



Tackling Weapons of Mass Destruction

Introduction

Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) are a real and growing threat. Greenpeace has been campaigning against WMD for thirty years; our first direct action was to try to stop nuclear testing in 1971.

War is an ineffective way to deal with WMD. Pre-emptive military strikes against states possessing or suspected of possessing WMD do not provide a stable basis for controlling such weapons. This approach would require repeated armed interventions against numerous countries. States known to have nuclear weapons include India, Pakistan and Israel and all five permanent members of the Security Council. North Korea is openly seeking to acquire them. The Bush administration has stated that at least 13 countries are pursuing biological weapons research. Do Bush and Blair intend to attack each of these in turn?

What is needed instead is a collective international arms control and disarmament system. The framework already exists, in the form of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention. But rather than being strengthened, this framework is being undermined by the general hypocrisy of existing nuclear weapons states (who refuse to give up their own WMD despite an international obligation to do so) and by the specific actions of the Bush administration.

The Bush Administration has not only refused to be bound by several treaties itself, it has also opposed efforts to bring Iraq within the Chemical Weapons Convention, which suggests that it prefers war to diplomacy as a means of dealing with WMD.

A strengthened framework of international treaties on nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, backed up by legally-binding verification regimes, properly resourced and implemented fairly, could provide a stable basis for controlling the spread of weapons of mass destruction – and disarming those nations that already have them.

Export controls must be strengthened to ensure that dual use technologies are not transferred to countries that are not in full compliance with the NPT, the CWC and the BWC.

Until such an approach has been tried, nobody can claim that force is being used only as a last resort.

The US and British record on WMD

Tony Blair and George Bush describe weapons of mass destruction as one of the key issues facing the international community, but the US and Britain are doing more to undermine the treaties that control WMD than to strengthen them. Former UN chief weapons inspector, Richard Butler accuses the US of “shocking double standards” on nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.¹

- Although the US and British justification for war with Iraq is disarmament of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, the US and Britain will not rule out the possibility of using their nuclear weapons against Iraq.² The Pentagon also reportedly plans to use chemical agents in Iraq, which are banned for use in war under Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC).³
- Whilst Blair and Bush are pouring millions into preparations for war against Iraq, the Bush Administration is withholding payments to the Organisation for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for verification of chemical weapons disarmament by the United States.
- As Blair and Bush search for a “smoking gun” to justify military action against Iraq, the Bush Administration has blocked verification of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) so that it can pursue its own “biodefence programmes”.
- Whilst Blair and Bush say that Iraq must disarm now, Britain and the United States are ignoring their own obligations to disarm under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

According to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, “There has been a disturbing gradual erosion of the established international norms on weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, rising military expenditures suggest that an ever-growing challenge still exists. It is, therefore, vital for us all to help preserve and consolidate existing multilateral norms through adherence to treaties and fulfilment of legal obligations.”⁴

Nuclear, chemical and biological weapons cannot be controlled unilaterally or countered effectively militarily. The NPT, the CWC and BWC must be strengthened and must be implemented fully and fairly to reduce the risk from weapons of mass destruction.

It is now well documented that many of the dual use and military technologies acquired by Iraq were provided by Western countries including the US and Britain.

¹ “Butler: U.S. Guilty of 'Double Standards' on Iraq”, *Reuters*, 28 January 2003.

² William Arkin, “The Nuclear Option in Iraq – The U.S. has lowered the bar for using the ultimate weapon”, *Los Angeles Times*, 26 January 2003. Secretary of State for Defence, Hansard, 3 Mar 2003 : Column 578.

³ Severin Carrell, “US plan to use illegal weapons”, *Independent*, 16 February 2003.

⁴ “An Ominous Cloud’: Statement to Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters” by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, 6 February 2003.

On October 27, 1992, the US Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs held hearings that revealed that “the United States had exported chemical, biological, nuclear, and missile-system equipment to Iraq that was converted to military use in Iraq's chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons program. Many of these weapons - weapons that the U.S. and other countries provided critical materials for - were used against us during the war.”⁵

British tax payers paid millions to underwrite arms sales by British arms companies to Iraq in the 1980s, despite Iraq's war with Iran and its use of chemical weapons in 1987.⁶

Export controls must be strengthened and made more transparent to ensure that dual use technologies are not transferred to countries that are not in full compliance with the NPT, the CWC and the BWC.

