

Surviving Nuclear Zero

*A fresh perspective on disarmament
in the 21st century*



UNA-UK



About UNA-UK

Founded in 1945, the United Nations Association UK (UNA-UK) is the country's foremost advocate for UK action at the UN; a leading source of analysis on the UN; and a UK-wide movement of 20,000 global citizens. We serve as a hub for UN issues in the UK and stimulate thought and debate on how to make the organisation stronger, more credible and more effective.

Our Towards Zero programme builds on our historic role as a leading campaigner for nuclear non-proliferation and multilateral disarmament. The core strands of the programme are:

- influencing decisions-makers and opinion-shapers in the UK;
- working with key individuals and organisations in other nuclear-weapon states;
- collaborating with experts on policy options; and
- re-establishing nuclear disarmament as a central issue for young people.

*Cover photo: Royal Navy Vanguard Class Trident submarine HMS Vigilant surfaces in Clyde area of Scotland.
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Opposite: UNA-UK's Chairman, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, welcomes youth and expert delegates to the Surviving Nuclear Zero event at London's International Maritime Organization.

We would like to thank the British American Security Information Council (BASIC), with whom we worked in partnership on Surviving Nuclear Zero, and the funders of the 'Special Peace Grant' (administered by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust). We are also grateful to the International Maritime Organization for the generous use of their premises.

For more information, visit www.una.org.uk/towards-zero or contact Ben Donaldson, Communications and Campaigns Manager, on donaldson@una.org.uk.

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Introduction

The 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review present an opportunity for the UK to re-examine the role played by nuclear weapons in its security strategies. Whilst acknowledging the lack of appetite for nuclear disarmament, particularly among the five Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) nuclear-weapon states, due to a range of political, security and economic reasons, UNA-UK is determined to stimulate informed debate on possible UK action that can deliver benefits for its citizens and further the UK's international obligations.

Working with the British American Security Information Council (BASIC), UNA-UK hosted a thought experiment event entitled 'Surviving Nuclear Zero' to encourage nuclear experts and students to consider the value states attach to nuclear weapons from a new perspective.

The project challenged participants to identify how a post-nuclear UK could protect itself and engage effectively in a world where others still possessed nuclear weapons and where grave threats remained. What would fill the perceived gap in the UK's national security strategies? What would diplomatic relations with allies and adversaries look like? Would British citizens be safer?

