

Nuclear Free Local Authorities Secretariat

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Trident Commission
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Emailed to: TC@basicint.org

9th December 2011

Dear BASIC Trident Commission,

TRIDENT COMMISSION EVIDENCE – SUBMISSION BY NUCLEAR FREE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

I attach the official submission of the Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) for consideration by the Trident Commission on the need for, and alternatives to, Trident replacement.

The NFLA is a cross-party (we have representatives from 11 political parties on our Steering Committee) body of local authorities from England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland which, amongst other issues, puts forward its opposition to the possession and use of nuclear weapons, and seeks their eventual abolition (1). It also works closely with the 5092 member international local authority body, Mayors for Peace, (Manchester City Council and Glasgow City Council are on the Mayors for Peace Executive and 2020 Vision Campaign Boards) which is led by the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the only two cities to have experienced the terrible effects of a nuclear weapons attack (2). It fully supports the Mayors for Peace '2020 Vision for the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons' (3).

It also campaigns on the ultimate phase-out of nuclear power and advocates renewable energy alternatives.

The NFLA submission considers the three main questions requested of groups and individuals that wish to make representations to the Trident Commission.

Q1. Should the UK remain a nuclear weapon state?

For the NFLA the simple answer is 'No' for a number of reasons.

a) *Multilateral nuclear disarmament through the '2020 Vision'*

The NFLA was established in November 1980, partially to call for a nuclear weapons free world. This was at a time of mounting international concern as the 'Cold War' heated up. It is the NFLA's view that now, over twenty years since the end of the Cold War, the risks of a nuclear weapons attack remains higher than ever, and the concerns over increased nuclear weapons proliferation are becoming ever more pressing. The NFLA is concerned that states like Iran and North Korea are particularly wishing to possess nuclear weapons because they feel directly threatened by the Nuclear Weapons States, and they see possession of such weapons as an effective deterrent preventing an attack on them. By signalling that they apparently intend to retain their weapons indefinitely, states possessing nuclear weapons are providing an incentive for insecure states to develop their own nuclear weapons, with the attendant proliferation risks.

For the past 2 decades, the NFLA has forged a close relationship with the Mayors for Peace. The Mayors for Peace is the largest local government organisation in the world – its 5,092 members represent around a billion citizens in 151 countries. We consider that this is a

mandate which indicates that the vast majority of ordinary citizens around the world are opposed to nuclear weapons and wish to see action to eliminate them. The NFLA joins with the Mayors for Peace in its urgent call that all existing nuclear weapons states, and in this case the UK, should move actively and quickly towards a reduction in, and eventual elimination of, nuclear weapons as part of a sensible and structured timetable. In the meantime, it supports the views of a number of like-minded groups like Abolition 2000, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament (PNND) (4), that the UK Government needs to take partial steps to reduce the weaponry of the UK's 'nuclear deterrent' and foster the 'good faith' that is needed to engender the confidence for more effective disarmament steps to take place.

The NFLA works with the Mayors for Peace as it wants to see a global, hard-headed multilateral response for nuclear weapons abolition. The rapid expansion of Mayors for Peace in recent years shows how important local government across the world sees this issue, and it is a practical case-study of international multilateral co-operation that the Trident Commission is encouraged to consider.

The NFLA fully endorses the Mayors for Peace's 'Hiroshima-Nagasaki Protocol' (5). This seeks to see the development and approval of a Nuclear Weapons Convention at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation (NPT) Treaty Conference in 2015 and full-scale multilateral negotiation for complete abolition of nuclear weapons by 2020 – the 75th anniversary of the first atomic bombings. These deadlines were set at the 2003 Mayors for Peace Executive Conference, held in Manchester, and were realistic targets at the time. However, foot-dragging since then by the Nuclear Weapon States has meant that the likelihood of the abolition of nuclear weapons by 2020 has significantly reduced, but this does not mean that the demand for the governments to negotiate a Nuclear Weapons Convention has become invalid.

