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Transcript Q&A

Disarmament and Non-Proliferation: The Nuclear Question in a Changing World

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Patricia Lewis:

I now want to open up the floor for discussion. The Non-Proliferation Treaty preparatory committee for the 2015 review conference opens on Monday in Vienna. This is a very timely event from that perspective. I appreciated your comments Kat, quite provocative for us old 'NPT'ers'.

Question 1:

On the Global Zero principle, I think the argument made before us today is: if we had no nuclear warheads then we wouldn't see such dire calamity as it was shown to us. Were the nuclear warheads that were not visible were there before 1945 and have avoided the countries and the war itself, being torn in to pieces? Therefore, are the nuclear warheads themselves are a cause of war or peace, or could they be both, as the example of the Cold War testifies? States could perceive nuclear war as a deterrent of not going to war, because they know of the consequences that would result from such war. Therefore, even though their outside behaviour would suggest otherwise, the weapons themselves could prevent countries from going to war and therefore causing such atrocities.

Anaiz Parfait:

Within Global Zero, we are convinced that there is a risk of proliferation. Whatever the effects of the nuclear weapons during the Cold War – which has now been over for more than 20 years. Basically we think that now the risk of proliferation is the biggest risk of the 21st century and that it could lead to a lot of destruction, which we want to avoid. We feel the only way to avoid that destruction is to make sure that within the 25 years to come we get rid of all those nuclear weapons.

Kat Barton:

I would just like to clear a common misconception up. Deterrents are not an attribute of a weapon, of any particular weapon. Deterrents are a multifaceted relationship between potential adversaries within which varied degrees of threats/ past consequences are communicated with the intention of preventing attacks and dissipating serious threats. So, to equate the nuclear weapons to 'nuclear deterrents' – as John put it – is to confuse things somewhat, I would argue. I think we've all been paying attention to the things that some of the, what I like to call, heavy weight US statesmen – elder statesmen like

Kissinger, Shultz, Perry and Nunn – said. One of the things they said in 2007 was that reliance on deterrents is becoming increasingly hazardous and decreasingly effective. Now, deterrence is a strategy and like all strategies, it can sometimes fail. Relying on nuclear weapons for deterrents makes failure catastrophically more costly than other security strategies.

Patricia Lewis:

Thank you. We will take a few questions together in the interest of time.

Question 2:

In the video there was a quote that 180 countries do not have nuclear weapons; many of them could, but have chosen not to. My understanding of one of the principle claims of the US deterrent is that it provides a reassurance to our allies that fall under the so-called US nuclear umbrella.

So my question is: in 2008 the congressional commission on the strategic posture of the US, was on a tipping point, whereby if those allies were to lose confidence in the United States' strategic deterrence, it would trigger a new arms race, particularly in the Baltic States like Poland with a resurging Russia. Do you think there is any danger of that, and where do you think that sort of conversation fits in the dialogue with regards to non-proliferation?

Question 3:

I wasn't sure if Anaiz you said that the UK still held US tactical weapons – because they don't. My question to you is, given as we've seen an increasing number of international statesmen – and populations around the world – wanting to get rid of nuclear weapons and coming out in quite strong opposition. Who do you see as the real forces, now, lined up actually proposing that we renew and keep our nuclear weapons. Who are they and where are they? They don't seem that visible? Even those that say to renew Trident that's contingent upon saying that we wouldn't have liked to – who are the ones driving forward modernisation.

And in this time of austerity and cuts, what in the UK do you think is a proportionate amount of money to be spending on nuclear weapons, given you know, who supports them and what is relative to who is supporting them? Should we therefore say that we have to give that amount of money when so

many other services are necessary? What proportion is now appropriate given the level of political support out there?

Question 4:

It is a shame that John has gone, because this will go to his point of unilateralism versus multilateralism. There are a few inconsistencies in his argument by saying that no country that is trying to develop nuclear weapons is doing so for fear of the UK's nuclear weapons, and yet he said that we needed to have them in order to act as a deterrent. So, in your respective views, do you think that it would actually, or are you actively opposed to the idea, of the UK perhaps withdrawing unilaterally in the same way that South Africa did? Would you suggest that South Africa is any worse off in terms of its security and in terms of its security when it was developing nuclear weapons?

Question 5:

If Russia and America can't be trusted with nuclear weapons then how can we trust North Korea, Iran, and Pakistan? Shouldn't getting rid of nuclear weapons start with stopping other countries from getting them?

Question 6:

One of the arguments that often gets pitched against, the nuclear arm powers in an international arena in far of terms of world peace and against nuclear disarmament, is the charge of hypocrisy. That while countries can say that 'you can't have nuclear weapons but we'll hang on to ours'. Is there any way that we could feasibly hang on to Trident while retaining that high ground? Isn't the disarmament of Trident and any form of nuclear deterrent in the UK and possibly even the US a prerequisite for saying to other countries for saying we are committed to this and we want to see a world without any nuclear weapons at all?