1. Strengthening the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention

The BWC was the first multilateral disarmament agreement banning the production and use of an entire category of weapons. However, the effectiveness of the Convention has been limited by the lack of any formal verification regime to monitor compliance.

Following revelations in the 1990s that at least 2 BWC states parties – Russia and Iraq – had violated the treaty, an Ad Hoc Group of BWC states parties was set up to negotiate and develop a legally-binding verification protocol for the Convention. However, the US withdrew from protocol negotiations in July 2001 and has since blocked any further structured diplomatic discussion of ways and means to strengthen the BWC.

Reasons given for US rejection of the protocol were that the protocol could not adequately detect secret bioweapons proliferation; that it would jeopardise commercial proprietary secrets of the pharmaceuticals industry in the US; and that it would threaten the US's own biodefence programme.

Ambassador Donald Mahley, the US chief negotiator for the protocol talks, admits that a number of US government agencies conduct biological activities that raise “ambiguities” relating to the BWC. US activities that are legally questionable under the BWC include:

- CIA efforts to copy a Russian cluster bomb designed to disperse biological weapons.
- A project by the Pentagon to build a bio-weapon plant from commercially available materials to prove that terrorists could do the same thing.

⁵ U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, “U.S. Chemical and Biological Exports to Iraq and Their Possible Impact on the Health Consequences of the Persian Gulf War”, James J Tuite, III, Principal Investigator, 1992.

⁶ David Leigh and Rob Evans, “UK Taxpayers forced to pay millions for Iraq arms”, *The Guardian*, 28 February 2002.

- Research by the Defence Intelligence Agency into the possibility of genetically engineering a new strain of antibiotic-resistant anthrax.
- A programme to produce dried and weaponised anthrax spores, officially for testing US bio-defences, but far more spores were allegedly produced than necessary for such purposes and it is unclear whether they have been destroyed or simply stored.⁷

Although Britain was a strong supporter of the BWC protocol, it is implicated in US biodefense developments through its close cooperation with the Pentagon's Joint Non-Lethal Weapons Directorate.

Efforts to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention are particularly pressing against the current background of rapid advances in biotechnology. In September 2002, the International Committee of the Red Cross launched an appeal on Biotechnology, Weapons and Humanity to:

- all political and military authorities to strengthen their commitment to the international humanitarian law norms which prohibit the hostile uses of biological agents, and to work together to subject potentially dangerous biotechnology to effective controls.
- the scientific and medical communities, industry and civil society in general to ensure that potentially dangerous biological knowledge and agents be subject to effective controls.⁸

Recommendations

BWC parties including Britain should:

- Establish a permanent secretariat for the BWC. Britain, as one of the depositaries for the BWC could offer to host and provide facilities for such an organisation in London.
- Increase transparency concerning biological weapons, including regular declarations concerning chemical and biological weapons, backed up by voluntary visits to sites declared.
- Pursue research into new monitoring and verification techniques for biological weapons, and monitor implications for the BWC of developments in biotechnology.
- Develop legally binding agreements to verify the BWC, without US involvement if the US continues to block progress on verification.⁹

⁷ Julian Borger, "US Weapons Secrets Exposed", *The Guardian*, 29 October 2002.

⁸ "Biotechnology, Weapons and Humanity: an ICRC initiative", <http://www.icrc.org>.

⁹ Further information and recommendations on Strengthening the CWC and the BWC are available at: <http://www.vertic.org>, <http://www.fas.org/bwc> and <http://www.acronym.org.uk/bwc>.

2. Strengthening the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention

The CWC bans the development, production, acquisition, and use of chemical weapons and requires its members to eliminate stocks of these weapons. The Convention includes provision for verification, and is implemented by the OPCW in The Hague.

The US is one of four states that have admitted possessing chemical weapons under the CWC. However, US ratification of the CWC was opposed by leading Republicans including current Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.

