

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY FORUM ON GLOBAL NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION AND ARMS CONTROL

After the 2026 NPT Review Conference: Where next for international nuclear weapons treaties and nuclear risk reduction?

Meeting held Monday 29th June, House of Lords Committee Room 1, Houses of Parliament

NON-VERBATIM SUMMARY

The second meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary Forum on Global Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Arms Control focused on the outcome of the recent Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT RevCon), the implications for UK policy, and the wider challenges facing global arms control.

The meeting brought together parliamentarians, officials, academics and civil society representatives to discuss why the RevCon failed to reach consensus, what progress was nevertheless achieved, and the role Parliament can play in strengthening nuclear diplomacy and public understanding.

Richard Foord MP chaired the meeting. The principal speakers were:

- David Riley (UK Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the Conference on Disarmament)
- Dr Alice Spilman (Policy Fellow, BASIC)
- Jane Kinninmont (Chief Executive, United Nations Association-UK)

1. UK Government assessment of the NPT RevCon

David Riley emphasised that, despite the failure to agree a final consensus document, the RevCon should not be viewed as a failure of the NPT itself. He argued that:

- the NPT remains the cornerstone of the global non-proliferation regime;
- only four Review Conferences since 1975 have successfully adopted consensus final documents;
- the Treaty continues to provide an effective legal framework for non-proliferation, safeguards and peaceful nuclear cooperation.

The Ambassador stressed that the absence of consensus reflected the political difficulties surrounding the RevCon rather than any weakening of the Treaty itself. The UK therefore continues to regard the NPT as resilient and fundamentally successful.

2. UK priorities at the RevCon

The Ambassador outlined the UK's principal objectives. These included:

- reaffirming support for all three pillars of the NPT;
- practical progress towards a nuclear weapons free world based on the principles of transparency, verification and irreversibility;
- stronger strategic stability dialogue between the five recognised nuclear weapon states (who participate in the 'P5' process—a diplomatic forum where they discuss their NPT responsibilities);
- robust responses to non-proliferation challenges posed by Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea;

- strengthening IAEA safeguards;
- expanding peaceful uses of nuclear technology;
- reforming the NPT review process.

He highlighted that the UK was prepared to support the RevCon President's final draft outcome document, considering it a balanced compromise. He also pointed to the extensive UK contribution during the conference, including:

- publication of working papers;
- organisation of side events;
- presentation of the UK's national report;
- leadership of the P5 process.

3. Why consensus proved impossible

The RevCon's failure to reach agreement on a final document was a central point of discussion throughout the meeting. It was noted that the RevCon President's draft outcome document sought to address concerns over Iran's adherence to the treaty, including on safeguards compliance, while also reflecting wider concerns regarding Ukraine and North Korea. However, despite several revisions and extensive last-minute diplomacy, agreement could not be secured.

The discussion highlighted that:

- disagreement over how to address non-proliferation concerns in Iran, in the context of the US and Israeli military attacks on the country, remained a key obstacle to consensus;
- Russia, China and several other states engaged in a 'battle of narratives,' trying to frame the West as the central problem in the NPT process.
- the lack of progress on disarmament is creating a significant divide between nuclear weapon states and non-nuclear weapon states

Speakers noted that while the conference failed procedurally, substantial work had nevertheless been undertaken across many policy areas. Jane Kinninmont noted that the failure to agree a consensus outcome document had been widely predicted, as none was agreed at the previous two RevCons either, and suggested there needs to be a wider definition of success, especially as most countries continue to support and respect the Treaty.

4. Wider geopolitical divisions

Dr Alice Spilman argued that the RevCon reflected much broader geopolitical tensions rather than simply disagreements over the Treaty itself. She identified four principal fault lines:

i) Iran and the Middle East

The Conference took place against the backdrop of continuing regional conflict. The unusually large number of Rights of Reply in the general debate illustrated the confrontational atmosphere. Discussions at the RevCon focused on:

- Iran's uranium enrichment programme—and its rights under the NPT;
- Iranian compliance with safeguards;
- attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities by the US and Israel;
- wider instability across the Middle East.

ii) Russia and Ukraine

Russia's invasion of Ukraine continued to divide states. Many delegations argued that the conflict had major implications for nuclear security, particularly regarding attacks on nuclear facilities and the violation of security assurances.

iii) Major power competition

Strategic rivalry between the United States, China and Russia increasingly shaped discussions. Disputes arose over:

- nuclear modernisation;
- transparency;
- NATO nuclear policy;
- AUKUS;
- strategic stability.