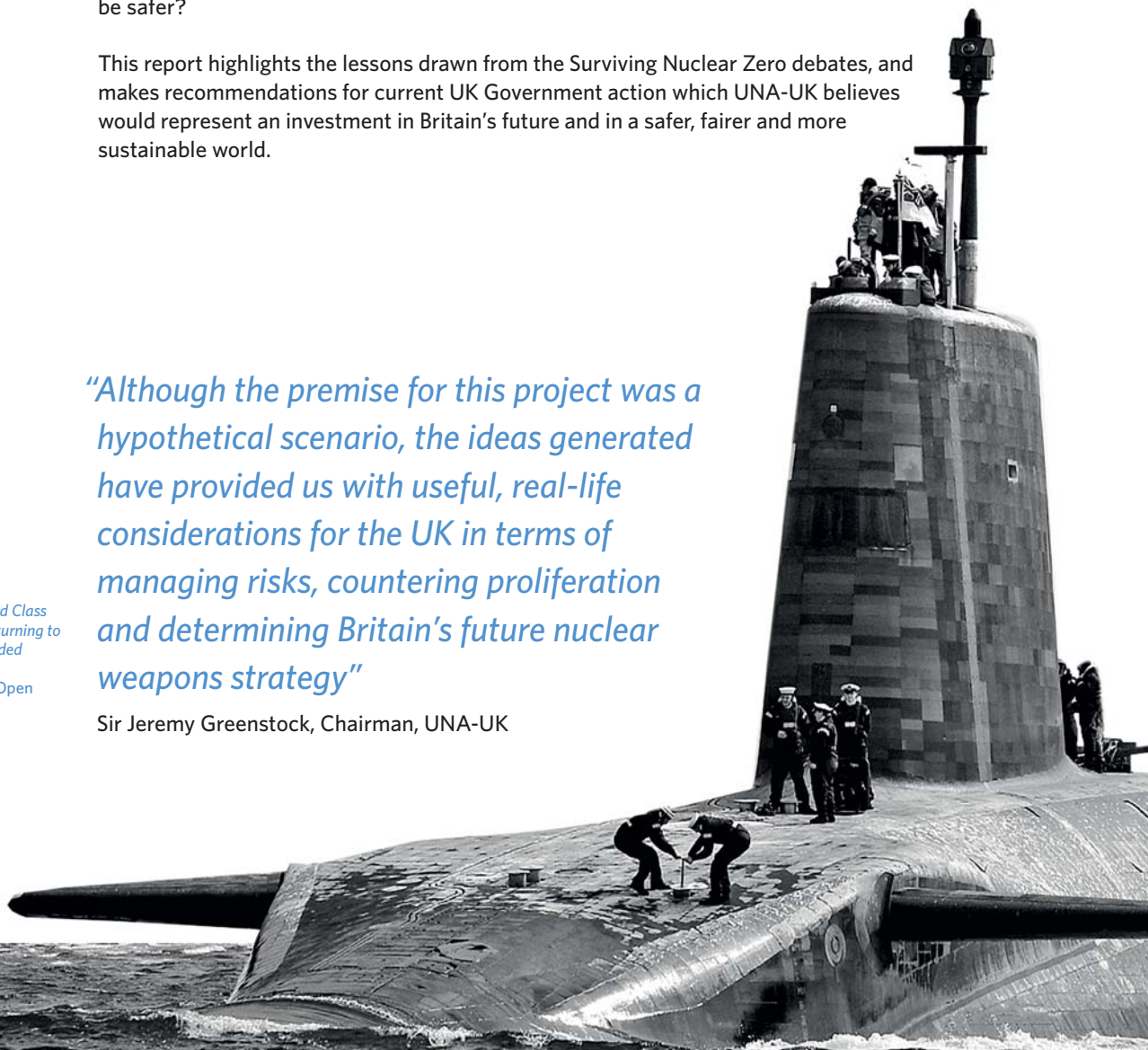
This report highlights the lessons drawn from the Surviving Nuclear Zero debates, and makes recommendations for current UK Government action which UNA-UK believes would represent an investment in Britain's future and in a safer, fairer and more sustainable world.

“Although the premise for this project was a hypothetical scenario, the ideas generated have provided us with useful, real-life considerations for the UK in terms of managing risks, countering proliferation and determining Britain's future nuclear weapons strategy”

Sir Jeremy Greenstock, Chairman, UNA-UK

Photo: Royal Navy Vanguard Class submarine HMS Vigilant returning to HMNB Clyde after an extended deployment.

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Impact

Surviving Nuclear Zero has informed UNA-UK's advocacy work, including our submissions to the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review and National Security Strategy. Our programme of work in this area is aimed at ensuring the UK's security strategies use a broad interpretation of national interest that acknowledges the need to invest in international institutions and further Britain's international obligations.

We believe that cross-generational and interdisciplinary engagement lead to a diversity of opinion, stimulating creativity and allowing new pathways for policy solutions to emerge. UNA-UK, through its youth network¹, and BASIC, through its Next Generation project², generate such discussion and work to develop a deeper understanding of how to better connect the nuclear weapons debate with other issues on the global agenda. We are pleased that Surviving Nuclear Zero has helped to re-establish nuclear policy and disarmament as a central issue for young people, and to introduce the next generation of policy-makers and influencers to leading experts in the field.

By encouraging participants to think beyond the current geopolitical landscape and explore what states might gain or lose from security strategies without nuclear weapons, we have taken steps towards building a clearer picture of the conditions that may enable states, including the UK, to make progress on disarmament.