We attach a copy of the updated Hiroshima-Nagasaki Protocol as Appendix 1 of this submission. As part of this process, the NFLA also encourages the UK Government to show global leadership and encourage a Special Disarmament Conference – Hiroshima has offered to be the venue for this – and also to continue to encourage its allies in the Middle East to support the UN Secretary General's programme to organise a conference on the development of a Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in 2012.

The NFLA believe the Protocol and the establishment of such conferences provide effective forums to assist discussion over international nuclear weapons disarmament and it urges the Trident Commission to invite members of the Mayors for Peace (with assistance from the NFLA) to discuss this initiative in greater detail.

The NFLA has been fully involved in lobbying the UK and other Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) for many years to seek reductions and the eventual elimination of all nuclear weapons. It met with the UK Government Counter-Proliferation Minister Ivan Lewis and officials prior to the 2010 NPT Review Conference and is keen to meet with Ministers and officials again as the NPT Preparatory Conference process begins again in Vienna in May 2012. It has also initiated a national tour of a photographic exhibition on the extensive damage and the physical and health effects of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings – over 20,000 people have now viewed this exhibition in the UK (6). Thousands more have seen this exhibition around the world. The aim of the A-bomb exhibition is to educate the public on the devastating effects of nuclear weapons and the pressing need for multilateral disarmament discussions. It believes the UK Government should encourage similar educational initiatives.

b) *An 'independent deterrent', other threats and financial costs*

The NFLA remains puzzled as to what the UK's 'independent nuclear deterrent' actually deters the UK from. It has not stopped widespread terrorist attacks killing many people on UK soil, whether due to the earlier campaigns of the IRA or recent 'Al Qaeda' attacks and near misses across our major cities.

In the NFLA's view, other much more pressing threats to the UK include the growing time-bomb of climate change, the worrying developments around concerted cyber attacks and the continuing concerns over an international flu pandemic (7). There is no way that the possession of nuclear weapons protects us from any of these threats, and yet the UK Government still plans to spend billions on them.

Furthermore, if one talks about terrorism, the prospect of terrorist organisations getting their hands on small amounts of the raw nuclear materials to develop a crude 'dirty bomb' type of device is seen by the UK Government as a major threat to our national security, according to its published risk assessment (8). A conventional nuclear deterrent located on Trident submarines would not prevent such an attack in a UK town or city centre.

The financial crisis in the UK economy and the major costs of a Trident replacement should also be a key factor in why the UK should look to end its role as a Nuclear Weapon State. The UK Government has stated that the capital costs of a Trident replacement programme will cost a minimum of £25 billion. Other groups, notably Greenpeace, have suggested this is a major under-estimation and the whole life costs could reach as much as £97 billion (9). The Ministry of Defence is also going through the largest series of cuts in its history, where our conventional forces are being trimmed back wherever practical to do so.

Whatever figure is eventually decided upon for a Trident 'Main gate' decision, can it be economically justified to be spending so much on a deterrent which even senior military figures like Sir Hugh Beach have said is a waste of military resources? (10) In the Chancellor's budget statement of the 29th November the scale of the financial crisis on public spending has become even more alarming. As a local authority organisation which has seen its members have to make the most savage cuts to core services in a generation, the NFLA has to pose the question of what a figure of £25 billion - £97 billion could be better used for in these difficult times.

The NFLA would like to encourage the Trident Commission to consider the research recently published by Malcolm Chalmers for the Royal United Services Institute (11). Chalmers noted that the MOD have currently budgeted for a further 8% cut in its budget to meet the targets set down on it for the current financial year and to avoid an impending 'budget crisis'. However, Chalmers suggests further problems may occur to the MOD budget if the costs of large-scale military spending on projects like the Trident replacement programme, the 'Joint Strike Fighter' aircraft and the Navy's Type 26 frigate project rise more than is anticipated.

Chalmers notes: "The largest, and politically most difficult, procurement programme over the next two decades will be the construction of a successor to the Trident nuclear deterrent submarines. The MoD is due to spend £7 billion over the decade to 2020 on the initial concept, design and development phases of this project, equivalent to around 11 per cent of the new equipment budget over the decade from 2011/12 to 2020/21".