Speakers suggested that great power competition is now one of the principal obstacles to multilateral arms control and disarmament agreements.

iv) Disarmament versus deterrence

Another significant divide concerned differing views on nuclear deterrence. Many non-nuclear weapon states expressed growing frustration at the failure of the nuclear powers to implement Article VI of the NPT (concerning the cessation of the nuclear arms race, and nuclear disarmament).

States supportive of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) thus argued that progress towards disarmament has stalled. The nuclear weapon states, meanwhile, maintained that progress must remain gradual, verifiable and consistent with international security.

5. Positive developments

Despite the absence of a consensus document, speakers identified several encouraging developments. These included:

- wider agreement on nuclear risk reduction;
- increased discussion of transparency measures;
- support for strategic stability dialogue among the P5;
- proposals to strengthen future RevCons;
- improved reporting by nuclear weapon states.

Dr Spilman particularly welcomed proposals for dedicated sessions allowing nuclear weapon states to explain and defend their national reports during future RevCons. Although these measures were ultimately not adopted formally, speakers argued they should be preserved and developed before the next Preparatory Committee.

6. Nuclear sharing and NATO

A lengthy discussion centred on NATO nuclear sharing; and the UK's announcement in June 2025 that it will join this 'mission'. Richard Foord MP asked whether extended nuclear deterrence may itself have reduced nuclear proliferation by discouraging allies from acquiring their own nuclear weapons.

In response, the Ambassador argued that:

- NATO nuclear sharing arrangements pre-date the NPT;
- such arrangements remain fully consistent with the Treaty;
- US nuclear weapons remain under exclusive American control;
- extended deterrence has discouraged allies from developing their own nuclear arsenals.

Dr Spilman emphasised that multiple factors explain why states choose not to acquire nuclear weapons, including:

- security guarantees;
- international law;
- nuclear weapon free zones;
- political and ethical considerations.

Several participants questioned whether NATO nuclear sharing—and the UK's participation in it—constitutes proliferation. The discussion reflected continuing disagreement over this issue among NPT member states.

7. Nuclear risk reduction

Nuclear risk reduction emerged as one of the strongest areas of agreement at the RevCon. Speakers highlighted increasing international support for practical measures in this area including:

- strategic dialogue;
- crisis communications;
- transparency;
- confidence-building measures;
- doctrinal exchanges.

The UK was recognised as having played a constructive leadership role in promoting this agenda through the P5 process. Dr Spilman argued that the UK should work with France (as incoming P5 chair) to carry such measures forward. Participants agreed that preserving these initiatives should be a priority before the next RevCon cycle, for example, to provide opportunities for arms control talks.

8. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW)

The forthcoming TPNW Review Conference featured prominently. Jane Kinninmont argued that although the UK has no intention of joining the Treaty, it should nevertheless engage constructively by having diplomats attend as observers. She suggested that:

- the Treaty now reflects the views of a majority of UN member states;
- UK engagement would demonstrate confidence rather than endorsement;
- dialogue with TPNW supporters could strengthen broader non-proliferation efforts e.g. because the Treaty plays a role in affirming the nuclear taboo.

The Ambassador responded that the UK remains concerned that the Treaty does not adequately address practical questions, such as disarmament verification.

9. Public understanding and "nuclear IQ"

Several speakers highlighted a decline in the British public's awareness of nuclear issues. It was suggested that:

- media coverage of the RevCon in the UK was minimal;
- public understanding has fallen significantly since the Cold War;
- Parliament has an important educational role.

The importance of strengthening nuclear literacy among parliamentarians, officials and the wider public was emphasised. Japan was repeatedly cited as a positive example of sustained public engagement through education, youth participation and remembrance.

Jane Kinninmont noted that while the NPT and RevCon were barely covered in British media, the British public was directly impacted by the negative effects of the US and Israeli war on Iran, which the belligerents had linked, in part, to the US's failure to reach a renewed agreement with Iran on its nuclear programme. While the war on Iran has a much broader political dimension, any successful settlement will need to draw on the multilateral system for non-proliferation, including the vital technical abilities, expertise and staff of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

10. Humanitarian consequences of nuclear war

Members discussed the UN scientific panel examining the humanitarian consequences of nuclear war, due to issue a full report in 2027. The Ambassador noted that the UK did not support establishing the panel because it already accepts that any nuclear war would have catastrophic humanitarian consequences. The panel includes a British expert who is looking at the impact of nuclear war on human health.

