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Systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally: a food for thought paper

**Submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and
Northern Ireland**

Introduction

1. The United Kingdom's goal is the global elimination of nuclear weapons. The present paper is intended to give a preliminary indication of what the United Kingdom believes will be entailed in pursuing systematic and progressive efforts to achieve this.

Key points

2. In progressing towards this goal there are a number of issues that will need to be considered, but three are of key importance:

- Nuclear arms control issues;
- Underlying political issues; and
- Related security issues.

Nuclear issues

3. In the nuclear sphere itself there are three main kinds of State: the nuclear-weapon States party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the non-nuclear-weapon States party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the States not party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Each kind of State has an important contribution to play in making progress towards reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons globally.

Nuclear-weapon States party to the Non- Proliferation Treaty

4. Each of the nuclear-weapon States party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty clearly has a key role to play in movement towards the global elimination of nuclear weapons. But their nuclear forces vary considerably in size. In particular, there is at present a clear distinction in size between, on the one hand, the nuclear forces of the Russian Federation and the United States of America and, on the other hand, the nuclear forces of China, France and the United Kingdom.

5. The United Kingdom recognizes that, aware of their particular situation, the Russian Federation (or its predecessor) and the United States have been negotiating bilaterally since the late 1960s to control and reduce their nuclear forces. With the end of the cold war there has been a decisive shift from control to reduction, through various bilateral agreements and a number of unilateral actions. Moreover, in addition to reducing nuclear forces, much effort has also gone into risk reduction and confidence-building measures and into dealing with the fissile materials now surplus to defence needs in both countries.

6. A crucial strand in any systematic and progressive effort to reduce nuclear weapons globally must be a continuation of these efforts by the Russian Federation and the United States. In particular, it is important that:

- START II and its Protocol should enter into force soon, along with the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty-related agreements reached in New York in September 1997;
- Both States should pursue to successful conclusions their discussions on a START III Treaty and on the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, as set out in their Joint Statement of 20 June 1999.

7. The United Kingdom recognizes that the heavy responsibilities which fall to the Russian Federation and the United States as the largest nuclear-weapon States do not in any way diminish the responsibilities that also fall on the smaller nuclear-weapon States (China, France and the United Kingdom). They can each make an important contribution to the overall effort by:

- Keeping their forces at minimum levels;
- Accepting that in due course they will need to join the larger nuclear-weapon States in negotiations about their nuclear weapons.

8. In addition, even before that moment is reached, and preparatory to it, there are clearly steps that all five of the nuclear-weapon States could usefully take to:

- Minimize the risk of any accidental, unauthorized or mistaken use of nuclear weapons (through the maintenance of robust and effective nuclear command-and-control mechanisms and such measures as hotlines, risk reduction centres, prior notification and exchange of information about ballistic-missile launches, and detargeting agreements);
- Address their total holdings of warheads, including short-range (for example, by being more transparent about them and by working on the verification issues that controlling, reducing and eliminating all nuclear warheads will pose, building on the work already undertaken by some nuclear-weapon States);
- Deal with fissile material issues (for example, by being transparent about their current holdings of fissile material and, as far as possible, about the past production of fissile material for all purposes, identifying any fissile material surplus to their defence needs, placing it under international verification as soon as possible and, in the case of surplus weapons-grade fissile

material, considering disposition arrangements for it);

- Pursue the consideration of the issue of security assurances to the non-nuclear-weapon States Parties.

Non-nuclear-weapon States party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty

9. The 182 non-nuclear-weapon States party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty have already made an invaluable contribution to the achievement of nuclear disarmament. Without their past willingness to forswear nuclear weapons, that goal would long before now have become a mirage. Its achievement still remains a possibility because of the restraint that they have shown. The United Kingdom gives full recognition to the vital contribution these States have thereby made towards sustaining the goal of the global elimination of nuclear weapons.

10. It follows that their continued commitment to the Non-Proliferation Treaty remains vitally important. Fortunately, in the vast majority of cases, the commitment of these States is not in any doubt. In many cases it has been further reinforced by additional commitments to treaties establishing nuclear-weapon-free zones and by a willingness to accept additional safeguards obligations through the conclusion of INFCIRC/540 agreements. Developments such as these continue to facilitate movement towards the elimination of nuclear weapons globally.

11. There have, however, been some very regrettable instances of non-nuclear-weapon States party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty falling short of the high standard set by most of them. The clandestine Iraqi nuclear weapons programme was exposed by inspections after the Gulf conflict, and there are continuing uncertainties about the past activities of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Dealing with these situations, and any others like them that may arise in the future, represents one of the most difficult challenges which all other States face in maintaining the conditions for further progress towards nuclear disarmament.

12. The United Kingdom does not claim to have easy solutions to such problems, but it is determined to work with others to deal with them as effectively as possible. Specific approaches have been devised in relation to Iraq and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea,

and the United Kingdom strongly supports Security Council resolution 1284 (1999) and the Agreed Framework. But there is clearly room for more thought on generic approaches to such problems. Unless the international community as a whole can address them successfully, the prospects for eliminating nuclear weapons globally will be gravely damaged.