The approach has taken seriously the UK's stated commitment to contribute to global nuclear disarmament and has helped to highlight the broader security context, including the role played by international institutions like the UN, in tackling peace and security issues.

"It's been interesting getting a different perspective on the role nuclear weapons play in defence strategies...I've enjoyed mixing with experts working in the field"

Elizabeth Ekhuemelo, York University (youth participant)

1. See UNA Youth for more info:
www.una.org.uk/youth

2. See BASIC NextGen Shapers for more info:
www.nextgenshapers.com/about



Lessons learnt

The Surviving Nuclear Zero debates identified a number of ways in which a UK that did not base its ultimate security on the possession of nuclear weapons could develop a sound strategy for national defence and make a breakdown in world order less likely. They highlighted the importance of a sustainable rules-based global system that takes account of the different interests of diverse national perspectives and delivers collective stability and prosperity. Many of the lessons drawn from the project are immediately applicable, whatever decisions are made on nuclear weapons holdings, and have been summarised in a set of recommendations for UK Government action (pg 9).

The debate assumed that the UK had given up its nuclear status, but many of the themes developed during the day brought out the importance of certain policy approaches whether or not the UK retains that status. The extent to which the UK would be able to capitalise on a non-nuclear policy would depend on many factors, including the UK's stated rationale for disarming; the prevailing pattern of national, regional and global threats; and Britain's future relationships with, and performance in, international organisations and alliances, particularly the UN and NATO.

An examination of the future shape of a non-nuclear UK security strategy illustrates the need to tackle the full range of threats concurrently from multiple angles, including by: focussing on the underlying drivers of instability; maintaining an effective military capacity; investing in non-traditional military capabilities including cyber-resilience, peacekeeping and regional conflict resolution; and developing new avenues for diplomatic engagement on non-proliferation, multilateral disarmament and collective security approaches, particularly amongst larger powers with competing philosophies.

Discussions about the future security of the United Kingdom should include diversity in perspectives, not only from a range of organisations and actors, but also from different generations. Youth involvement was an integral and valuable part of Surviving Nuclear Zero. It is the younger generation who will soon be taking these discussions forward. They are clearly concerned with the status quo and in touch with the trends that will determine the UK's outlook in the longer term - this was evident in the creativity of the ideas they helped to generate (pg 12).



Addressing the drivers of instability

At the heart of the UK's long-term security requirements lie the broad, multi-dimensional concepts of stability and security. As objectives, stability and security have to be forged in a host of complex ways, many of which are mutually reinforcing, but over which the UK on its own has varying degrees of influence. It is clear that, as well as needing to maintain the instruments for responding to the symptoms of instability – counter-terrorism, peacekeeping, atrocity prevention, economic development and humanitarian relief – the UK's long-term interests are best-served by tackling the underlying drivers of instability and insecurity. Such drivers include poverty, lack of education, inequality, poor governance, energy insecurity, global financial uncertainty, public health disasters and climate change. They also include conflicting national perspectives fed by cultural, historical and ideological diversity.

Nuclear weapons are relevant for addressing only a very narrow and improbable set of threats facing the country in the period ahead. More immediately menacing in today's world are terrorism, cyber-attacks, pandemics and regional crises that draw in the UK. Nuclear capability was therefore considered by many during the Surviving Nuclear Zero debates to be a marginal contributor to the UK's security base. Higher value was attached to the UK's capacity for generating collective international action and thus its diplomatic influence within international fora and organisations, through which the more fundamental questions of global insecurity need to be handled.

Tackling threats through diplomacy

Britain's global role has changed considerably over the past century, but by most measures – wealth, trade, capacity for action, presence at the table – it is still an influential country. This influence is now largely channelled through its membership of the various groups and bodies that make up the international community, particularly the UN. The benefits that could be reaped from improved UK performance on the world stage were consistently highlighted during the debates. Since the most pressing threats facing the UK need multilateral responses, the UK could maximise its influence in developing such responses by investing more heavily in both the instruments and the substance of diplomacy.

This suggests a series of diplomatic avenues that should be priorities for the UK. The extent to which they might be able to deliver results partly depends on whether the UK can demonstrate progress towards its international obligation to disarm.