The US is currently looking at options for using non-lethal chemical agents in Iraq such as calmatives, sticky foams, slipping agents and corrosives, although the use of such weapons in war is banned under the CWC. Rumsfeld, who describes the CWC as presenting “a very awkward situation” for the US, has suggested that in the event of war the US President could waive restrictions on the use of these weapons.¹⁰

The US has been slow to comply with the CWC, has withheld financial contributions, procrastinated over declarations concerning its own chemical industry, and blocked agreement on key areas of the OPCW’s work programme, including: frequency of inspections; degree of access to be given to inspectors; number, intensity, duration and timing of inspections; and equipment requirements for inspections.

In 2002, the US forced the removal of José Bustani, as OPCW Director-General. The US objected to Bustani as he had tried to apply the CWC equally to all states parties including the US and the US chemical industry.

The US also opposed Bustani’s attempts to get Iraq to become a member of the CWC regime. Bustani had sought Iraq’s membership as part of his mandate to achieve the Convention’s universality, but was opposed by the US leading to speculation that Bustani’s attempts to pursue peaceful options to disarm Iraq of chemical weapons were undermining US arguments that war is the only option.¹¹

As of August 2002, 30 CWC states parties owed the OPCW a total of nearly \$1 million in unpaid contributions and member states with chemical weapons facilities owed the organisation more than \$2 million in reimbursements for past inspections. The US alone owed more than \$1.4 million.¹²

As a result the OPCW has faced severe financial shortfalls in recent years, impacting on its ability to conduct verification inspections of chemical weapons sites and to fill staff

¹⁰ “Rumsfeld: New rules for non-lethal combat”, UPI, 5 February 2003.

¹¹ “US Diplomatic Offensive Removes OPCW Director-General”, News Review, *Disarmament Diplomacy*, Issue No 64, May – June 2002.

¹² *Chemical Weapons - Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons Needs Comprehensive Plan to Correct Budgeting Weaknesses*, United States General Accounting Office, GAO-03-5, October 2002, released October 25.

posts. In 2001, only 200 out of 293 inspections went ahead as a result of financial shortages.

Recommendations

The CWC Review Conference will take place in April – May 2003. In the run up to the meeting parties to the CWC, including Britain should make clear their support for:

- Reaffirmation of the CWC's provisions banning the use of non-lethal chemical agents in war.
- Efforts to bring Iraq into the CWC regime.
- Extension of the OPCW's work programme to include greater emphasis on verifying that illicit production of new chemical weapons is not occurring, including in the chemical industry. All states parties should allow greater access to be given to inspectors, including to chemical industry facilities.
- All states parties to pay arrears and reimbursements due to the OPCW without delay. OPCW funding should be increased to ensure that the organisation can carry out its full work programme, including longer and more frequent inspections, and urgent steps to recruit more staff and improve staff morale.

3. Strengthening the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

The 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) commits its parties to nuclear disarmament and the total elimination of nuclear weapons, but it has not been fully implemented and not all states have signed.

The US, Britain, France, Russia and China possess the largest quantities of nuclear weapons, but they have already reneged on nuclear disarmament agreements reached at the NPT Review Conference in 2000.

In the NPT Final Document agreed in 2000, the nuclear-weapon states made an “unequivocal undertaking... to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals”, together with a plan of action containing 13 practical steps to implement Article VI of the treaty, which requires the elimination of nuclear weapons.

These steps include: the importance and urgency of signatures and ratifications, without delay, of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT); continuing moratoria on nuclear testing; negotiation of a fissile material cut off treaty; the principle of irreversibility to apply to nuclear disarmament; early entry into force and full implementation of START II and conclusion of START III; preserving and strengthening the ABM Treaty; unilateral reductions in nuclear arsenals; increased transparency; a reduction in operational status of nuclear weapons; a diminishing role for nuclear weapons in security policies; and the engagement of all 5 nuclear weapon states in the process of eliminating their nuclear weapons.¹³

¹³ For the full list of 13 steps see: <http://www.acronym.org.uk/dd/dd46/46npt.htm>.

The US has broken its commitment to “preserving and strengthening” the ABM treaty in order to deploy a missile defence system, and has abandoned the START II nuclear disarmament treaty. The US also opposes the CTBT, a key component of the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and one of the 13 steps.

