



Eighth Report
from the
Foreign Affairs Committee

Session 1999–2000

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Response of the Secretary of State for
Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs

*Presented to Parliament
by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
by Command of Her Majesty
October 2000*

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WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

RESPONSE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND
COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Key Regional Threats

(1) We support the work of the Government in encouraging both India and Pakistan to demonstrate nuclear restraint by signing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, to join the negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty when they begin and to reopen dialogue on issues that divide the two countries. We recommend that the Government give priority to its dialogue with New Delhi because it is evident that Pakistan will not sign or ratify any nuclear-related Treaty unless India does so first.

The Government welcomes the Committee's recognition of its efforts to persuade India and Pakistan to undo the damage done by their nuclear tests. The Government shares the Committee's view that Pakistan is unlikely to act before India. Nevertheless the Government believes it should continue to press both countries to take the first step.

(2) We recommend strongly that the Government contribute as fully as it can to bringing about a comprehensive and sustainable Middle East Peace settlement as the absence of such a settlement provides a major spur to the proliferation of WMD in the region.

The Government accepts this recommendation. The Government is in continuous, high-level contact with all the key parties involved in the search for peace in the Middle East.

(3) We concur with the FCO's view that continued political reform in Iran, Tehran's rapprochement with the West, which included the upgrading of UK/Iranian bilateral links to Ambassadorial level in May 1999, and the success of the Middle East Peace Process are the best means of ensuring that Iran abides by its commitments under the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

The Government welcomes the Committee's conclusion.

(4) We support the Government in its diplomatic efforts within the UN Security Council to ensure that UNMOVIC and the IAEA are given the maximum opportunity to complete the process of disarmament in Iraq in line with relevant UN resolutions. We wish to see UNMOVIC start its work in Iraq at the earliest opportunity. It is important that UNSCOM's successor, UNMOVIC, commands a mandate of equal strength to that of its predecessor to enable it to conduct further inspections of Iraq's WMD activity effectively. We urge the Government strongly to resist any attempt to dilute the international inspectors' powers of inspection or to compromise with Iraq on the composition of the Commission. We agree with the Government that "for so long as Iraq denies UNMOVIC access there can be no progress towards the suspension and eventual lifting of sanctions".

The Government welcomes the Committee's recognition of its efforts to re-establish an effective arms control regime in Iraq. SCR 1284, which establishes UNMOVIC, makes clear that UNMOVIC has all the powers of its predecessor UNSCOM and that decisions on UNMOVIC's composition are the responsibility of the Executive Chairman. The Government is committed to the full implementation of SCR 1284. The Government continues to make clear to Iraq that SCR 1284 offers the only route out of sanctions.

(5) We urge the UK Government to give maximum support to the current dialogue between leaderships of North and South Korea, with the aim of reaching a settlement between the two parties.

The Government accepts this recommendation.

National Missile Defence and the Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty

(6) We commend the Prime Minister's approach, whilst urging the Government to impress upon the US Administration that it cannot necessarily assume unqualified UK co-operation with US plans to deploy NMD in the event of unilateral US abrogation of the ABM Treaty.

We welcome the Committee's commendation of the Government's approach to this issue, as set out to the House of Commons by the Prime Minister on 24 July.

The Government has repeatedly made clear that it values the stability which the ABM Treaty provides, and wishes to see it preserved. The US Administration is fully aware of UK views. President Clinton noted, in his 1 September speech announcing his decision not to proceed with NMD deployment, that:

“Our NATO allies . . . have all made clear that they hope the United States will pursue strategic defence in a way that preserves, not abrogates, the ABM Treaty.”

The US Administration has made clear that it too strongly favours the preservation of the ABM Treaty. President Clinton underlined this on 1 September:

“Clearly . . . it would be far better to move forward in the context of the ABM Treaty.”

The Government understands the considerations which have led the US Administration to consider NMD deployment. Any US request to use facilities in the UK for NMD purposes would be considered in light of the circumstances in which any such request were made. At no point has the Government given the US Administration reason to assume unqualified UK cooperation with NMD deployment: nor has the US Administration at any stage sought any such assurance.

(7) We recommend that the Government articulate the very strong concerns that have been expressed about NMD within the UK. We are not convinced that the US plans to deploy NMD represent an appropriate response to the proliferation problems faced by the international community. We recommend that the Government encourage the USA to seek other ways of reducing the threat it perceives.

The US Administration has always made clear that it sees NMD as a potential supplement, not as an alternative, to other methods of reducing the threat from proliferation. President Clinton explained this in his 1 September speech:

“No one suggests that NMD would ever substitute for diplomacy or for deterrence. But such a system . . . could give us an extra dimension of insurance in a world where proliferation has complicated the task of preserving the peace.”

