

**Peacebuilding in the post-Covid World**  
**Movement Against War Annual Remembrance Lecture**  
**November 2020**

- Good afternoon, my name is Fabian Hamilton and I'm Labour's Shadow Minister for Peace and Disarmament, a post which at the moment only exists in opposition.
- Thank you for asking me to speak to you and thank you to the Movement for the Abolition of War for arranging this meeting.
- It's such a shame we couldn't be together in person today but I'm glad we could go ahead online so I could hear your thoughts and answer some of your questions about go about peace building in a post-Covid world.
- As some of you may know, I was appointed Shadow Minister for Peace and Disarmament by Jeremy Corbyn in 2016, but I was delighted to be asked to continue in my role by Keir Starmer when he was elected in April this year.
- Keir called me and made clear how peacebuilding was a huge part of his long-term vision for the Labour Party and how Britain behaves on the international stage.
- As part of Labour's Shadow Foreign Office team, I work closely with Shadow Foreign Secretary ,Lisa Nandy, and I lead on issues relating to arms control and the non-proliferation of nuclear and conventional weapons.
- While our discussion today is going to focus on this aspect of my role, I'm also responsible for a selection of geographic areas where a peace agreement is being implemented, countries such as Colombia – where trade unionists and peace activists are targeted by militias everyday; and Cyprus – where Turkish involvement, and its occupying troops are hindering the reunification of the Island.
- It's an enormous honour to serve on the Labour frontbench in a role that could have such a direct affect on millions of people around the world and the threats of violence they face everyday – should Labour win the next General Election.
- I am convinced that to win at the next General Election, Labour must make peace a priority for its foreign policy and to do this we

need to make the case for conflict resolution and diplomacy over escalatory rhetoric and brinkmanship.

- Peacebuilding should not be allowed to fall by the wayside as the world battles Coronavirus.
- As we all know, every day it becomes increasingly clear that we cannot go back to 'business as usual' after this pandemic, where conflicts are allowed to claim the lives of innocent civilians across the world and the proliferation of nuclear and non-nuclear weapons rages on.
- If this is allowed to happen, much of the brilliant work done by activists and NGOs around the world will go unnoticed and the change that we so desperately need will simply not happen.

## **Committee on Arms Export Control and Parliamentary Scrutiny**

- But work on disarmament has to start at home.
- As the oldest parliamentary democracy in the world, Britain is well placed to make this happen.
- Currently, the only way for Parliamentarians to scrutinise British arms sales is through something called the 'Committees on Arms Export Control' – which is made up from MPs who sit on the Foreign Affairs, International Development, Defence and Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy select committees.
- Its purpose is to ensure British arms cannot be used by rogue states to break international law or be used against civilian populations – either domestically or in foreign wars.
- At the moment, the committee is paralysed and it's time to empower the CAEC to ensure all arms sales are treated with the most forensic of scrutiny from MPs.
- Since the General Election in December last year, this committee has only met once in order to select a new Chair in Mark Garnier – who was previously one of the Government Ministers who signed off the arms sales to Saudi Arabia which clear evidence shows were later used to kill civilians, including many children, in Yemen and were ruled unlawful by the Supreme Court.
- In such a volatile and unpredictable world, the work of this committee has never been more important and, to be effective, it

needs parity with other select committees to ensure its voice is heard and MPs can commit enough time to the vital work it does for world peace.

- While much of the work we do in the Shadow Foreign Office team is naturally outward looking, I believe it would be a good start to begin this work from our own backyard in order to kickstart a new disarmament agenda for Britain.
- This work doesn't just apply to bombs and guns. It would also have the ability to suspend the sale of anti-riot materials, which is of specific importance for those states who choose to use force against peaceful protestors.
- Any government that's serious about ending the use of our weapons against innocent civilians abroad would ensure this committee not only has parity with the other select committees, but is also able to examine all British arms sales before a single weapon is handed over.
- Such scrutiny is vital to how we are viewed by our allies, and must go as far as possible to ensure Britain maintains a reputation internationally for justice and responsibility.