According to Chalmers, spending on Trident replacement is due to peak in 2021/2 or 2022/3, when it will consume 30% of the MOD's budget, a figure likely to be maintained until deployment of new submarines in, or around, 2028. The Chalmers report argues that, unless defence spending is significantly increased, other military projects will have to fall back sharply to cope with the financial demands of Trident replacement. This may, for example, require a

reduction in the number of Type 26 conventional warships if such spending models are adopted. With the continuing stress on the UK military in Afghanistan and other theatres of conflict, the NFLA urges a reconsideration of the Trident replacement programme in reference to the dramatic cuts to the MOD's budget.

c) *The damage to the planet of even a limited nuclear weapons attack*

Considerable recent research has been undertaken on the effects on the planet in the event of a limited nuclear weapons attack. It was presented to the NFLA and to the Mayors for Peace Executive Board at its recent meeting in Granollers by the Mayors for Peace Executive Director, Aaron Tovish (12).

The research puts forward the concept that a limited nuclear weapons attack it would not just have wide scale physical and environmental damage, but it would also lead to catastrophic wider damage on world food production, escalate the negative effects of climate change and affect the state that used the weapons almost as much as the state it had attacked. This shows up the fundamental weakness of the theory of deterrence in a post Cold War world. The NFLA attaches this research as Appendix 2 of this submission. The NFLA encourages the Trident Commission to consider carefully the arguments that have been made in this technical area of the debate over the possession and use of nuclear weapons.

d) *The morality of possessing nuclear weapons*

In reading some of the published submissions to the Trident Commission the NFLA has been aware that those who wish the UK to remain a Nuclear Weapon State do so out of the 'realpolitik' that it is better that we have them than not in an uncertain world. Despite all the arguments that NFLA and other organisations have made above, it is above all the view of the NFLA that possession of nuclear weapons is immoral and unethical and breaks with the judgement of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that use of nuclear weapons would almost certainly be illegal under international law (13). If the use of nuclear weapons is outlawed by international law, then it follows that the threat of using them is also illegal, and as a result the UK should seek to make the moves to being a nuclear weapons free state.

The NFLA also fully supports the Mayor's for Peace's 'Good Faith Challenge'. (13) This seeks to assert the ICJ's advisory opinion that Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) places an obligation on all state parties to achieving nuclear weapons disarmament by adopting negotiations on the principle of 'good faith'. It is the view of the NFLA that developing a new series of Trident-ready nuclear submarines and modernising the UK's nuclear weapons stockpile goes against this principle. The NFLA also support the recent opinion of Judge Mohammed Bedjaoui, who was President of the ICJ from 1994 – 1997, that Trident renewal would be a material breach of NPT obligations, as has been outlined in the appendix of the submission to the Trident Commission by the Baptist Union, the Methodist Church, the Society of Friends and the United Reformed Church (14).

Q2. If it should, is Trident renewal the only or best option that the UK Government can and should pursue?

As outlined above, the NFLA does not believe the UK should remain as a nuclear weapon state but rather develop an international nuclear weapons convention and move towards eventual and complete nuclear weapons disarmament.

All other potential 'alternatives' to Trident renewal fall by the same hurdle of international law and the ultimate aim of the NPT.

However, the NFLA would very much welcome moves by the UK Government to take Trident off a 'Continuous At Sea Deterrence' and reduce the number of Trident submarines from 4 to 3. This would be seen positively in a national and international context as part of a move towards eventual, complete nuclear weapons disarmament (15).

Considering ways to reduce the yield of a nuclear warhead or other alternatives does not again move away from the hurdle of international law.

Q3. What more can and should the UK Government do to more effectively promote global nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and nuclear security?

The NFLA have noted that in recent years there has been a hugely welcome rise in civil society efforts to promote the aim of global nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and nuclear security. This can be seen by the rapid expansion of the Mayors for Peace and PNND, the positive work of ICAN, the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) and the International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms (IALANA); and the recent ground-breaking decision of the governing body of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent to work towards a legally binding agreement to ensure nuclear weapons are never used again and are ultimately eliminated (16).