States not party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty

13. The problem of the four remaining States not party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty is another serious challenge that all parties to the Treaty face. The United Kingdom recognizes that Cuba has signed the Treaty of Tlatelolco on a regional nuclear-weapon-free zone, and has in practice placed its nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards. The other three non-parties — India, Israel and Pakistan — have yet to undertake similar measures. These States have made clear that they are firmly convinced that their security positions do not yet permit them to adhere to the Non-Proliferation Treaty in the only way they can, as non-nuclear-weapon States.

14. Nevertheless, the United Kingdom believes that this objective remains of fundamental importance and that in the meantime it is essential that these States exercise the maximum of restraint if there is to be continuing overall progress towards the elimination of nuclear weapons. The Resolution on the Middle East, adopted without a vote by the 1995 Review and Extension Conference of the Parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty set out the steps that States in that region should take. Security Council resolution 1172 (1998) of 6 June 1998 sets out the steps which the two non-parties in South Asia should take.

All States

15. In addition to the particular actions which the different kinds of State can take, there are some actions which all States can usefully take. In particular, they can all sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty if they have not already done so, and they can all work for the successful conclusion of negotiations for a fissile material cut-off treaty. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty places important constraints on the development of nuclear weapons, and a fissile material cut-off treaty will be essential to place a limit on the amount of fissile material available for nuclear weapons.

Underlying political issues

16. While it is clear from the above that every kind of State can make important and immediate contributions in the nuclear sphere itself, it is also clear that what happens in the nuclear sphere is not divorced from underlying political realities. There are no easy answers here. The world would be a better place if nuclear weapons were not still judged to be necessary, but the conditions for complete nuclear disarmament do not yet exist.

17. With the end of the cold war, it has proved possible to make rapid strides towards reducing the nuclear forces of the nuclear-weapon States. But plainly, further progress in this sphere will depend on maintaining good relations between all five of these States. For its part the United Kingdom is committed to achieving this, both bilaterally and collectively.

18. Nor is it an accident that the remaining States not party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty are, with one exception, in parts of the world where political tensions are particularly acute. It will therefore be important for them to work at managing and resolving those tensions. For our part we are working hard to bring about a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, which we hope will have a positive impact on the nuclear policy of that region's remaining non-party. As for South Asia, we stand ready to offer suitable assistance to the non-parties in that region if they would find that helpful in easing the tensions between them.

19. In noting these points about underlying political issues, the United Kingdom is not trying to make excuses for any State not making progress on the nuclear issues themselves. It is simply drawing attention to the reality that progress on these issues is likely in practice to be very dependent on progress in the wider political sphere, and that therefore this dimension must not be neglected in any systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally. Ultimately, to achieve the global elimination of nuclear weapons it will be necessary to create the conditions in which no State believes them necessary for its security.

Related security issues

20. There are a number of related security issues that will be important in pursuing this goal.

21. One is what happens in relation to other weapons of mass destruction — biological and chemical weapons. Progress towards eliminating nuclear weapons is clearly going to be easier if the Chemical Weapons Convention secures universal adherence and compliance, and if an effective protocol to strengthen the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention is rapidly concluded, adhered to by all and complied with by all. Securing these objectives must therefore be another important dimension in any overall approach to the elimination of nuclear weapons. And implementation of rigorous verification provisions will give added confidence that eventual nuclear disarmament can be properly verified. The United Kingdom is working hard to ensure that both the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention demonstrate that a global arms control regime can be made an effective reality.

22. Another complicating factor in the search for nuclear elimination is the developing capability of some countries in the ballistic missile field. By multiplying the potential threats to other countries, this potentially increases the risk of proliferation. So continued efforts to control and reduce the spread of ballistic-missile capabilities must be another crucial element in systematic and progressive efforts to reduce nuclear weapons globally.

23. The best solution would be to achieve a world in which the underlying political tensions that give rise to a sense of insecurity on the part of States have disappeared. In such a world, all States would need to be fully committed to the rule of international law. International rules of law go hand in hand with impartial, non-political arms-control compliance systems. We need to continue building confidence in both. Our efforts in biological and chemical weapons, in verifying conventional arms levels and in pursuing collective security arrangements are all an essential backdrop to creating the conditions for complete nuclear disarmament.

Key tasks

24. It is the United Kingdom's preliminary view, therefore, that any truly systematic and progressive effort to reduce nuclear weapons globally, with a view to the goal of eliminating them, will have to comprise three key tasks:

- Making progress on the nuclear issues themselves, along the lines set out in paragraphs 3 to 15 above;
- Addressing the underlying political issues along the lines set out in paragraphs 16 to 19 above; and
- Dealing with related security issues along the lines set out in paragraphs 20 to 23 above.

Conclusion

25. The United Kingdom is unequivocally committed to nuclear disarmament. It offers this paper on what pursuing that goal will entail, in the hope that it will provide food for thought by all concerned States.