

Conference on Disarmament: Minister Cleverly's Address on the UK Integrated Review

Mr President,

Thank you for the opportunity to address the Conference on Disarmament. It is a particular pleasure to do so under the Presidency of the UK's friend and Ally, Bulgaria. As the single multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament, this Conference has played a decisive role in developing the international legal framework on weapons of mass destruction that make the world safer.

Today, I would like to brief the Conference on the UK's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Foreign and Development Policy, that we published last week. The review is about building resilience at home and overseas; strengthening defence and security partnerships; contributing to scientific and technological innovation, and shaping the open international order of the future that allows all countries, and all peoples, to be secure, prosperous and free.

Through all these objectives runs the UK's enduring commitment to solving problems with our partners through multilateral channels. We are a European country with a uniquely global set of partnerships, capabilities and interests. We want to work with the entire international community towards mutual security and prosperity, and to establish the norms in the future frontiers of cyberspace, new technologies, data and space. The Conference on Disarmament has an important role to play.

Mr President, Our Integrated Review also serves as an official statement of the UK's nuclear deterrence policy. We are clear that we intend to maintain the UK's nuclear deterrent, for as long as we need it, as the ultimate guarantee of our security and that of our NATO Allies.

We are equally clear that we remain committed to, and will actively pursue, the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons. The fundamental purpose of the UK's nuclear weapons remains to preserve peace, prevent coercion, and deter aggression.

And we remain committed to maintaining only the minimum destructive power needed, to guarantee that our nuclear deterrent remains credible and effective, against the full range of state nuclear threats, from whichever direction.

This represents the continuation of our longstanding policy. But we are also adapting to ensure that our nuclear deterrent remains aligned to the current realities. The nuclear security environment has deteriorated over the past decade; and as we look at the darkening global security picture, we place as much emphasis on the "credible" bit of the policy as on the word "minimum".

In this context, the UK intends to increase the limit of our overall weapons stockpile from 225, to no more than 260 warheads. I must stress that this is a ceiling, not a target, and is not our current stockpile. We will continue to keep this under review in light of the international security environment. The UK is committed to the principle of transparency, in both our nuclear doctrine and our capabilities, to the extent compatible with our national security considerations and non-proliferation obligations.

But a measure of deliberate ambiguity contributes to strategic stability by complicating the calculations of potential aggressors, and by reducing the risk of deliberate nuclear use by those seeking a first strike advantage. Therefore, the UK remains deliberately ambiguous about precisely when, how and at what scale we would contemplate the use of our nuclear weapons. And we are extending this policy by no longer giving public figures for our operational stockpile, either for deployed warheads or deployed missile numbers.

We also reviewed the UK's unilateral negative security assurance. As has been the case for many years, the UK will not use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear weapon state party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. This assurance does not apply to any state in material breach of those non-proliferation obligations.

Our Integrated Review makes clear that we reserve the right to review this assurance, if the future threat of weapons of mass destruction – such as chemical and biological capabilities, or emerging technologies that could have a comparable impact – makes it necessary to do so.

Mr President, Let me be clear: we remain committed to multilateral disarmament and our shared long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons. The UK's unequivocal undertaking, with the other nuclear weapons states, to eliminate our nuclear arsenals persists; as do our obligations under Article 6 of the Non Proliferation Treaty. As such, the UK has taken, and will continue to take, a consistent and leading approach to nuclear disarmament. The UK possesses the smallest stockpile of any of nuclear state recognised by the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and we are alone amongst those states in operating a single nuclear weapon system.

We also maintain our voluntary moratorium on the production of fissile material for the use in nuclear explosive devices. Building on these unilateral measures, we will continue to press for key steps towards multilateral disarmament. And this includes the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and successful negotiations at this Conference on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty.

The UK will continue to take a leading international role on nuclear disarmament verification, which is essential for achieving and maintaining a world without nuclear weapons under strict and effective international control. We will also continue to work to reduce the risk of nuclear conflict through misinterpretation and miscalculation, and to enhance mutual trust and security.

We will champion strategic risk reduction and seek to create dialogue, both among states who possess nuclear weapons, as well as between states who possess nuclear weapons and those who do not. The road to a nuclear weapon-free world will remain challenging. But we firmly believe that the best way – indeed the only credible way – to get there is by the gradual, multilateral, negotiated, step-by-step approach within the framework of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The Integrated Review explicitly commits the UK to doing just this. The UK takes its responsibilities as a nuclear weapon state seriously, and will continue to encourage others to do the same.

Mr President, The prevention of an arms race in outer space has been on the agenda of this Conference since the early 1980s, and remains a core issue. Our Integrated Review recognises the centrality of space systems to our security and prosperity. It also highlights the growing range of threats to space systems, and the risk that those threats could lead to miscalculation and, in turn, escalation.

The open international order must extend to outer space, to tackle these threats to international peace and security. General Assembly resolution 75/36 on reducing space threats through norms, rules and principles of responsible behaviours in outer space, which the UK had the honour to lead, contributes to this goal. We will continue this important work as a way to manage and mitigate the perceptions of threat, and avoid conflict.

Mr President, Let me also highlight some aspects of the Integrated Review that touch on the wider non-proliferation, arms control and disarmament picture.

We are determined to strengthen international prohibitions on the use of Chemical and Biological weapons. We are also determined to ensure accountability for those who use them – such as those responsible for the poisoning of Alexey Navalny, those responsible for the chemical weapons attack in Salisbury in 2018, and members of the Syrian regime responsible for the appalling use of chemical weapons against its own people. The Chemical Weapons Convention Conference of States Parties must take a stand against these incidents, and against the Syrian regime's failure to accurately declare its chemical weapons programme.

The Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the devastating effects of disease, and the need to strengthen global biosecurity. The UK has been at the forefront of international efforts to ban biological weapons for decades, and will continue to champion ways of strengthening the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention, at the forthcoming Ninth Review Conference.

We will also support global efforts to protect our citizens from the risk of terrorists acquiring weapons of mass destruction, including through our leadership of the Global Partnership under our G7 Presidency.

Our Integrated Review recognises the extraordinary potential that technology has for global prosperity, to the benefit of all. But the exploitation and proliferation of new technology poses risks too, and we must work together to extend the international order to cover them, supplementing domestic controls

and protections.

Our Integrated Review also makes clear that the UK remains determined to prevent the destabilising accumulation and illicit transfers of conventional weapons. We will work with our partners across the world to advocate for conventional arms control regimes, which reduce the likelihood of war and its humanitarian impact, including through our upcoming Presidency of the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

Finally, the UK has now fulfilled its legal obligations to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, by clearing all landmines from the Falkland Islands, and we will continue to uphold our moral obligation to support mine action across the globe.

Mr President, The UK's Integrated Review puts multilateralism, arms control, non-proliferation, and disarmament at the heart of our approach to security.

We recognise that in order for all to succeed and prosper, it is no longer enough simply to defend the status quo; we must dynamically shape the international order of the future, extending it to the new frontiers of cyberspace, emerging technology and outer space. And it is vital that we protect democratic values as we do so.

The UK commits to continue to work with you all, to play a constructive and creative role in this Conference, and in the wider multilateral disarmament machinery, in order to turn this vision into a reality.

And I thank you.