These civil society groups fully support the initiative of 140 states who advocate the development of a Nuclear Weapons Convention that will provide an international, legally binding agreement to ban and eliminate nuclear weapons (17). The NFLA believe the UK should take a more pro-active role in this debate. It should not only state clearly that it would support the eventual introduction of a Nuclear Weapons Convention, and would not block or attempt to delay the commencement of negotiations on such a treaty, it should also encourage the 'P5' states (France, USA, Russia and China) and non-signatories to the NPT like Israel, India and Pakistan to engage with the vast majority of the United Nations and civil society groups on this issue. The NFLA also believes the time to act is now, with real concerns that the reluctance of the P5 and other states to engage in this debate may lead to an increase in nuclear weapons proliferation and a much more unstable world.

The NFLA are disappointed with the development of the UK-French Defence and Security Treaty which commits both states to co-operation on nuclear weapons research through 'Project Teutates' for up to the next 50 years. To the NFLA this goes very much against the 'good faith' principle and indeed it could be reasonably argued is counter to the aims and objectives of the NPT. The UK Government should make it clear that, if international circumstances change and the disarmament climate improves, it would be willing to review its commitment to a 50 year lifespan for the Treaty.

Conversely, the NFLA welcomes the co-operation between the UK and Norway on improving the verification regime for nuclear weapons reduction and encourages this co-operation to prosper. The UK Government has undertaken some good disarmament initiatives in recent years, but these have to be judged against the strong desire to replace the Trident weapons programme and the lack of activity to develop a Nuclear Weapons Convention. Given the UK's leadership role previously in developing international convention on landmines and on chemical and biological weapons, the NFLA strongly encourages the UK Government to lead the P5 much more swiftly to engage on nuclear weapons disarmament.

Finally, the NFLA notes the major ongoing policy debate in Scotland, where Trident submarines are stationed. Opinion polls show higher public support for nuclear weapons disarmament than elsewhere in the UK. A growing coalition including the Scottish Government, the Scottish churches, the Scottish Trades Union Congress and civil society groups are moving more closely together on this issue (18), and there appears a clear possibility that the presence of Trident

submarines could be an issue in a future debate on Scottish independence. A recent speech by the First Minister of Scotland, Alex Salmond, highlighted how this issue could be brought into such a debate, when he said (19):

“Fiscal responsibility, financial freedom, real economic powers is a legitimate proposal. It could allow control of our own resources, competitive business tax and fair personal taxation. All good, all necessary but not good enough. Trident nuclear missiles would still be on the Clyde, we could still be forced to spill blood in illegal wars, such as Iraq, and we would still be excluded from the councils of Europe and the world.”

The NFLA encourages the UK Government and the Trident Commission to fully engage with the developing debate in Scotland on nuclear weapons.

If the Commission would like members of the NFLA to attend a future hearing, or discuss the possibility of bringing international officers or prominent leading Mayors from the Mayors for Peace to a subsequent hearing, then please contact the NFLA Secretary, Sean Morris, on s.morris4@manchester.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Brian Goodall (pp with his approval by the NFLA Secretary, Sean Morris)
Chair of the Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

References:

- (1) The terms of reference and all associated work of the Nuclear Free Local Authorities can be found on its website – <http://www.nuclearpolicy.info>.
- (2) See the Mayors for Peace website – <http://mayorsforpeace.org>.
- (3) See the Mayors for Peace 2020 Vision Campaign website – <http://www.2020visioncampaign.org>.
- (4) At the Mayors for Peace Executive Conference meeting in Granollers, Spain on the 8th – 10th November 2011 it was agreed to strengthen partnerships with like-minded civil society groups.
- (5) The Protocol is attached as Appendix 1.
- (6) The Hiroshima-Nagasaki A-bomb exhibition was formally opened on November 4th 2010 in Manchester. It has now been exhibited in Dundee, Newry, Dundalk, Aberdeen and the Shetland Islands. Plans are in place for it to be exhibited in the Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, Rotherham, Glasgow, Leeds, Hull, Oxford and London in 2012.
- (7) UK Government National Security Strategy – A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty. September, 2010.
<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/national-security-strategy.pdf>
- (8) *ibid.*
- (9) In the Firing Line, Greenpeace UK, September 2009.
<http://greenpeace.org.uk/media/reports/firing-line-hidden-costs-supercarrier-project-and-replacing-trident>
- (10) General Sir Hugh Beach – What Price Nuclear Blackmail? Blackaby Paper, No.9 - <http://abolition2000uk.org/The%20Blackaby%20Papers.htm>
- (11) Professor Malcolm Chalmers, RUSI – Is the UK Defence Budget Crisis Really Over? <http://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/RUSIBriefingPaperSept2011.pdf>
- (12) Aaron Tovish's paper is attached as Appendix 2.
- (13) International Court of Justice, The Hague, 1995 – <http://www.icj-cij/docet/files/95/7497.pdf>
- (14) See Mayors for Peace website.

