofi Annan, lecture at Princeton University (New York: UN Department of Public Information, 28 November 2006).
- 53 For further discussion of the future of the NPT, see Yale Law School, 'Change the Non-proliferation Regime?' *Open Argument* 2(1), October 2006.
- 54 On the concept of 'constructive non-renewal', see further Ken Booth, 'The Certainty of Uncertainty', paper presented to a Greenpeace/WMD Awareness Programme seminar on 'Trident Replacement: The Tipping Point?', 12 December 2006.
- 55 Predictions of nuclear war by accident or design are unfashionable these days. We should recall that during the Cold War period government leaders regularly reassured the public that the chances of such a war were minimal while betraying much greater concern in private.
- 56 Sima Qian, *Records of the Historian*, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (Hong Kong: Commercial Press, 1974), p. 171. The quotation comes from an inscription erected by the first Qin emperor himself.
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