Rather than supporting a “diminishing” role for nuclear weapons in military postures as required by the NPT agreement, the US and Britain have both implied that they are willing to use nuclear weapons against Iraq if it uses WMD.¹⁴ According to the Secretary of State for Defence “rogue states” can be “absolutely confident that in the right conditions we would be willing to use our nuclear weapons.”¹⁵ The use of nuclear weapons against Iraq would breach key elements of international humanitarian law.

The British government claims to regard the NPT as the “cornerstone of the non-proliferation regime” and to be “firmly committed” to the Final Document agreed in 2000.¹⁶ However, the UK has failed to make any progress on implementing the NPT since 2000 and has cooperated with US policies that break the agreement such as missile defence.

US allies Israel, India and Pakistan are now the only states which have not signed the NPT. But instead of maintaining pressure on these countries to sign and implement the NPT the Bush Administration has lifted sanctions imposed against India and Pakistan for conducting nuclear tests in 1998.

A joint report by the Commons foreign affairs, defence, trade and industry and international development committees in 2002 condemned the British government’s failure to block arms sales to India and Pakistan at the height of the tensions between the two countries over Kashmir.¹⁷

The US also provides extensive military assistance to Israel and in July 2002 Britain relaxed its arms export rules to sell Israel components for US F16 fighter jets – the most likely delivery vehicle for Israel’s air launched nuclear weapons.

Recommendations

UN Under-Secretary for Disarmament Affairs, Jayantha Dhanapala advocates the establishment of a permanent institution to implement the NPT, and negotiation of a Nuclear Weapons Convention.¹⁸ Instead of threatening Iraq, the US, Britain and the

¹⁴ Ellen Sorokin, “Administration won’t bar use of nuclear weapons”, *The Washington Times*, 27 January 2003.

¹⁵ David Hearst, “NATO Directionless on Nuclear Policy”, *The Guardian*, 9 January 2003.

¹⁶ Secretary of State for Defence, Hansard, 26 Mar 2002 : Column 845W.

¹⁷ First Joint Report of the Defence, Foreign Affairs, International Development and Trade and Industry Committees, Strategic Export Controls: Annual Report for 2000, “Licensing Policy and Prior Parliamentary Scrutiny”, HC 718 of 2001-02, 19 July 2002.

¹⁸ Challenging ‘the Very Existence of WMD’: Speech by Jayantha Dhanapala, 3 December 2002, <http://www.acronym.org.uk/docs/0212/doc04.htm>.

other members of the UN Security Council members should implement their own commitments under the NPT and take steps to strengthen the treaty and achieve universality.

- NPT states parties should establish a permanent secretariat, to ensure that the NPT is implemented fully and fairly in future.
- At the NPT PrepCom in April 2003, the nuclear-weapon states, including Britain should reaffirm the programme of action for nuclear disarmament that they signed up to in 2000 and report on steps taken to implement it.
- The US and Britain should take action to require Israel, India and Pakistan to sign and implement the NPT as non-nuclear-weapon states parties immediately. The US and the UK should end arms sales to these countries whilst they remain outside the NPT regime.
- Britain should stop cooperating with US policies that undermine the NPT such as missile defence, the new US nuclear posture, and collaboration between US and UK nuclear weapons laboratories. Britain should encourage the US to ratify and implement the CTBT.
- The international community should pay to make the Soviet nuclear legacy less insecure. This would cost a fraction of the cost of a war on Iraq, and would contribute much more to preventing the spread of nuclear weapons.

Minimising the risk from existing nuclear material.

Unfortunately, the world has a dangerous legacy of nuclear material from the last five decades of irresponsible construction of nuclear power stations and nuclear weapons. The most widespread problem is in the states of the former Soviet Union. However the Bush Administration has sought to cut funding for programmes that safeguard nuclear material in the Soviet Union.

The least sensible management option for nuclear waste is to reprocess it. This separates out the uranium and plutonium, making material for weapons more easily accessible, and emitting a large quantity of radioactivity in the process. Reprocessing must end immediately.

Conclusion

Tony Blair states that, “unless the world takes a stand on this issue of WMD and sends out a clear signal, we will rue the consequences of our weakness.”¹⁹ The world should take a stand against weapons of mass destruction. Instead of blocking progress on disarmament and verification, Britain and the United States should start by implementing their own commitments to abolish these immoral weapons.

¹⁹ Tony Blair, speech to Foreign Office Conference in London, 7 January 2003.