Other participants argued that renewed and updated scientific analysis remains valuable, particularly in relation to limited or regional nuclear conflict. Discussion also touched upon the concept of "tactical" nuclear weapons and the continuing need to explain their potentially devastating consequences.

11. Questions on UK nuclear policy

Several questions addressed the UK's recent decision to acquire dual capable aircraft and join NATO's nuclear sharing mission. The Ambassador clarified that:

- the UK's strategic nuclear deterrent solely comprises the submarine-launched Trident system;
- participation in NATO's dual capable aircraft mission does not create a second UK nuclear capability;
- US nuclear gravity bombs assigned to NATO remain under exclusive American control.

The discussion also examined French proposals for extending nuclear deterrence to European allies and the implications for future European security arrangements.

12. Broader strategic questions

Members raised wider concerns including:

- the collapse of trust between major powers, which may mean that nuclear disarmament discussions can only address the symptoms of a deeper problem;
- the consequences of Russia's violation of the Budapest Memorandum, including the wisdom of Ukraine relinquishing the nuclear weapons it held on its territory in 1996;

- whether multilateral disarmament (concerning both conventional and nuclear arms) is possible without broader political settlements;
- the status of Israel's undeclared nuclear capability;
- whether existing international institutions remain capable of resolving strategic tensions.

Speakers generally agreed that many of these issues lie beyond the formal remit of the NPT, but nevertheless shape its prospects for success.

13. Iran

Towards the conclusion of the meeting, discussion returned to Iran. Jane Kinninmont noted that:

- the collapse of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), following US withdrawal, had significantly damaged confidence;
- future diplomatic efforts would require renewed engagement involving the IAEA;
- military action against safeguarded nuclear facilities raised important legal and political questions, and had been condemned by the IAEA.

One attendee argued that responsibility for the deterioration in relations should not be attributed solely to Iran and stressed the need for a balanced approach if future diplomacy is to succeed. The Ambassador reiterated the UK Government's support for a diplomatic solution that permanently prevents Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

14. Conclusions

The meeting concluded that although the RevCon failed to agree a consensus outcome document, substantial technical and diplomatic progress had nevertheless been made. Speakers agreed that future priorities should include:

- preserving progress made on transparency and nuclear risk reduction;
- maintaining strategic dialogue among the P5;
- strengthening the NPT review process;
- increasing parliamentary engagement;
- improving public understanding of nuclear issues;
- continuing UK Government investment in arms control and verification expertise.

The Chair thanked the speakers and participating organisations, noting the important contribution of parliamentarians, officials and civil society in sustaining informed debate on nuclear non-proliferation and international security.

REGISTERED ATTENDEES

Name	Affiliation
Richard Foord MP	Liberal Democrat Party
Rt Hon Sir Julian Lewis MP	Conservative Party
Baroness Susan Miller	Liberal Democrat Party
Baroness Christine Blower	Labour Party

Baroness Natalie Bennett	Green Party
Lord Hannay of Chiswick	Crossbench
Helen Maguire MP	Liberal Democrat Party
Lord John Alderdice	Liberal Democrat Party
Lord Malcom Bruce	Liberal Democrat Party
Fabian Hamilton MP (Apologies)	Labour Party
Peter Jenkins CMG	Chairman, British Pugwash
Jack Burling Nebe	UK PONI Project Manager, RUSI
Okopi Ajonye	Co-Director, Nuclear Information Service
Kseniia Yehorova	Policy Fellow, European Leadership Network
Marie Noelle Vieu	Member, Medact- Nuclear Weapons group
Dr Poul Erik Christiansen	Program Director, International Pugwash
David Cullen	Policy Fellow, BASIC
Sebastian Brixey-Williams	Executive Director, BASIC
Dr Becky Alexis-Martin	Lecturer, University of Bradford
Manuel Galileo	Analyst
Jack Crawford	Research Fellow, RUSI
Alex Akhurst	Journalist, BBC News
Nikita Gryazin	Policy Fellow, European Leadership Network
Nicholas Mellor	Independent Researcher
Vivienne Lyndon	Member, Student and Young Pugwash
Thoon Naychi Moe	Member, Student and Young Pugwash
Ginko Kobayashi	Journalist
Franco Castro Escobar	PhD student, Keele University
Dr Mark Hilborne	King's College London
Ben Worrall	Member, Student and Young Pugwash
Steve Barwick	Chair, Nuclear Education Trust

Dr Tim Street	Secretary, British Pugwash
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BARONESS CHRISTINE BLOWER, BARONESS NATALIE BENNETT**

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