- (15) Submission by the Baptist Union, Methodist Church, Society of Friends (Quakers) and United Reformed Church to the Trident Commission.
<http://www.basicint.org/tridentcommission/evidencereceived>
- (16) See ICAN submission to the Trident Commission; ibid web reference (14).
- (17) Australian Red Cross, November 2011.
<http://www.redcross.org.au/gglobal-red-cross-movement-champions-action-on-nuclear-weapons.aspx>
- (18) See ICAN submission, reference (15).
- (19) Scotland without Nuclear Weapons Report, Scottish Government, November 2009 -
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/11/governmentresponse/Q/Page/2>
- (20) Alex Salmond speech to the SNP Conference, 22nd October 2011, BBC News Online -
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-15411188>

Updated Hiroshima-Nagasaki Protocol**Protocol complementary to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons for achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world by the year 2020**

Desiring to establish an over-arching means of addressing nuclear disarmament in all its aspects so as to facilitate the fulfillment by States Parties of their obligations under Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and with a view to all states fulfilling the nuclear disarmament obligation found by the International Court of Justice in their 1996 advisory opinion on the legality of the use or threat of nuclear weapons;

Considering that continued exploitation of the discriminatory nature of the Treaty, wherein nuclear-weapon States Parties are exempted from the prohibition on the acquisition of nuclear weapons, is incompatible with the pursuit in good faith of nuclear disarmament in all its aspects; Considering further that full equality under international law must be re-established by the elimination of all nuclear arsenals as agreed in the 1995 Extension Conference decision on "Principles and Objectives";

Article I

1. The nuclear-weapon States Parties to this Protocol shall cease forthwith:
 - (a) all activities related to the acquisition of nuclear weapon which non-nuclear-weapon States Parties are prohibited from pursuing under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons;
 - (b) all activities which incorporate nuclear weapons into their military doctrines and practices;and shall place all nuclear weapons and weapon-usable fissile materials in safe and secure storage at the earliest possible date.
2. All other States Parties to this Protocol possessing weapons-usable fissile material shall take those steps required of the nuclear-weapon States in paragraph 1 which apply to their circumstances.

Article II

1. The States Parties to this Protocol shall pursue in good faith negotiations on achieving nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under the following two main sections:

Section One negotiations will standardize and legally codify the measures taken under Article I, paragraph 1, (a) and (b).

Section Two negotiations will address:

- (c) the elimination of all nuclear weapons and related deployment systems, including delivery vehicles, launch platforms, and command and control systems.
 - (d) the elimination of all infrastructure associated with the acquisition of nuclear-weapon system, including production and testing facilities, and of all weapon-usable fissile material stocks.
2. The negotiations called for in paragraph 1 shall have as their objective a Nuclear Weapons Convention or a comparable Framework Agreement. Negotiations shall begin

forthwith and be pursued without interruption by all States Parties until this objective is achieved. A Secretariat for the negotiations shall be established that remains in operation until negotiations are concluded.

3. Every good faith effort shall be made to ensure that all measures related to Section One are agreed and implemented before or by 2015 and that all measures related to Section Two are agreed and implemented before or by 2020.
4. All measures contained or foreseen in the Nuclear Weapons Convention or Framework Agreement shall be subject to strict and effective international control and shall provide for international institutions capable of ensuring that the nuclear-weapon free world which is achieved can be maintained indefinitely.

