



Statement from APLN Chair Gareth Evans

UK Nuclear Weapons Surge Abdicates its Global Responsibility

The UK Government's statement of intention to increase its nuclear warhead numbers by over 40 per cent is a disgraceful abdication of its global responsibility.

It is in clear breach of its treaty obligation under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty to pursue nuclear disarmament, and will undermine any prospect for consensus at the forthcoming NPT Review Conference.

It is in clear breach of its political obligation to help revitalise those other nuclear arms control agreements – like INF, Open Skies and New START - that are currently dead, dying or on life support; to help restore the JCPOA with Iran and denuclearization negotiations with North Korea; and to generate support for new treaties limiting hypersonic, space and other new weapons systems.

And it is clear breach of its moral obligation to help eliminate the most indiscriminately inhumane weapons ever devised, whose use in a nuclear war would be an existential threat to life on this planet as we know it.

While Prime Minister Johnson claims a more volatile global security environment as justification for the UK's decision, the truth of the matter – as spelt out repeatedly by those hard-headed Cold War realists Henry Kissinger, Bill Perry, Sam Nunn and the late George Shultz - is that, in today's world, the risks associated with continued possession of nuclear weapons by anyone far outweigh any conceivable security benefit.

It is time for the world's nuclear-armed states to recognise anew the force of the Reagan/Gorbachev declaration of 1985 that a 'nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought', and to embark upon a serious program of nuclear risk reduction, including reducing weapons deployments, taking them off high alert, committing to No First Use, and – above all – reducing stockpile numbers.

For all those wanting a safer and saner nuclear world, the UK – committed as it has been to a minimal deterrence posture, facing as it does no obvious existential military threats, and having as it always has significant voices within the country arguing for reducing and ultimately eliminating its nuclear role – has been until now a beacon of hope among the world's nuclear armed states.

With this announcement, it has joined the ranks of the most irresponsible of them.

Gareth Evans

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