## **Flipping the Burden of Proof**

- Who we sell arms to – and what they are used for – is so important to how this country is seen as both an ally and a key player on the international stage and so it's time to flip the burden of proof to prevent the sale of British arms from directly implicating us in conflicts across the world.
- Whilst Britain isn't a part of the Saudi coalition in Yemen, our arms sales implicate us in the war there and we have seen the destruction and the humanitarian disaster that has caused, along with the loss of millions of lives. The use of British weapons there is a disgrace and must never be repeated.
- But, we can only put this right with a root and branch reforming agenda for how we decide to whom we sell arms.
- We can no longer carry on selling weapons to states which consistently and frequently flout international law and so it's essential that we now move to a system where we pre-vet arms export licences properly based upon an assumption that an export

licence will not be granted unless there is a compelling case made for it to be granted.

- It beggars belief that we're now in a situation where foreign governments are able to buy British weapons without a thoroughly rigorous system of vetting.
- Surely, any arms deals involving British weapons should be subject to the most stringent analysis before they can go ahead?
- Our weapons are *our* responsibility and it's time for a common sense approach to arms sales – an approach that puts British values at the heart of a truly ethical foreign policy.

## **Britain's role**

- I'd now like to move onto Britain's role in the world and how we are in a prime position to lead on multilateral disarmament initiatives on the international stage.
- With our position on the UN Security Council, on the G7 and our excellent institutions, such as the British Council, we are in dire need of the political will to take peacebuilding and conflict resolution forward.
- Historically, this country has been respected as the nation of democracy and diplomacy – knowing we have a responsibility to make the world a safer place but also having a firmness with those who flout international law.
- Our excellent diplomatic corps and those who work to engage with states and leaders across the world are vital to promoting international peace and stability.
- But, one specific example of how Britain can play a part is the **UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons**.
- The treaty comprises five protocols aimed at reducing the use of some of the most horrific conventional weapons – weapons which are developed with the sole purpose of maiming and killing those they are used against.
- This includes weapons with non-detectable fragments, landmines, incendiary weapons, and blinding laser weapons.

- Thankfully, Britain has already ratified four of the five protocols, but Protocol 5 is yet to be put to Parliament so it can be confirmed as a pillar of international law that applies to the UK.
- Protocol 5 sets out obligations and best practice for the clearance of explosive remnants of war. It forces states that choose to militarily intervene in other countries to clean up their own mess.
- The weapons military forces leave behind can be extremely detrimental to local populations, who are currently forced to live alongside unexploded British ordnance in many places across the world – including Syria, Libya and Iraq.
- And the range of weapons that are left behind is staggering – from bombs to rockets, grenades, artillery shells, flares, mortars, and hazardous residues that may remain after a partial detonation.
- This can leave huge areas unable to be developed in states that are in desperate need of space for new infrastructure and public facilities, particularly in South East Asia and the Middle East.
- Local populations of civilians should *not* have to live in fear alongside these weapons which could still detonate and kill or maim many people in an instant.
- Given how significant this protocol is for the the lives and livelihoods of millions of people, it's unacceptable that the British Government has failed to act on it in Parliament.
- In 2017, the then Foreign Secretary, Boris Johnson said: *“The UK has ratified the remaining four protocols of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons...and remains fully supportive of the Convention's work”*.
- This is simply not good enough. I have asked the Government for answers repeatedly and, time and time again, my questions have been brushed off by Ministers.
- Whilst we are assured that progress on ratification is being made, we have yet to see any signs of this materialising in the House of Commons.
- With the UK currently under pressure on the international stage – after admitting it will disregard international law when it sees fit – it would be unthinkable that we would also begin to shirk our responsibilities on arms control too.
- And our inaction on this is making a mockery of the ‘Global Britain’ policy that Boris Johnson has promised us since he came to office.