As the Prime Minister made clear on 24 July, the Government is strongly in favour of deeper, carefully considered international dialogue on this complex and difficult issue. The Government has worked hard to promote such dialogue both among NATO allies, and with Russia, China, and others. We have of course articulated UK views in the course of such exchanges, and believe these views are well understood, not least in the US.

The Government believes that this approach has already yielded positive results. For example, despite their disagreements, the US and Russia have been able to make some significant progress in their discussions on this issue. At their June summit in Moscow, Presidents Clinton and Putin reached agreement:

“that the international community faces a dangerous and growing threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, including missiles, and (they) stress their desire to reverse that process. They agree that this new threat represents a potentially significant change in the strategic situation and international security environment.”

At the G8 Summit in Okinawa in July, President Putin expressed his determination to step up Russia's efforts to stem proliferation. And Russia is now playing an active role in multilateral efforts to develop new international restraints on ballistic missile development (see our response to the Committee's Recommendation (20) for further detail).

The Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)

(8) We recognise that the international climate prior to the NPT Review Conference was inauspicious and did not appear favourable for progress in the area of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. The achievement of a final document by consensus is a positive and welcome outcome and we commend the Government for its role in bringing this about.

We welcome the FAC's recognition of the UK's positive contribution to the successful outcome of the Review Conference. Our efforts are now devoted to implementing the agreements reached in New York. In our view, the priorities must be the entry into force of the CTBT, the start of negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament on the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty and further significant reductions in Russian and American arsenals.

(9) We commend the Government's early ratification of the Additional Protocol (which strengthens the IAEA's safeguards agreements with States Parties to the NPT) which will allow it to enter into force in the UK. We recommend that the Government impress upon our European partners the need for them to ratify.

We note the recommendation. Progress on the ratification of Additional Protocols is discussed regularly at EU coordination meetings. The Presidency of the EU, speaking at the IAEA General Conference on 18 September, again committed EU Member States to ratifying their Additional Protocols as soon as possible. We understand that those member states who have still to ratify their Additional Protocols have allocated time in their Parliaments to debate ratification.

Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)

(10) We urge the Government to cooperate with the US Administration and encourage the new US President to re-submit the CTBT to the Senate for ratification as an urgent priority, to encourage China and Israel to ratify the Treaty and also to impress upon India and Pakistan, in particular, the importance of their becoming parties to the CTBT. Given the importance of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organisation in stemming nuclear proliferation, we recommend that the Government should fully support the proposed 18 per cent increase in the CTBT Organisation's budget for 2001.

We continue to urge all states, particularly those whose ratification is necessary for the Treaty to enter into force, to sign and ratify the CTBT as soon as possible. Together with our European Partners, we are considering ways of encouraging states to sign and ratify the Treaty. A major focus of our efforts will be the next Article XIV conference which is due to take place next year. We will participate actively at that conference.

The Executive Secretary of the CTBTO Provisional Technical Secretariat has proposed a budget of US\$88.5 million for 2001. The UK will support this proposal when it comes up for adoption at the November meeting of the CTBT Preparatory Commission. We are working to encourage others to support this budget.

Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty

(11) We recommend the Government make renewed efforts to help break the impasse on the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty negotiations and ensure that substantive negotiations commence quickly.

The Government is deeply disappointed that the Geneva Conference on Disarmament has thus far failed to get substantive negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty underway.

The explanation for this failure lies in the insistence of some states that equal or greater priority be given to negotiations on nuclear disarmament and on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space. These states have refused to allow negotiations on a Cut-Off Treaty

to begin unless parallel negotiations are established on new legal instruments relating to nuclear disarmament and Outer Space. This stance ignores the reality that the Cut-Off treaty is the only new multilateral instrument in this area ripe for negotiation at present. It also ignores the fact that a Cut-Off treaty would itself be a significant nuclear disarmament as well as non proliferation measure.

In an effort to break this deadlock, we and other key states have made clear our willingness to accept the establishment of a body in the Conference on Disarmament to deal with nuclear disarmament in parallel with Cut-Off negotiations. This was made explicit in the Final Document from the 2000 NPT Review Conference. We have also made clear our willingness to see a similar body established to discuss Outer Space issues.

Disappointingly, there is still no consensus on a work programme in Geneva. China in particular continues to insist on actual negotiations on the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space taking place in parallel with Cut-Off negotiations.

The Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) Negotiations

(12) We recommend that the Government use its influence with both Russia and the USA to achieve the maximum negotiable reduction in nuclear warheads in START III. We further recommend that the Government use its position in both the G8 and the EU to accelerate progress in helping the Russian Government to destroy its surplus nuclear materials or convert them to civil use.

The Government sees further deep reductions in the nuclear arsenals of Russia and the United States as one of the highest priorities in this field. We welcomed the Russian Duma's approval of START II in April this year, and look forward to that treaty entering into force as early as possible. We have consistently urged both Russia and the United States to make early progress towards a START III agreement which would bring further deep cuts in their respective nuclear arsenals.