Photos (left to right): Youth participants during Surviving Nuclear Zero plenary session; Expert roundtable participants discussing the role of nuclear weapons in the UK's security strategies; UNA-UK Chairman Sir Jeremy Greenstock with youth participants at London's International Maritime Organization.



The first avenue relates to the risk that, by being over-reliant on nuclear deterrence, the UK could underestimate the effort it needs to expend on other actions that are needed to secure international stability. The danger of complacency would be diminished by calculating what policy approaches were necessary without the possibility of recourse to nuclear capability. Such action could make a future step down the nuclear ladder more accessible to the UK whilst also raising the legitimacy and moral authority of Britain's diplomatic inputs in the eyes of a wide group of UN member states.

The second avenue is to pay attention to the health of the NPT – a treaty recognised by the UK and others as the 'cornerstone' of international efforts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons. The implications of the proliferation of nuclear weapons technology to state or non-state actors are of huge concern for the UK and the world. Since improving legitimacy and restoring faith in the NPT regime will require concerted action from the permanent members of the Security Council (P5), who are also the five recognised NPT nuclear powers, the UK should use its energy and its imagination to encourage progress within the 'P5 Process', as it has in the past. This should include but should not be limited to confidence-building and steps that signal progress towards its own international commitment to disarm, such as stockpile reductions. It also implies a dialogue on how the bigger powers can accommodate their divergent interests within an overall system of order.

Other international efforts on disarmament which could similarly benefit from increased UK leadership include furthering progress on two important treaties – the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)³ and the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT)⁴.

The final avenue imagines an increased role for Britain operating as a bridge between nuclear and non-nuclear states, building dialogue and diffusing tension where possible. If exacerbated by a continued lack of progress on the NPT agenda (particularly with regard to nuclear-weapon states' obligations to disarm), this tension could damage buy-in to the non-proliferation regime, and weaken international cooperation more broadly on a raft of peace and security matters.

By playing a more active role within the group of states discussing the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons, the UK should work to foster improved dialogue between nuclear- and non-nuclear states and demonstrate its awareness of the legitimate concerns held by many in the latter. The UK played this role to some extent at the December 2014 Vienna Conference on this subject, but there are opportunities to significantly broaden engagement on this issue – with those signing the Humanitarian Pledge, for example, but also with a range of emerging states whose views on global security are more pertinent than in the Cold War or immediate post-Cold War eras.

Such actions could start a compelling trend in international debate about extending global peace and security deep into the 21st century. That in itself could trigger progress in terms of strengthening the international non-proliferation regime, and creating the conditions that are necessary for multilateral nuclear disarmament.

Investing in global solutions

Our ability to tackle the most challenging global issues depends on the strength of the international system. In the UN's 70th year, when collective responses appear more vital than ever, there is a danger that political leadership remains trapped in national agendas. The younger generation in particular worries about the legacy they are being bequeathed in terms of the quality and sustainability of the global system, which they see as crucial to addressing the challenges they will have to tackle.

A decline in the health of the international system would have serious consequences for the UK's security and prosperity. It would also diminish the UK's global role and standing. The UN remains an indispensable tool for realising the UK's international objectives and support from the UK is necessary for UN initiatives to succeed. It is vital the UK acknowledges that a healthy UN is in its national interest and that it devotes the corresponding energy to strengthen the organisation, including through its promotion of international justice and fulfillment of international obligations. Such action is necessary and urgent if the organisation is to be sustained and fit for purpose for its next 70 years.

3. More info on the CTBT can be found in UNA-UK's Towards Zero report *Embedding the CTBT in norms, law and practice* by Dr Rebecca Johnson: www.una.org.uk/ctbt-report

4. More info on the FMCT can be found on BASIC's website: http://www.basicint.org/sites/default/files/nonproliferationdisarmamentregime_factsheet_april2015.pdf

Recommendations

Many of the lessons drawn from the Surviving Nuclear Zero debates are relevant to our current security environment and have been used to form a set of recommendations for UK Government action. The development of the UK's National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review provide useful opportunities for the UK to consider a more comprehensive set of national approaches than emerged from the 2010 exercise.