- Since the Protocol came into effect in 2006, there are 95 state parties to the agreement, including our close allies: the United States, France, Germany, Canada, the Republic of Ireland and Italy.
  - The UK must not be left behind and the UK's commitment to arms control initiatives like this cannot be allowed to fall by the wayside.
  - We know that protocol five would have potentially major consequences for previous military interventions from which many states have now withdrawn.
  - As the only member of the UN Security Council that hasn't ratified the convention in full, it seems that the Government is acutely aware of the complications it would have for the UK's support for Saudi Arabia in its disgraceful and shocking war in Yemen and potentially UK military involvement in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria – primarily against Islamic State.
  - We in the UK have a responsibility to address the long-term consequences of military engagements overseas. The Government must take that responsibility seriously, so that the risks to civilian populations are reduced and our reputation is abroad is protected.
- 
- Sadly this is not an isolated incident – the UK's outright failure properly to engage with these important international arms control agreements stretches much further.
  - Britain is due to assume the presidency of **UN Convention on Cluster Munitions** from Sweden this month.
  - Countries that ratify the convention will be obliged "*never under any circumstances to*" use, develop or sell cluster munitions, which are designed to kill large numbers of people in very quick succession – these weapons are totally inhumane and their use should be outlawed right now.
  - However, the British Government objects to the text of the declaration that says "*we condemn the use of cluster munitions*", arguing instead for it to say "*we condemn the unlawful use of cluster munitions*".
  - There is a clear pattern here as the Government looks to shirk its responsibilities in this so the UK can try and avoid condemning allies like Saudi Arabia, who are not party to that treaty, and

therefore are not technically violating the law in using cluster munitions unless the attacks are specifically unlawful.

- What kind of image does this project of 'Global Britain'? It shows a country that wilfully breaks international law and shirks its responsibilities to civilian populations across the world – as long as it meets the needs and interests of rogue states which the UK Government is happy to call allies.
- It is this inaction on arms control agreements that Labour would champion in Government as we look to turn the tide on Britain's collapsing international reputation and influence.

## **A New Cold War**

- No matter who finally emerges from the US Presidential election victorious – and it now looks increasingly like Joe Biden – it's clear that the world is going to face renewed tensions between the United States and China following the Coronavirus crisis.
- It's hard to overstate the impact this will have on international political stability in the coming months and years.
- We've already seen this in recent months with reports that China recently conducted an underground nuclear test and the Trump Administration has reportedly discussed conducting the US' first nuclear test since 1998.
- Alongside the ongoing issues in Hong Kong; disputes over the origins of Coronavirus; the trade war and Huawei; the potential for an escalation in tensions and a nuclear confrontation is very real and we can't afford to take that chance.
- Any nuclear test has the potential to undo much of the progress we have seen on arms control over the last 60 years.
- As a nuclear-armed state and a member of the UN security council, Britain has a responsibility to prevent not only our closest ally – the US – resorting to nuclear brinkmanship, but also to be firm with Beijing.
- But a New Cold War needs ideas of the same calibre that brought about *detente* in the 1980s.
- Britain has to make it clear that nuclear tests conducted by any nation, would be a disaster for all nations as well as international

peace and stability – and any suggestion that brinkmanship would force China and Russia into a new arms control treaty is a fallacy.

- We don't have to look further than the currently stalled negotiations with New START to see that, which I'll come onto shortly.
- For this reason, though, I believe that the completion of existing non-proliferation treaties would provide a more immediate solution to preventing these tensions from spiralling into a nuclear conflict, particularly those agreements that the UK has already ratified.
- The **Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty** was ratified by the last Labour government and France but was never ratified by China and the United States.
- I'm confident that if the US finally ratifies the CTBT, China will quickly follow suit, as the Chinese Communist Party has made clear that whilst it will not act alone – but – given its considerably smaller nuclear arsenal – it is keen to agree to multilateral agreements with the US and other nuclear-armed states.
- There are huge human consequences of nuclear testing – consequences which are sadly already evident in Nevada, New Mexico, Arizona and Utah where there are now significant cancer clusters following the nuclear fallout from historic testing of the United States' nuclear weapons.
- If nothing else, the horrendous consequence nor humanity of possessing these weapons should be the driving force in finally bringing nuclear testing to an end.
  