Question 7:

China hasn't been mentioned and I find that quite interesting. Talking about global efforts to get rid of nuclear weapons, have you had any traction for Global Zero movement in China and how do you see the Chinese reacting to future non-proliferation efforts?

Anaiz Parfait:

That is a lot of questions. I will start with China. We have some signatories from China but we don't have any student mobilisations there. Our understanding from our signatories is that anyway, China wouldn't be part of any international negotiations for any reductions of nuclear weapons until the US and Russia get reductions of their own arsenal to 1000 weapons each.

I was pretty interested by the comment you said that there is a stronger position from the civil society against nuclear weapons, I would not say that this is true actually. I don't feel that there is, nowadays, a strong opposition amongst the citizens worldwide against nuclear weapons. I think that it was probably more the case in the 80's – I wasn't even born – I'm not sure this is the case now. That is also why Global Zero was born, that was our goal, to first make sure that nuclear disarmament and the elimination of nuclear weapons was not seen any more as an idealistic goal. That is why we tried to get support from world leaders and signatories and people who are experts on the subject.

The second goal was to try to get more people motivated on that issue. And I know that ICAN is doing a great job, but we cannot say that we have a public movement towards elimination of nuclear weapons. If some of you are interested then I'm sure that ICAN or Global Zero would be very interested to [inaudible].

On Global Zero and its position towards the renewal of Trident, we are against zero renewal of Tridents – that is pretty clear. I would say that is not where our focus is on the moment. We have a clear action plan, which was developed by 100 of our world leaders – 100 of our Global Zero members. Our focus is on the reduction in the US and Russia because we feel that is the most important and urgent step to take right now. We have a clear vision of course, and we are a small team so we have to make choices, basically.

Kat Barton:

Just a quick response to the question about the nuclear umbrella. I think that this is an interesting question, especially related to Global Zero's current campaign about the removal of US tactical nuclear weapons from Europe. I will just briefly say that really, are we to believe that the Czechs and Hungarians are sleeping safely and more soundly in their beds because their *compadres* in Italy and the Netherlands have got US nuclear weapons on their soil, which they don't even have a veto over? I just don't think that is credible

at all. I would say that actually today the world has changed a lot and I don't believe these arguments about the nuclear umbrella are as salient certainly as they once were.

There was a question about who are the hard-core. I don't know. I do know that whoever those hard-core are, they have a strong belief in what I would call voodoo magic. Which is basically this idea that weapons possess certain powers which I think is giving over this power to these weapons. We don't need to do that and I think that is the framing that we need to change.

There was a question about UK withdrawal and if the UK withdrew unilaterally, would we be worse off than South Africa. I would just say no – look at all the states that don't have nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons are an old tool for an old age and we do not need them anymore. So I would say no, we would do a lot better without them. That question was probably directed more to John.

The question about starting to get rid of nuclear weapons by getting rid of them in other countries, and this I think is my central point. I really don't think under the current regime that we have that it is fit for purpose to be able to prevent other states from getting nuclear weapons. I do think that we are on a trajectory and if we carry on in which there will be more nuclear weapons in the world. I think it was President Obama who said if we think the spread of nuclear weapons is inevitable then we are actually saying that the use of nuclear weapons is inevitable.

Just to add to that, I think that the kind of tools and policy instruments that we are using for countries like Iran and North Korea are very blunt instruments. We need a stronger, non-discriminatory regime with the teeth to deal with these issues like non-compliance. I think that without it, we will see states continuing to flout the sanctions and side step them. States like North Korea and Iran only need to look to India, Pakistan, and Israel to see that if they can weather the sanctions and cross that threshold then the world will treat them with kid gloves.

I really do think that in the end we are not, if we continue with this, we are not going to be effective at preventing proliferation and it will continue to grow. We need to have a system whereby nobody is allowed to have nuclear weapons. I appreciate that isn't going to happen overnight. It will take time to come, but I also think that we need that time and that process. This change is not linear, so we need that time for these norms to be built in for states to think about what their security would look like.

The issue we haven't touched upon is what a world with zero nuclear weapons would look like. I think it would need to be a world where real security and by that I mean security that people out there think about – they are thinking about jobs, food, they may be thinking about climate change and those sorts of things. I think real security in a world without nuclear weapons, global and human security will be prioritised over military strategic security that was the situation in the Cold War.

Patricia Lewis:

Well on that note, I'm going to close the meeting. I would like to thank Kat, John and Anaiz. I would like to thank Anaiz of Global Zero for prompting this whole thing and for the film that you brought. We appreciate you doing this. Thank you all for coming, I hope that you got something out of it. The conversation will flow upstairs.

[Applause]