While the headline focus of this project was to explore the role played by nuclear weapons in a states' security strategies, the importance of adopting a broad approach to security issues – from military responses to soft power and diplomacy – was a clear theme that emerged.

The UK Government should:

- Ensure its national security strategies are focussed on current and emerging trends and place emphasis on addressing the underlying drivers of instability, not just the symptoms
- Involve the public, particularly the younger generation in the national debate around long-term security
- Maintain an effective military capacity to protect vital national interests and to contribute to international operations sanctioned by the UN
- Increase investment in non-traditional military capabilities including cyber-resilience, peacekeeping and humanitarian relief
- Demonstrate commitment to its international obligation to disarm under Article VI of the NPT, including by:
 - Expand the scope of diplomatic dialogue within the 'P5 process'
 - Fostering improved dialogue between nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapons states, including by increasing its engagement with the humanitarian consequences movement
 - Increasing diplomatic efforts to make progress on the CTBT and FMCT
 - Setting out the rationale for its nuclear programme and posture in the SDSR and developing parallel strategies for managing any threats identified as relevant to the UK's nuclear weapons capability through complementary non-nuclear means
 - Identifying the conditions necessary for multilateral nuclear disarmament
 - Committing to undertake regular reviews of its programme and posture as part of its obligation under Article VI
- Recognise the importance of effective global institutions to the UK's security and prosperity, including by developing a clear strategy for UK engagement with the UN

These recommendations have been informed by the Surviving Nuclear Zero debates but do not necessarily reflect the views of individual participants.

Photo: Delegates voting during Surviving Nuclear Zero plenary session – see Methodology section (Pg 11) for more info on format.





Annex 1:

Methodology

Surviving Nuclear Zero was structured around two concurrent roundtables followed by a plenary session. The first roundtable brought together experts representing a broad range of perspectives, including nuclear and security specialists, arms control campaigners and former diplomats⁵. The other comprised students from the networks of UNA-UK and BASIC, who went through a rigorous selection process ahead of the event.

Each roundtable devised an outline for a post-nuclear UK security strategy, before presenting their policies to a live audience of more than 100 international relations students and NGO representatives. The purpose of the presentations was to ensure that the policies generated stood up to public scrutiny.

The format allowed for free and frank discussions which explored long-standing issues around nuclear disarmament from a new angle. The event was not designed to advocate that the UK moves towards a non-nuclear posture in the near future, but rather to explore the conditions and debates that may be necessary to overcome the national security implications of a post-nuclear UK.

“It was a really creative format, forcing us to think outside the box and challenge some of our pre-existing conceptions”

Dr Heather Williams, Centre for Science and Security Studies, King's College London (expert participant)

Expert attendees

Andrea Berger, Deputy Director, Proliferation and Nuclear Policy programme, Royal United Services Institute

John Everard, former UK Ambassador to North Korea

Richard Guthrie, Lecturer, Bath University

Lord Hannay of Chiswick, Cross-bench peer, former UK Ambassador to the UN

Dr Kate Hudson, General Secretary, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

Dr Patricia Lewis, Research Director, International Security, Chatham House

Dr Priyanjali Malik, independent researcher

Andreas Persbo, Executive Director, Verification Research, Training and Information Centre (VERTIC)

Dr Nick Ritchie, International Security Lecturer, York University

Malcolm Savidge, former MP

Shata Shetty, Deputy Director, European Leadership Network

Tim Street, Researcher, BASIC

Dr Heather Williams, Centre for Science and Security Studies, King's College London

Youth attendees

Aira Bekeryte, Glasgow University

Nickolas Bruetsch, Aberystwyth University

Rex Ejimonyeabala, University College London

Elizabeth Ekhuemelo, York University

May Elin Jonsson, York University

Alexandra Lancendorfer, Hertfordshire University

Romain Laugier, law graduate

Mehvish Maghribi, Brunel University

Lee Markham, Exeter University

Jacq Mehmet, Oxford University

Anne Mowbray, Oxford University

Kelechi Okoye-Ahaneku, Coventry University

Sajidah Patel, SOAS University

Hannah Sanderson, Durham University

Sylwia Watroba, Aberystwyth University

The views expressed in this document and on the day do not necessarily reflect the views of any of the individuals listed above.

