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THE BLIX COMMISSION'S WAKE-UP CALL: MEETING THE NUCLEAR CHALLENGE

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International Conference on *A Comprehensive Approach toward Nuclear Disarmament*

European Parliament, Brussels, 19 April 2007

In January this year the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists' Doomsday Clock, for six decades now the best-known symbolic indicator of the threat posed by nuclear proliferation, moved two minutes closer to midnight – at 11.55 the closest to doomsday it has been since the Cold War.

At the start of the nuclear arms race in 1953 the clock's hands were set at two minutes to midnight. Under President Bush senior, with the end of the Cold War and after the US and Soviet Union signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty in 1991, the clock moved the farthest from doomsday it has ever been, to 11.43.

Now, under his son's watch, the hands of the clock have been pushed back almost as close to midnight as they have ever been – with the renewed value being attached to the possession of nuclear weapons by so many countries; with the CTBT in limbo and the NPT being steadily eroded; with North Korea's bomb test and Iran's nuclear plans; with the deal with India unaccompanied by any serious discipline on fissile material production or anything else; with the continuing talk about the development of new generations weapons; with the emergence of talk – almost unthinkable in the Cold War years – of nuclear weapons being an acceptable means of war-fighting, even to the extent of their use in preemptive strikes; and with the new anxiety felt about non-state actors, combined with old fears continuing about poor safeguards of nuclear materials.

There is no reason for Europeans to feel any sense of smug complacency about any of this, that it's all about the current US administration and nothing to do with *us*. Neither of the two EU nuclear weapons states have done anything to persuade the non-nuclear

weapons states that they are in the slightest bit serious about meeting their own side of the grand NPT bargain – to move steadily toward absolute nuclear disarmament.

The UK Government's determination to proceed with the replacement of the Trident system is as clear, and depressing, an example as will even find of the way in which low political calculation will always trump high principle, short term advantage will always out-manoeuvre long-term gain, and perceived national interest will just about always triumph over obvious global interest. And so far as France is concerned there is an Academy Award on offer for anyone able to assert with a straight face that any of this week's presidential candidates would in office be any more willing than their UK counterparts to unilaterally abandon or weaken their *own* country's position in the double-standard game of charades being played by the nuclear weapons states.

This is the background which led to the creation by Hans Blix and the Swedish Government of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission in 2003. No-one emerged with more credit from the Iraq debacle of that year than Hans Blix, and he had no difficulty in either pulling together a team of highly experienced commissioners from all corners of the globe, or - after more than two years of debate and argument and consultations and hearings all round the world – extracting from his members a hard-hitting and completely unanimous report, published last year, which I believe is the most accessible available compilation of the issues, and the most succinct guide to the action which now needs to be taken.

The report's title is stark - *Weapons of Terror: Freeing the World of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Arms* - and its messages are straightforward, beginning with:

Why action is necessary

Nuclear, biological and chemical arms are the most inhumane of all weapons. And nuclear weapons are the most inhumane of all. Designed to terrify as well as destroy, they are capable, in the hands of either states or non-state actors, of destruction on a vastly greater scale than any conventional weapons, and their impact is far more indiscriminate and long lasting.

Notwithstanding the end of the Cold War balance of terror, stocks of such weapons remain extraordinarily and alarmingly high: some 30,000 in the case of nuclear weapons, of which around 12,000 are still actively deployed.

Over the last decade, there has been a serious, and dangerous, loss of momentum and direction in disarmament and non-proliferation efforts. Treaty making and implementation has stalled and, as a new wave of proliferation has threatened, unilateral enforcement action has been increasingly advocated.

2005 saw two loud wake-up calls in the failure of the NPT Review Conference, and the inability of the World Summit to agree on a single line about any WMD issue. It is critical for those calls to be heeded now.

So what is to be done? The Commissions recommendations are grouped into four sets, with some overlap inevitable because of the inter-linkages that clearly exist between the issues of arsenal security, non-proliferation and disarmament, but the basic messages all very clear.

First, agree on general principles of action

The Commission spells them out:

- Disarmament and non-proliferation are best pursued through a cooperative rules-based international order, applied and enforced through effective multilateral institutions, with the UN Security Council as the ultimate global authority;
- There is an urgent need (bearing in mind that the CD in Geneva has spent ten years failing to agree even on agenda for future talks) to revive meaningful negotiations, through all available intergovernmental mechanisms, on the three main objectives of reducing the danger of present arsenals, preventing proliferation, and outlawing all weapons of destruction once and for all.
- States, individually and collectively, should consistently pursue policies designed to ensure that no state feels a need to acquire weapons of mass destruction.
- Governments and relevant intergovernmental organizations and non-government actors should commence preparations for a World Summit on disarmament, non-proliferation and terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction to generate new momentum for concerted international action.