As the FAC noted in its Report the Government have announced that it will provide £70 million over the next 10 years to plutonium disposition in Russia. It will continue to work both in the G8 and other fora to develop a cooperative framework and international financing plan to take this important work forward.

UK Nuclear Posture and Disarmament

(13) We accept the Government's statement in the Strategic Defence Review that, with the reductions in nuclear capability it has made, the UK's deterrent "is the minimum necessary to provide for our security for the foreseeable future and smaller than those of the major nuclear powers". We recommend that the Government make every endeavour to bring about reductions by all nuclear weapon states to genuinely minimum deterrent levels.

We welcome the Committee's recognition that the UK's nuclear deterrent is now the minimum necessary to provide for our security for the foreseeable future.

We continue to urge the other Nuclear Weapons States to reduce their own nuclear arsenals to the lowest possible levels, and to work to help create the conditions in which such progress can be made. The Government has welcomed not only the major bilateral reductions negotiated by the US and Russia through START and the INF Treaty, but also the significant unilateral reductions that France, the US and Russia have made in recent years. We are particularly keen to see more progress by Russia in further reducing, and being more open about, its significant remaining stockpile of non-strategic weapons. We hope to be able to pursue this issue via the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council.

Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC)

(14) We recommend that the Government exert maximum bilateral and international pressure on those countries who have not yet become States Parties to the Convention to do so.

It is the Government's aim to achieve a Convention with universal adherence, implemented effectively on a world-wide scale. Accession by states with significant national chemical industries is considered of particular importance, as is adherence by states in regions of tension. Every opportunity is therefore taken in bilateral contacts, and through other international fora, to encourage non-States Parties to accede to the CWC.

(15) We recommend that the Government urge the USA to rescind its power of Presidential veto over challenge inspections, bringing the USA in line with the rest of the States Parties in time for the 2002 review conference.

This aspect of US national legislation has given rise to particular concern because of the wider impact it may have upon the full and effective implementation of the Convention. The Government fully supports the terms of the CWC which provide for the use of challenge inspections in cases of serious compliance concerns. The Government will continue to make its views on this subject known to the United States.

(16) It is in the interests of the UK and the international community that Russia is able to comply with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention. We repeat our request for regular updates on the progress of the projects the UK is funding and recommend that the Government and its European partners provide higher levels of aid in assisting Russia to dispose of its chemical weapons arsenal.

The Government announced on 18 July 2000 that the sum of £12 million, phased £4 million per year over three years 2001–04, would be made available to help Russia meet its obligations to destroy chemical weapons and in other related areas. UK and Russian officials will now need to discuss where this assistance can best be directed in accordance with the current priorities of the Russian programme. The UK will also coordinate its own effort with the assistance already being provided by both the United States and its European partners in order to provide the maximum benefit to the overall destruction effort. The Government will provide updates to the Committee on the progress of this work as requested in the report.

Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC)

(17) We recommend that the Government use the UK's position as a close ally of the USA to convince it that a strong verification procedure for biological and toxin weapons which does not affect commercial confidentiality is a viable and achievable goal. We further recommend that the Government exert maximum bilateral and international pressure on those countries who have not yet become States Parties to the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention to do so.

The Government is seeking to achieve a Protocol with a range of complementary measures including: the mandatory requirement to declare sites and activities which could be misused for producing biological weapons; provisions for on-site visits; and, in the case of serious doubts, investigations (ie inspections) of suspect facilities and incidents. The Government believes that it is possible to negotiate an effective compliance regime that would not compromise commercial confidentiality. To that end the Government is working closely with the United States and all other States Parties actively engaged in the negotiations. As a Depositary of the BTWC, the Government will continue to take every opportunity to bring bilateral and international pressure to bear in order to achieve the universality of the Convention.

(18) The Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC) is an integral part of the web of deterrence against states developing and stockpiling WMD. For it to be effective, it has to have an equally stringent verification regime to that of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We endorse the Government's view that an effective BTWC Protocol requires a package of complementary measures—declarations, visits and investigations. Whilst recognising the need to take account of legitimate concerns about protecting commercial proprietary information, we believe that national security requirements demand that the BTWC contains

the strongest verification regime that can be agreed. The Government has played a positive role in arguing for such a regime. We recommend that the Government reiterate this position and push for an early conclusion to the negotiations.