Opposite: Youth roundtable participants discussing the role of nuclear weapons in the UK's security strategies.

5. The concept note for Surviving Nuclear Zero, along with invitations to participate, were sent to representatives from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence.

Annex 2:

Idea generation

In drafting the rudiments of a post-nuclear UK security strategy, five questions of significance to the UK's national interests were considered:

Without nuclear weapons, how will the United Kingdom...

1. Manage nuclear threats?
2. Manage other security threats?
3. Maintain effective defence capabilities?
4. Manage relationships?
5. Maintain influence?

Summaries of the most popular ideas generated are included on this spread, based on the views of both expert and youth participants, as well as points raised during the plenary discussions. They were not necessarily endorsed by all participants.

“Discussions have been thought-provoking, unpacking a lot of assumptions about what we think about nuclear weapons”

Dr Nick Ritchie, International Security Lecturer, York University (expert participant)

Photo: Youth roundtable participants discussing the role of nuclear weapons in the UK's security strategies.

1. Managing nuclear threats

The role of diplomacy and active trust-building exercises in avoiding the emergence of active nuclear threats to the UK was highlighted, with intelligence sharing and transparency initiatives identified as central to such efforts. Confidence building was considered integral to maintaining constructive relationships with potential adversaries, such as Russia, and to ease mutual threat perceptions. The continuation of international cooperation within shared regimes, such as the Proliferation Security Initiative, was also identified as important.

While UK nuclear weapons were not considered to be a major factor in shaping other states' security strategies, they were considered to play an important role in shaping other states' perception of the UK. A British decision to abandon its nuclear arsenal may have the potential to strengthen, not weaken, its moral standing and, possibly, its effectiveness in advocating non-proliferation and disarmament within international fora. Iran and North Korea were specifically mentioned as states in which relationships on non-proliferation issues could be strengthened.

Ideas

- Put more resources into diplomacy and trust-building efforts, including transparency and intelligence gathering initiatives to build and enhance partnerships with other countries
- Use the opportunities presented by shared nuclear non-proliferation and security regimes and initiatives such as the Proliferation Security Initiative, the Nuclear Security Summits, the 'P5 Process', and the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification
- Work through international fora and bilaterally with partners to redouble efforts in support of non-proliferation and multilateral disarmament

2. Managing other security threats

Participants identified terrorism, cyber security, military crises between other states and natural disasters, including pandemics, as some of the most important threats to the UK, and indicated that nuclear weapons were unlikely to be effective or proportionate in responding to such threats.

It was acknowledged that UK divestment of nuclear weapons would likely be a long and drawn-out process. However, in due course, freed-up resources could be diverted to address further the underlying causes of instability and respond more effectively to the emerging threat environment.

Ideas

- Invest in tackling the root causes of threats, including addressing the causes of conflict and building stronger cultural understanding between countries
- Redirect resources to international development, peacekeeping initiatives, diversification of energy sources and cyber resilience



3. Maintaining effective defence capabilities

There was some support expressed for the UK committing two per cent of GDP to defence spending. This was a target identified by NATO leaders at the 2014 Newport Summit, and has since been committed to by the Government in the budget released in July 2015.

Participants highlighted the importance of the UK military, not only in protecting Britain's vital interests, but also in contributing to UN peacekeeping and humanitarian missions, and in monitoring and responding to the drivers of conflict. It was reasoned that a post-nuclear UK could be in an improved position to concentrate and broaden its specialist capabilities, such as intelligence gathering and cyber security.