Article III

Nothing in this Protocol shall be interpreted as diminishing in anyway the non-proliferation obligations of any State Party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; including each State's obligation to cooperate in the establishment and operation of the international institutions of Article II, paragraph 4.

The implications for catastrophic climate change from nuclear weapons deterrence (Talk by Aaron Tovish, Mayors for Peace to the IPPNW Conference in Geneva)

We have heard just how high the stakes are in nuclear war, even a 'limited' one. Does this have any implications for how nuclear deterrence should be viewed and can be practiced?

Let us suppose for the moment that, in the example of a nuclear exchange involving all US and Russian weapons on ready-to-launch status, the costs for the immediate parties are already so devastating that that the subsequent climate change would not make matters significantly worse for them. Of course, the 'innocent bystanders' to an exchange, who might have previously believed that they would escape relative unscathed, will look at it very differently now. Where they might have coped with the radiation wafting from what remains of the United States and Russia and then carried on more or less as usual; that 'comforting' notion now lies in tatters.

Just as the prospect of prompt destruction should motivate the US and Russia to ensure it does not occur; so the prospect of a long nuclear winter should motivate all other countries to ensure that it does not occur. The US and Russia are still caught in a mutually-assured-destruction (MAD) relationship in which each conceives of their task as ensuring that deterrence does not fail. The rest of the world, now caught up willy-nilly in a globally-assured-destruction (EGAD) relationship with the nuclear powers, certainly do not want deterrence to fail, but they resent being in the helpless position of having to count on the US and Russia getting it right perpetually. They would prefer that the US and Russia renounce nuclear arms as part of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free world. As stakeholders in any nuclear war, their views ought to be respected.

Indeed, if they had the power to intervene and dismantle all the nuclear arsenals of the world, they would be perfectly within their rights to do so. They do not have the hard power to do that; but they should not accept any limitations on their soft power to accomplish the same ends. I am referring to political intervention. Citizens of the nuclear-armed states do not relish relying perpetually on nuclear deterrence either. Perhaps if non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS's) were to pro-actively promote a process for establishing a Nuclear Weapons Free World (NFWF), the citizens of the Nuclear Armed States (NAS's) could ensure that their government became a good faith partner in this endeavour. That is the central concept behind Mayors for Peace's proposal for a Special Disarmament Conference.

If we now look to the 'limited nuclear war' scenario, we can get a glimpse of why this transformation of the internal debate in the NAS's might now be easier than it has been thus far. The 'limited' scenario 'puts the shoe on the other foot.' Any one of the NAS's could be an 'innocent bystander' to a limited war between any two of the others. Their people would be as devastated by that war as the NNWS's. And they are just as helpless in preventing it. While they must hope that deterrence among the NAS's will hold, it is in their interest that all the other NAS's disarm. National leaders may not see this immediately, but the citizens and enlightened Mayors and Parliamentarians do increasingly.

While John Bolton may think it is clever to say that he is in favour of nuclear disarmament by everyone *except* the United States, sensible people realize that if you want others to act you have to be willing to act with them.

So the *fact* that MAD now means GAD, give the NAS's the same incentive to promote the establishment of a NFWF as the NNWS's have felt since Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But an incentive only motivates if it is recognized. Why are the NAS's having such a hard time seeing what is directly in front of them?

Could it be that acknowledging GAD would undermine even their cherished notion of MAD? While "seeking the peace of a world without nuclear weapons" President Obama assured the American people that he would "maintain a nuclear deterrent second to none." Now we see that no leader can promise to protect his people against catastrophic climate change cause by a failure to deter between two other states. So the protective value of the deterrence is already significantly diminished in light of our new understanding of catastrophic climate change.

But there is a more direct challenge to ‘classical deterrence’: What does a leader do in the face of a very limited nuclear first strike?

Think about it a moment. For the sake of argument, let’s say ten large cities have been destroyed in a sneak attack, just short of what it takes to trigger nuclear famine. Within ten hours the cities have been completely incinerated; and the country has been eliminated as a global player for decades to come. Its leader knows that to retaliate in kind will definitely trigger catastrophic climate change. The initial attack killed 10 million people; the retaliation would condemn one billion to death – a hundred times more. Genocidal tit-for-tat is already obscenely immoral; but to drag almost one billion innocent bystanders into the carnage would be an abomination.