The Government gave a Manifesto commitment to strengthen the BTWC with a legally-binding Protocol in order to provide means to combat and deter proliferators. The United Kingdom is responsible for chairing meetings in the key area of compliance measures - the core of the proposed Protocol - and will continue to play a leading role in the negotiations in our capacity as a Depositary Government for the BTWC. Our aim is to put in place a mechanism which will be an effective addition to other existing non-proliferation regimes. We believe that the negotiations are now approaching a crucial phase with just over a year to go if we are to meet the terms of the mandate of the BTWC Ad Hoc Group. It is still difficult to predict with certainty that we can complete our efforts in that timescale given the complexity of the negotiations. We maintain that as our objective. The Government remains fully committed to seeing the early and successful completion of a Protocol and as a demonstration of that commitment has offered London as the venue for the eventual signing ceremony.

Role and effectiveness of Export Control Regimes

(19) We recommend that the Government encourage and assist Belarus, Turkey and Slovenia, which are about to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and other future candidates for membership to implement, at the earliest possible opportunity, effective nuclear export control legislation and mechanisms. Moreover, in light of the IAEA Additional Protocol, introduced to strengthen verification procedures following the discovery of a nuclear weapons programme in Iraq, we recommend that the Government lobby for acceptance by the other Nuclear Suppliers Group members of this Protocol as an extra condition of civil nuclear supply in the future.

The Government notes the Committee's recommendation on encouragement and assistance to new Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) members and future candidates for membership. Officials have this year had bilateral meetings with Belarus and Cyprus (who have now joined the NSG, along with Turkey) and with possible future member Malta, to assist them in strengthening strategic, including nuclear, export controls. Further UK assistance is planned during this financial year. The Government will continue to offer support in this area to new and prospective members, where there is mutual agreement to do so. The Government also notes the Committee's recommendation on the IAEA Additional Protocol. NSG members have agreed in principle that acceptance of the Additional Protocol should eventually be adopted as a condition of supply. To date 33 out of 38 NSG members have signed the Additional Protocol. The Government will encourage those members who have not yet signed the Protocol to do so.

(20) We recommend that the Government play an active role in exploring new and enhanced measures to constrain the development of WMD-capable ballistic and cruise missiles in countries of proliferation concern. These measures should be multilateral and bilateral in nature and should target non-western suppliers (China, Russia and North Korea) of missile technology and assistance, as well as the countries developing the missiles themselves.

The Government accepts the recommendation. The Government continues to be active in exploring enhanced multilateral measures to constrain the development of WMD-capable delivery systems, wherever such development occurs. The Government urges all potential suppliers, whether MTCR fellow-members such as Russia, MTCR adherents such as China, or non-adherents such as North Korea, to exercise restraint in the transfer of missile technology. The Government regularly raises its concerns over the development of ballistic and cruise missiles, or assistance to such programmes, in its bilateral contacts with countries of proliferation concern.

Small arms

(21) We welcome the efforts that the Government has been making to reduce the deadly impact of small arms and urge it to continue to play an active role in international efforts to curb the proliferation of these weapons.

The Government welcomes the Committee's support for its efforts to combat the scourge of small arms proliferation and confirms that it will continue to work vigorously at national, regional and international level in support of this objective. In this context, the Committee will wish to be aware that the UK has nominated Sir Michael Weston, our former Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, as a candidate to chair the 2001 UN Conference on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons.

Landmines

(22) We applaud the Government on the prominent role it took in bringing the Ottawa Convention into force and we urge the Government to continue in its efforts to persuade non-signatories to sign and ratify the Convention.

We welcome the Committee's support for the prominent role the UK has played in bringing the Ottawa Convention into force. The Government continues to urge other states on a regular basis to sign and ratify the Convention. This is often done in conjunction with other likeminded states such as Belgium, Canada, the Netherlands and South Africa. This determined lobbying has resulted in over 100 states signing and ratifying the Convention ahead of the Second Meeting of the States Party to the Convention, which took place in Geneva in September this year.

Conclusion

(23) As we have detailed in this Report, there has been some encouraging progress on arms control in recent years. At the same time, there are some highly disturbing features of the Weapons of Mass Destruction situation worldwide. Despite all the effort on non-proliferation, the number of known nuclear weapons states is slowly enlarging. Whilst the overwhelming majority of responsible countries have renounced possession of both chemical and biological weapons, a small minority of regimes have acquired these weapons or are believed to be in the process of acquiring them covertly. The possibility that a terrorist organisation might obtain possession of a nuclear, chemical or biological weapon is a matter of the utmost concern. This has horrific potential. As we stated earlier in the Report, one hundred kilograms of anthrax released from the top of a tall building in a densely populated area could kill up to three million people.

The Government welcomes the Committee's conclusion that there has been progress on arms control, but shares its concern at the remaining challenges.

(24) Britain as a nuclear weapon state, a permanent member of the Security Council, a leading member of NATO, and a member of the G8 and the EU has a key role and a key responsibility in trying to put all Weapons of Mass Destruction under international arms control regimes and in making progress towards their complete elimination. This must surely be one of the highest foreign policy priorities for the Government.

The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion.



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