Ideas

- Maintain defence spending and ensure the UK remains an effective member of NATO
- Ensure UK military is well-placed to offer greater support to UN peacekeeping, humanitarian missions and to deal with conflict drivers, such as the impacts of climate change

4. Managing relationships

Alliances, formal and informal, were recognised as essential for UK effectiveness in combatting the major imminent security threats such as cyber-attacks, terrorism and natural disasters. This translates to a need for effective and sustainable burden sharing within NATO. At the same time, the UK could usefully invest more heavily in diplomacy and soft power-based approaches, for example through our diplomatic networks and through institutions such as the BBC World Service and the British Council.

A non-nuclear UK would, in respect of certain treaties such as the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), remain a recognised nuclear-weapon state, putting the UK in a unique position during nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament negotiations. The UK could seize opportunities presented by this position to share best practice, improve transparency and verification practices, strengthen relationships between nuclear- and non-nuclear-weapon states and be an effective advocate for disarmament.

Ideas

- Share burden of imminent international threats such as cyber-attacks, terrorism and natural disasters through NATO
- Invest more heavily in efforts to improve diplomatic relations and reduce tension between nuclear and non-nuclear weapons states
- Share best-practice on transparency and verification procedures, such as research produced through the UK-Norway Initiative

5. Maintaining influence

The common assumption that possession of nuclear weapons brings greater influence on the world stage was questioned by many participants. It was suggested that the UK's role in international organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union, as well as alliances such as NATO, would not be significantly diminished as a result of no longer having nuclear weapons. New diplomatic and alliance-building opportunities could arise as a result of the UK being the only non-nuclear member of the 'P5' – this would also break the erroneous link between nuclear weapons and a permanent seat of the UN Security Council. The UK could also create new investment networks by utilising its nuclear knowledge for civil purposes, for example.

Ideas

- Capitalise on diplomatic and alliance-building opportunities by being the lead P5 state on non-proliferation and disarmament efforts
- Invest in global solutions and support the institutions through which such solutions can be pursued



"I enjoyed challenging everyone else's ideas"

Hannah Sanderson, Durham University
(youth participant)

Annex 3:

Policy background

From the very first resolution of the UN General Assembly, the world has been committed to creating a nuclear-weapons-free world. Today, 190 states have signed the NPT, including the P5. Yet nuclear weapons continue to underwrite global security strategies. The majority of the world's population still lives in a nuclear-armed state or in states they have guaranteed to defend.

In 2009, buoyed by signals from the new US administration, an increasing number of world leaders and security hawks joined campaigners in a host of initiatives aimed at “nuclear zero”. The change in rhetoric led to some concrete action: agreement of new US-Russia strategic arms reduction treaty, the launch of the ‘P5 process’ to promote transparency and confidence-building among the recognised nuclear-weapon states, and, in the UK, the announcement of stockpile reductions.

The 2010 NPT Review Conference was widely hailed as a success, with a 64-point action plan agreed, including commitments to make progress on arms reductions and a Middle East nuclear-weapons-free zone (MENFWZ). Since then, multiple crises across the Middle East and North Africa have stalled efforts to create a MENFWZ and created widespread instability in the region and beyond. Relations between big powers have soured, notably between Russia and the US, first over Syria and then over control and influence in Ukraine⁶.

In February 2015, representatives of NATO countries met in Brussels to discuss the perceived threat posed by Russia, citing Russia's recent activity using strategic nuclear bombers close to the maritime border between Russia and NATO members, which is thought to have quadrupled in 2014 compared with the previous year.

As a result of these developments, the P5's appetite to discuss nuclear disarmament has all but dissipated. This has increased what former UN High Representative on Disarmament, Angela Kane, has described as “malaise among NPT States Parties regarding their regime”. Ms Kane went on to assert that the “basic fairness of the ‘NPT bargain’” is increasingly called into question⁷.

The failure of the 2015 NPT Review Conference to reach a formal agreement is indicative of the dissatisfaction of non-nuclear weapons states with the slow pace of disarmament and the extent to which they consider the NPT process to be dominated by the interests of the nuclear weapons states and their allies.