Since this throws into serious doubt the likelihood of retaliation, it undermines deterrence. By deterrence logic, this makes such an attack *more* likely. And yet, there have been no such first strikes! Could it be that no one is so determined to eliminate a rival that they would be willing to kill 10 million people? In that case, why do the US and Russian arsenals contain thousands of nuclear weapons? Could it be that threatening to retaliate with one or two nuclear weapons would be more credible than with ten, much less one hundred or one thousand?! This, in turn, means that retaining all but the tiniest arsenal implies an intent to strike first.

The answer would be YES, IF nuclear weapons were retained purely for retaliation against nuclear attack. But nuclear weapons are applied to other security objectives as well. Nuclear weapons used on a battlefield far from inhabited areas (and other concentrations of flammable materials) would not trigger a nuclear famine. But would nuclear weapons use be confined to such battlefields?

Here I will ‘pick’ on Russia, although the same was true of NATO during the Cold War and remains on the books even to this day. The language of nuclear deterrence is rife with euphemisms and oxymorons, most of them coined by Western thinkers, but Russia has recently contributed a beauty: “nuclear de-escalation.” What they are referring to is, of course, *escalation* to nuclear weapon use. They call it ‘de-escalation’ because of the quaint hope that by escalating to nuclear weapon use the adversary will call off a conventional weapon attack, i.e. *de-escalate* the conflict. Better yet, by articulating in advance this threat, they are hoping that no adversary would start the conventional attack in the first place. Deterrence in action!

This and all such scenarios for limited use suffer from the ‘last-move fallacy’. The presumption is that one’s own move has trumped all other moves. What if, despite this ‘de-escalation’ threat, the adversary persists with its conventional attack, or applies a ‘nuclear de-escalation’ of its own?

Mayors for Peace adopted the “Cities Are Not Targets!” slogan to highlight the genocidal nature of nuclear war and that current nuclear war planning involves attacks on and near population centres. Indeed, we were against the use of any form of explosive force against cities. The most significant change of in warfare from the 19th century to 20th century was that cities had become ‘fair game’ again, but this time with much more powerful and indiscriminate weapons. If cities are targets and nuclear weapons exist, then cities are in danger of incineration. And the world is in danger of nuclear famine or winter.

So, while we continue to press all states (and non-state actors) to renounce the use of explosive force in populated areas, we will **not** and cannot place our trust in such declaratory policy when it comes to nuclear weapons. As the US Conference of Mayors says (and Pope Benedict has recently reiterated), “Weapons of mass destruction have no place in a civilized world.” And please note that ‘civilized’ entomologically means ‘citized’.

Returning to the theme of the ‘last move fallacy’, Henry Kissinger wrote a book about nuclear strategy. He and Nixon tried to apply one of his theories during the Vietnam War by threatening to use nuclear weapons if North Vietnam did not relent in its support for the insurgency in South Vietnam. Years later, Kissinger asked the General Giap, if the threats had been ignored because they had been judged a bluff? Giap responded, “We decided it did not matter whether they were real or a bluff; we would continue either way, and we would win.”

I bring this up because, the only scenario in which a NAS can be sure of controlling the sequence of nuclear 'moves' is in a conflict with a NNWS. It is credible – the North Vietnam case notwithstanding – that the use or threat of use of a very small number of nuclear weapons against cities might influence the behaviour of an adversary who could not respond in kind. But if bullying NNWS's is the sole role left for nuclear weapons we have a very big problem with non-proliferation. This consideration may help account for the heightened debate over negative security assurance in recent times.

In short, as laced with paradoxes and fallacies as deterrence was during the Cold War, in light of nuclear winter/famine, nuclear deterrence has no clothes – or only very dirty underwear!

With deterrence in disarray, the imperative to move to the stability of nuclear abolition is all the greater. If the leaders of the NAS's and their allies are in denial about this and still blind to the abolition alternative, then it is up to the civil society of these countries to wake up their leaders. Until they awaken, it is up to the leaders of countries not addicted to the nuclear drug to guide the way to a NFWF.