- Earlier this year, the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty** celebrated its fiftieth anniversary and is, without doubt, the most important multilateral nuclear treaty in history.
- But there are still some major non-signatories, which the UK could play a part in bringing on board.
- The most notable are India and Pakistan and – with the Kashmir dispute intensifying – there's a real potential for it to spiral into a nuclear conflict.
- The NPT review conference – which serves to reaffirm states' commitment to the principles of the treaty – has been postponed owing to the Coronavirus pandemic, but will hopefully take place next year.

- It's so important that the UK Labour Party sends a representative to clearly and unequivocally show our support for this vital treaty to our international partners because so often the British Government fails to send representatives to these conferences.
- We cannot afford to waste chances to engage with our allies and states across the world on nuclear non-proliferation – but it's time to learn from others too.
- The work of the Austrian, Irish and New Zealand disarmament missions in Geneva are excellent examples of how to rally support with international partners for the expansion of such treaties and I am already working with them to develop this relationship from a British perspective.
  
- In the same vein, we must also look to work with the US to prevent their withdrawal from Open Skies and New START which expires in February 2021.
- Donald Trump pledged to withdraw the United States from Open Skies – a treaty which allows mutual airborne surveillance of each other's territories to help prevent the fear of a build up of nuclear arms in preparation for a conflict. The treaty provided an unprecedented amount of much-needed trust between the US and Russia.
- New START is the only nuclear non-proliferation treaty left that prevents an unrestricted, unlimited arms race between the United States and Russia.
- Allowing it to expire would give way to political instability and a fear of nuclear confrontation not experienced since the fall of the Soviet Union.
- However, there is hope: I'm extremely encouraged by Joe Biden's commitment to no first use of nuclear weapons, to never use nuclear weapons against conventional forces and to extend New START – but, as ever, the devil is in the detail.
- New START is only able to be extended once more, but Russia has offered just a one year extension. I fear that this would not be enough time to negotiate a new nuclear disarmament treaty of anywhere near the same calibre – one that places explicit limitations of the number of nuclear warheads either party is able to have.

- In a Biden Administration, competence will run deep and it must look to extend the treaty for the maximum 5 years so a new treaty can be negotiated before it expires. This is the only way extension of New START will mean anything in practice and actually have the ability to bring in third parties – primarily China – into a new agreement.
  - In the event of a 5 year extension, the UN could fill the void left by New START when it eventually expires bringing in other countries and playing to its strengths on independent verification and compliance, which all nuclear armed states would respect.
  - From their recent and somewhat surprising support for the Arms Trade Treaty, we know Beijing agrees with this analysis too, as it looks to fill the void in leadership left by the US in recent years.
  - There are details on the definition of what constitutes a warhead and negotiations ongoing around missile defence systems and nuclear delivery vehicles, but the future of New START looks much brighter than it did a week ago.
- 
- Our allies and partners in Asia have also recently warned that they mustn't be put in a position where they are forced to choose between China and the US, and a reversion back to spheres of influence we saw between East and Western Europe for decades following the Second World War.
  - Any attempts to economically contain China will cause severe financial damage to the region, which could allow China to expand their political influence following the austerity and socioeconomic deprivation that would inevitably follow.
  - However, the withdrawal of US military from the region would leave South Korea and Japan exposed - and could force their hand in acquiring nuclear weapons in the name of self-defence.
  - This is why a new nuclear agreement that includes China is so key to preventing a possible conflict.
  - The Chinese Communist Party perceives multilateral agreements negotiated by a few powerful nations, including bilateral agreements such as New START, as hegemonic.
  - Since the beginning of the nuclear arms race, China has opposed allowing decisions about nuclear weapons to be made without the

participation of non-nuclear weapons states, and has criticised them as an attempt to consolidate a nuclear monopoly, mainly on the part the US.