Meanwhile North Korea has claimed that it has successfully developed the technology to “miniaturise” a nuclear device, and, by implication, deploy it on a ballistic missile – though this has been contested. Together with the apparent test firing of a submarine-launched ballistic missile on 8 May 2015 (pictures and videos likely to have been doctored), the announcement has raised international concerns about the growing security threat posed by the country to its neighbours.

There are two exceptions to this trend. First, the negotiations between Iran and the EU-3+3⁸. A long-term deal was struck in July 2015 which limits Iran's nuclear programme in return for sanction relief.

Second, the growing humanitarian impact initiative. Launched in Oslo in 2013, the initiative attracted support from 159 UN member states during the 2015 NPT Review Conference. More than 115 have now endorsed the Humanitarian Pledge⁹, committing to work for a new legally binding instrument to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons. So far, states possessing nuclear weapons have been opposed to engaging with such a process.

6. Russia's actions in Ukraine violated the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. Under the memorandum, Ukraine agreed to give up what was then the third largest nuclear weapons stockpile (placed on its soil when it was part of the Soviet Union) and accede to the NPT in return for security assurances by Russia, the US and UK against threats to its territorial integrity or political independence.

7. Angela Kane, remarks on outlook for the 2015 NPT Review Conference, Prague, 2014 <https://unoda-web.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/HR-remarks-prague.pdf>

8. The EU-3 consists of France, Germany and the UK. The group began negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme in 2003, leading to the Tehran Declaration of 21 October 2003. The EU-3+3 refers to a grouping that also involves China, Russia and the US. These states joined the EU-3's diplomatic efforts in 2006. The grouping is sometimes referred to as the P5+1 (i.e. the five permanent Security Council members and Germany).

9. For up-to-date list of Humanitarian Pledge signees, see <http://www.icanw.org/pledge>

UK context

The UK Government is committed to a comprehensive renewal of the UK's nuclear capabilities based on the Trident system which will "serve the country until at least 2060". The Government has further stated that the commitment will not be revisited during the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review.

Like other nuclear-weapon states, the UK cites stability and security as its reason for maintaining "a minimum credible nuclear deterrent for as long as it is necessary", i.e. until the conditions for multilateral disarmament are met.

Arguably, some of these conditions have already been brought about. The 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review holds that "no state currently has both the intent and capability to threaten the independence or the integrity of the UK".

The most pressing threats identified in the 2010 National Security Strategy are as follows:

- Terrorism
- Cyber-attacks
- A major accident or natural hazard (including pandemics)
- A military crisis between states that draws in the UK

In their recent manifestations, none of these could pose an existential threat to the UK. In a global security environment increasingly defined by asymmetric threats - e.g. from non-state actors - the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence has been reduced. Some have argued that the risks of terrorists acquiring nuclear materiel or carrying out a cyber-attack on a UK nuclear facility are exacerbated by the prevailing strategy.

However, a change in policy seems highly unlikely. It is more likely that the role of nuclear weapons could in future be upgraded in the UK's security strategy, from ultimate insurance policy to one of actual nuclear deterrence against potential threats from Russia, following the deterioration between Russia and western states after its actions in Ukraine. The UK also maintains that its nuclear forces play an "important part" in NATO's overall strategy.

At the same time there are growing calls for the UK to protect defence spending and develop its conventional capacity. In July 2015, the UK Government announced that it will maintain defence spending above two per cent of UK GDP for the next five years, meeting the NATO target and easing the concerns from NATO allies over the UK's ability to play an effective role in the alliance. At present, the UK spends about £36bn a year on defence. It has over 20 operations across the globe, from small training teams to relief efforts in Nepal to NATO reassurance exercises across Europe, such as the Baltic Air Policing Mission.



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The United Nations Association - UK (UNA-UK) is the UK's leading source of independent analysis on the UN and a vibrant grassroots movement campaigning for a safer, fairer and more sustainable world.

To find out more and to join our growing movement, visit www.una.org.uk

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