Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Working together to persuade states not to obtain weapons of mass destruction

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Mr Chairman, Mr Secretary-General, on behalf of the UK government may I warmly congratulate Kazakhstan on becoming the first Central Asian nation to steer and chair the Security Council. As has been pointed out your historic commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament is well known. We welcome this important debate because our collective security and prosperity depend on an effective global non-proliferation regime.

Now it is sometimes, I think, easy to forget just how recently the global community coalesced around a common strategy in this sphere. There were very dark predictions made during the 1960s and 1970s of a bleak world in which dozens of nuclear armed states vied with each other. Yet today, thanks to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, that number of nuclear states remains in single figures.

Together, we have painstakingly constructed a comprehensive set of rules, norms and standards that counter the proliferation of all types of Weapons of Mass Destruction and their means of delivery. If the rule book that we have written together is to remain effective in this century, we must all meet our responsibilities to protect and implement our common rules, norms and standards – and hold those who breach them properly to account.

The success or failure depends on our ability to work together. This of course is illustrated by the examples of Iran, North Korea and Syria, which I shall now briefly discuss.

The threat of a nuclear Iran brought the international community, this Security Council, together to defend our commonly-held rules and to protect our shared security interests. Through our painstaking joint diplomacy and co-ordinated pressure Iran came to the negotiating table. Collectively we agreed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, which we in the UK continue to steadfastly support.

We should always remember that before the deal, Iran could have produced enough fissile material for a weapon in a few months. Now all experts would suggest this would take at least a year.

All of us in this Security Council should be proud of this success that we achieved by working together. Let us please continue this work.

On North Korea rightly we have had successes. Not least because we have worked together.

North Korea has repeatedly, continuously flouted our non-proliferation rules, with deepening consequences for international security. We agreed that the DPRK's development of a nuclear programme is illegal and cannot be accepted. In response, this Council collectively imposed the strictest sanctions in a generation with a number of Security Council Resolutions.

Rest assured these measures are already having an impact. The Security Council must, in my view, continue to stand united, on both North Korea and Iran.

By contrast, the Security Council has not been as united in response to the use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Regrettably it has been Russia that has repeatedly in this Council wielded its veto despite clear conclusions from an impartial independent expert investigation, set up by the Council itself, that the Syrian Regime and Daesh have repeatedly used chemical weapons. I fear that this Council's lack of unity and resolve on Syria sends the most dangerous possible signal of a confused message to would-be proliferators of the future.

The Security Council must be prepared to hold all transgressors to account. And the UK implores those in this Council that have stood in the way of action to join the consensus for the future.

Mr President, the lesson for this Council could not be clearer when we work together, we can persuade and cajole States to abandon their ambitions to obtain weapons of mass destruction. If we do not it is the most vulnerable, civilians often, who suffer, and the security of the world is put at risk.

The Nuclear Proliferation Treaty remains a cornerstone of international security. Although the pace of non-proliferation and disarmament is often frustratingly slow, it is vital not to lose sight of the ambitious vision that the Treaty embodies. Its achievements stem from its development, over time, by consensus, and because it offered tangible benefits to all its signatories.

By contrast, the nuclear weapons ban treaty would offer no solutions to the very complex security challenges that we face, nor in my view to the significant technical challenges of nuclear disarmament.

This is why the United Kingdom will not become a party to the weapons ban treaty. We do not consider that its prohibitions represent an emerging rule of customary international law.

The United Kingdom remains committed to a world without nuclear weapons. We believe the best way to achieve this goal is through gradual multilateral disarmament, negotiated step-by-

step, within existing frameworks.

There is much more we can do if we continue to work together. We can continue the voluntary moratoria on nuclear weapons testing and work for the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. We can prevent nuclear, chemical and biological material from falling into the hands of terrorists, by working for full and effective implementation of the Security Council Resolution 1540. And we can tackle the threat of ballistic missiles by encouraging Member States to consider acceding or adhering to the Missile Technology Control Regime and the Hague Code of Conduct.

Mr Secretary General, Mr President, the Security Council has as we know has a very special role to play in safeguarding international peace and security. And as ever, it is the unity of this Security Council and the UN beyond that is vital.

Together, we must continue working to prevent proliferation. Together, we must hold to account those states that breach our rules. And together, we must persuade and cajole would-be proliferators to abandon their ambitions to develop weapons of mass destruction.

The UK remains ready to work closely with you, with all members of this Security Council towards these important goals – goals which I belive are essential for the future security of mankind.

Read more about the Minister’s

2-day visit to New York representing the UK at the United Nations Security Council

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Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/when-we-work-together-we-can-persuade-and-cajole-states-to-abandon-their-ambitions-to-obtain-weapons-of-mass-destruction