- So in order to bring them in it's vital that we look to strike a balance between non-proliferation and inclusivity without inadvertently ushering in a world where more nuclear weapons are seen to provide security through the dangerous precedent of mutually assured destruction.
- UN engagement and Britain's place on the UN Security Council is hugely significant to this process.
- China has a tendency to view international agreements negotiated in the United Nations as more inclusive and equitable, so their outcomes are inevitably more stable and compliance is very good.
- For example, although it hasn't yet ratified it, China actually had a hand in writing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and encouraged the then leadership to go further to help negotiate the Fissile Material Cut Off Treaty - which banned the production of uranium and plutonium for use in making nuclear warheads.
- Cutting off the supply and production of uranium and plutonium is so important to preventing the unrestricted spread of nuclear weapons to rogue states.
- We have seen the success of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in Iran - which Donald Trump ditched - and a similar agreement is now urgently needed for Saudi Arabia who have worryingly begun their own uranium enrichment programme, with no verification from the UN or the Nuclear Suppliers Group - who are responsible for controlling the export of materials used to make nuclear weapons and nuclear energy.
- This group is supported by the UK, United States and China so must now be vocally championed from all sides in order to force Saudi Arabia to halt its dangerous nuclear programme.

## **TPNW**

- I will end my remarks with some more hopeful news - it's not all doom and gloom!

- To give it its full name - the UN Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons would outlaw the possession of nuclear weapons by any state.
- It's clear that this is the natural successor to the historic Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.
- The hugely significant development is that the treaty was ratified by the 50th UN member state last month, so will come into force as a pillar of international law on 22nd January 2021.
- It's difficult to stress how important a moment this is in our journey towards a nuclear free world and its entry into force is a notable diplomatic accomplishment.
- Sadly again, the UK Government has failed to engage with it after being leant on by the Trump Administration - who explicitly urged all parties to withdraw their support for it.
- However, now it's about to enter into force, the UK government should consider how this treaty can provide new impetus towards multilateral nuclear disarmament.
- It couldn't have come at more important time either - in the run up to next year's delayed Non Proliferation Treaty review conference and with widespread instability across the world as a result of the pandemic.
- In the interests of upholding the rules-based order of our globalised world, we must seize the opportunity of the Review Conference next year to reinvigorate the multilateral disarmament agenda.
- The TPNW has the potential to work alongside the NPT to encourage non-nuclear armed states not to acquire nuclear weapons for the first time - but will also need further UN-led agreements to further the prospects of a 'phasing out' programme for the nuclear armed states along with a stringent verification initiative.
- Nobody is saying that this treaty is going to get rid of nuclear weapons overnight but the UK Government - like the rest of the nuclear armed states - has not been represented at any stage of the TPNW's process into international law and, by not participating, is undermining Article 6 of the NPT which calls for all parties to work towards complete nuclear disarmament.

## **Remembrance Day**

- Tomorrow is Remembrance Sunday which serves as a perfect reminder of the sacrifices our military personnel make, as well as the consequences of conflict and war.
- We must make what is both the moral and patriotic case, for a truly international and multilateral disarmament agenda.
- The Coronavirus pandemic has cost millions of lives across the world and will certainly lead to many more deaths.
- But weapons of mass destruction are useless in a war against an invisible enemy.
- The world is changing and it becomes more clear everyday that public services - our health, transport and welfare infrastructures - must take precedent over the development and use of these destructive weapons.
- If there was any opportunity to make real progress on a meaningful disarmament agenda, it's now.
- Thank you and I'll take any questions you may have.