

# NUCLEAR WEAPONS - STILL PRESENT, STILL LETHAL



The British public was immersed in the general election process while the Review Conference on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was taking place in New York at the United Nations. Little notice was taken of it, but it is also the case that since the end of the Cold War many people seem to think that nuclear weapons are no longer a serious issue. However although South Africa, the Ukraine and Libya have got rid of theirs, Israel, India and Pakistan, and probably North Korea have joined USA, Russia, China, France and Britain as Nuclear Weapon States (NWS). What is also serious is that the gap between conventional and nuclear weapons has narrowed. In the Falklands campaign, in military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq, nuclear battlefield weapons were standing by for possible use; Geoff Hoon actually said so. Now there is a move from the old doctrine of deterrence whereby, as many people believed, any breakdown into Mutually Assured Destruction helped to keep the peace, to a whole policy of Pre-emptive Defence with equally alarming consequences.

The 1,752 Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) who sent representatives to the Review Conference were determined to have some influence on the proceedings. Facilities for their participation were very poor, and the British NGOs, including CND, and CANA (Clergy Against Nuclear Arms) had set an agenda for their meeting with the UK Disarmament Delegation, but Dr. John Freeman (head of the Delegation) cancelled the meeting at short notice, so the crucial questions about British failure to honour its undertakings under Article VI of the Treaty were not discussed.

The Treaty holds a Review Conference every five years, interspersed with annual Preparatory Commissions. It became obvious from the Commissions of 2003 and 2004 that the detailed thirteen recommendations for progress were not going to be honoured. There were several weeks of wrangling over the agenda itself and much frustration and anger expressed. There needs to be a post mortem on the Conference in Britain to expose the huge betrayal of foreign and defence policies, and no doubt the peace movements will take this up soon. Meantime it might be helpful if we quoted the famous Article VI as a reminder of our obligations. Much time was spent in New York on the secure handling of nuclear power for peaceful purposes, which is allowed under the Treaty. More time was spent on trying to ensure non-proliferation of weapons across the world, noting the

failure to deter India and Pakistan from becoming nuclear weapons states, and virtually nothing was said about Israel's arsenal. The obligations of the NWS were ignored.

Article VI says this: *(The eight nuclear powers undertake) "to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control."*

It should have sufficed to notice what Kofi Annan, (UN Secretary General) said: *"Some 35,000 nuclear weapons remain in the arsenals of the nuclear powers, with thousands still deployed on hair-trigger alert. Whatever rationale these weapons may once have had has long since dwindled. Political, moral and legal constraints on actually using them further undermine their strategic utility without, however, reducing the risks of inadvertent war or proliferation. The objective of nuclear non-proliferation is not helped by the fact that the nuclear weapons states continue to insist that those weapons in their hands enhance security, while in the hands of others they are a threat to world peace. If we were making steady progress towards disarmament, this situation would be less alarming. Unfortunately the reverse is true."*

The Final Document on this Review Conference did little more than list the participants and the number of meetings. It was a resounding failure as far as nuclear disarmament is concerned. Many delegates were angry. Senator Douglas Roche, the Canadian Chairman of the Middle Powers Initiative, said: *"This conference revealed very deep fissures in international community. The nuclear have-nots have run out of patience.....and the nuclear haves still haven't got the message"*, Condoleeza Rice, the American Secretary of State, remarked that the treaty *"has loopholes and is fraying in many ways. It is still an extremely important document and we continue to support it; but we have tried to go at this in several ways"*. Not many would agree with her. Jon Wolfstahl of Carnegie said *"The Bush administration has an ideological opposition to any legal treaties that could possibly constrain any American freedom of action."*



**Senator Doug Roche:**

*"The nuclear have-nots have run out of patience... and the nuclear haves still haven't got the message."*

The last Review Conference of 2000 reached agreement on 13 practical steps enabling systematic progress towards the complete elimination of the world's nuclear arsenals. The diplomats have failed to live up to these. We have work to do in Britain to ensure that the whole business of nuclear disarmament is not forgotten or overlooked. Tony Blair is said to be preparing to agree to a replacement for Trident; the USA is set on developing a new generation of nuclear weapons, and evading the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty also. It looks as though only NGOs are going to make any difference. ■

# WHO'S BEING RECKLESS WITH NUCLEAR SECURITY?



What can we do to stop more nuclear installations from being built here in Britain at a time when the Government seems to have forgotten all promises of nuclear disarmament and when they're trying to sell us the lie that nuclear power is somehow green? Under new Government guidelines, allegedly designed to reduce the risk of terrorist attacks but rather conveniently having the effect of limiting information available to the concerned public, things are going to get a whole lot more difficult. Objectors will be prevented from seeing the detailed plans for new nuclear plants or new developments at existing plants. Instead, protesters will have to pay for the privilege of having an 'appointed representative', who will be chosen by the Attorney General, to examine the plans on their behalf and represent them, and the public will be denied all but the most general information about the proposals. These guidelines refer to the 2001 Anti-Terrorism Act, which created an offence of being 'reckless' with 'nuclear security' and are yet another example of civil liberties being eroded on the pretext of national security. If terrorists wanted to attack a nuclear installation, they wouldn't need detailed plans.

If the government was really serious about preventing reckless acts in relation to nuclear security, it might have kept a closer eye on the ne'er-do-wells at Sellafield. Just last month, a pipe at Sellafield nuclear reprocessing plant was discovered to be leaking. The pipe, which had fractured unnoticed, may have been leaking continuously since last August. By the time it was discovered, 83,000 litres of radioactive liquid had collected in a pool. The Nuclear Installations Inspectorate is investigating and it is possible that the reprocessing plant will be shut down permanently as a result. Criminal charges may also be brought. As usual, it is claimed that there has been no risk to members of the public or workers at the plant.

The leak came just as Tony Blair was preparing to start selling his plans for a new generation of nuclear power stations to the public. These new plants are being proposed as a temporary solution to the problem of how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Unfortunately, nuclear power stations bring problems of their own that are anything but temporary. You could say that building new ones is being reckless with nuclear security... ■

# NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION ON EARTH AND IN SPACE

America is actively exploring the possibility of new battlefield nuclear weapons, known as 'bunker busters', as well as other new types of nuclear weapon. Whatever America does, Russia is likely to follow suit, leading to a further escalation in the nuclear arms race when countries should be working towards disarmament. It is also likely that we will soon not only have nuclear weapons on Earth, but these and other weapons may also be sent into Space to protect America, after attempts to build a missile defence system on Earth failed. The US Air Force wants to put weapons into Space so that if the nation is under attack, they can quickly and easily target their space weapons on the attackers. The technology will cost hundreds of billions of dollars because space weapons need space satellites and there are lots of technological hurdles to overcome, as well as opposition from countries such as Russia, Europe and China, who oppose US space superiority. The first step has already been taken however, with an experimental micro-satellite launched in April. This has the capability of interfering with other nations' communications and reconnaissance satellites.

In recent discussion in Congress, members have opposed weapons in Space per se and raised concerns over ethics, diplomacy, reliability, practicalities and costs. However, the US Air Force seems undeterred. General Lance Lord, leader of Air Force Space Command, dismissing potential problems and astronomic costs, claimed that "*Space superiority is not our birthright, but it is our destiny.... Space supremacy is our vision for the future.*" And Bush is known to be all in favour. Be warned. ■