Second, reduce the danger of present arsenals:

The Commission's mantra here is 'no use by states – no access by terrorists'. And what that means in policy terms is:

- Secure all weapons of mass destruction and all WMD-related material and equipment from theft or other acquisition by terrorists.
- Take nuclear weapons off high-alert status to reduce the risk of launching by error; make deep reductions in strategic nuclear weapons; place all non-strategic nuclear weapons in centralized storage; and withdraw all such weapons from foreign soil.
- Prohibit the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons, and phase out the production of highly-enriched uranium.

- Diminish the role of nuclear weapons by no-first-use pledges, assurances not to use them against non-nuclear weapons states, and by not developing nuclear weapons for new tasks.

Third, prevent proliferation.

That means both vertical proliferation (no new weapons systems) and horizontal proliferation (no new possessors), to be achieved by the following policy approaches:

- Prohibit any nuclear weapons tests by bringing the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty into force.
- Revive the fundamental commitments of all NPT parties: the five nuclear weapon states parties to negotiate towards nuclear disarmament and the non-nuclear weapon states to refrain from developing nuclear weapons.
- Recognize that countries not party to the NPT also have a duty to participate in the disarmament process.
- Continue negotiations with Iran and North Korea to achieve their effective and verified rejection of nuclear weapons, while assuring their security and acknowledging the right of all NPT parties to peaceful uses of nuclear energy.
- Explore international arrangements for an assurance of supply of enriched uranium fuel, and for the disposal of spent fuel, to reduce incentives for national facilities and diminish proliferation risks.

The Blix Commission was not unconscious of the argument that the ‘atoms for peace’ principle is unsustainable, and that civil nuclear energy production (whatever its superficial attractions in an age of anxiety about the contribution of fossil fuels to global warming) inevitably will reinforce and make ever harder to control the move toward wider nuclear weapons possession.

But we felt that recognizing and accommodating the demand for civilian nuclear capability was the only possible way the NPT could be held together – and, as it must be, strengthened – in the present environment, and that it would be Quixotic in the extreme to tilt at this windmill while trying to hold together a broad based international consensus in favour of drawing an absolute red line against anything in the nature of weaponisation.

Of course the optimal solution all round (except for those who not prepared to support any role for any kind of civil nuclear energy) would be for all fissile material production, and all spent fuel disposal, to be internationalized and fully controlled so as to make impossible any diversion for weapons production purposes. But it is hard to get that aspiration even to first base while some countries – notably the US – refuse to even contemplate the internationalization of their own processes.

Fourth, work toward outlawing all weapons of mass destruction once and for all.

This is unquestionably the hardest part of the equation to operationalise, but without serious attempts to move down this track, it is hopeless to contemplate holding the non-proliferation line against further erosion. All the world hates a hypocrite, and there is no area of international public policy where double standards are more obvious than in relation to the NPT, and the requirement in Article VI that the existing nuclear weapons states commit to disarmament.

The Blix Commission argues that all states should:

- Accept the principle that nuclear weapons should be outlawed, just as biological and chemical weapons are, and explore the political, legal, technical and procedural options for achieving this within a reasonable time.
- Complete the implementation of existing regional nuclear- weapon- free zones and work actively to establish zones free from WMD in other regions, particularly and most urgently in the Middle East.

It also argued strongly – and this has been reinforced by China’s recent experiment in shooting down a satellite - that there should be an absolute prohibition on the stationing or use of weapons in outer space.

There is one particular message that runs like a constant refrain through the Blix Commission Report, as it did through the report of the Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons which preceded it ten years ago, and first formulated this language, viz:

So long as any state has nuclear weapons others will want them. So long as any such weapons remain, there is a high risk that they will one day be used, by design or accident. And any such use would be catastrophic.

There are a lot of complexities and technicalities in the nuclear debate, and all too many policy makers, like all too many members of the public, throw up their hands and say it’s all just too complicated. But there are not many messages in public life that are simpler than that one.

And so too is the Commission’s answer to the endlessly recurring argument that it is pointless talking about the elimination of nuclear weapons because they cannot be uninvented:

Weapons of mass destruction cannot be uninvented. But they can be outlawed, as biological and chemical weapons already have been, and their use made unthinkable. Compliance, verification and enforcement rules can, with the

requisite will, be effectively applied. And with that will, even the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons is not beyond the world's reach.

That's a very simple couple of messages. It's time that they were heard, time that they were acted upon, and time – here as elsewhere – that Europe, instead of hiding behind everyone else's skirts, takes a lead in ensuring just that.