

Dear Readers,

This issue of the Review is focused on the idea of 'ethical foreign policy' and contains three very different contributions. The first item, by Diana Francis, philosophical in emphasis, explores the concepts embodied in the phrase and suggests a radical shift in approach. The second article, by Michael Hammer, addresses the relationship between democracies and armed conflict, beginning with a critique of current patterns and tendencies and going on to propose key principles for future policy. The third piece, by Michael Randle, is a personal statement, written on the occasion of a blockade by academics at Faslane, and expresses one person's ethical viewpoint on a specific matter of foreign policy. We hope that this themed variety will contribute to much-needed discussion on the ethical relationship between state policy and action and global needs and structures.

Ethical Foreign Policy

by Diana Francis

This is short article on a vast subject. I shall begin with some general, contextual observations on recent British foreign policy, moving on to a piece-by-piece discussion of the different elements of the 'ethical foreign policy' concept and concluding with a few suggestions for change, based on my own ethical and political approach.

Recent British foreign policy

'The national interest' is (and always has been) the taken-for-granted base line for foreign policy within all the major parties. On more than one occasion recently, Gordon Brown has promised that he (presumably if he becomes PM) will not slavishly follow US policy in foreign affairs, but will act in 'the national interest'. Ethics were not mentioned. In his recent visit to India (as in his earlier visit to Africa), he showed by his manner that he is driven by moral passion. Yet the national interest was still to the fore in his comments and he distanced himself from Gandhi's commitment to nonviolence, while expressing admiration for his strength and decisive leadership. He insisted that 'hard power' (violence) was necessary, as well as 'soft power'.

Robin Cook, often seen as the initiating champion of ethical foreign policy, in fact promised only 'an ethical dimension' to it. Does that mean that he would have ruled out all unethical policies that national interest might entail, or was national interest still to trump ethics? For much of his time as Foreign Secretary it was hard to avoid the conclusion that ethical considerations would be applied only if they were cost free. He permitted all kinds of lucrative arms deals to go ahead – for instance the sale of BAe's Hunter Hawk jets to Indonesia – that breached any possible notion of ethical exports (even assuming, as I do not, that arms exports can be ethical). He did, eventually, resign over Iraq, but he never pointed to the ethical contradiction inherent in being prepared to attack another country on the pretext that it had acquired 'weapons of mass destruction' while his own country had them in abundance and was not honouring its NPT treaty obligations to get rid of them.

The Blair government in which he served, which tacitly supported his idea of taking an ethical approach to foreign policy, acted very much like past British governments, in that it majored on militarism as the favoured means of action and used the rhetoric of justification – which is, after all, a nod in the direction of ethics. The air attacks on Serbia and Kosovo and the subsequent international occupation of the latter were presented as an ethical intervention and are still seen by many (though not by me¹) as having been morally justified. This ‘justification’ was used as a reference point for the later justification of the bombardment, invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq.

In recent speeches, Tony Blair has argued that it is vital for Britain to have war fighting as part of its way of being in the world. ‘Peacekeeping’, he says, is not enough. War fighting is an important element in our diplomacy. But the tone of moral rectitude is ever present.

I would argue that such claims to ethical justification are specious and that such an approach to the national interest is counter-productive, creating more enemies by the day. I would also like to suggest that the word ‘foreign’ discourages an ethical approach and is inimical to it.

A discussion of terms

Let us reflect a little on what could be meant by ‘ethical’, and then on the meaning and implications its relationship to its companions, ‘foreign’ and ‘policy’.

Ethical

How demanding a definition of ‘ethical’ might we have in mind? The word itself means only ‘Of or pertaining to morality or the science of ethics’ (OED). Should this mean doing all possible good, or rather avoiding gross wrong – or something in between? I would argue that it is necessary to go beyond prohibiting the active perpetration of wrong against others. Referring to Galtung’s definition of violence as ‘avoidable insults to basic human needs’, I would suggest that our view of what is unethical should include ‘wanton neglect of’ the same. Yet what is avoidable or wanton will always be at issue. With the best will in the world, there will be limits to what can be done by any one nation at any one time and some disasters are not amenable to preventive or immediate effective intervention. Nonetheless, a policy of being proactive in helping to meet the needs of others would seem to be indicated by ‘ethical’ here.

The old debate about means and ends must be brought in here, too. Does the goal alone have to be ethical, or also the actions taken to achieve those goals? I would argue that goals and means should be judged by the same set of ethical principles. The actions taken for a particular purpose are in themselves ethical or unethical. For instance, using tactical nuclear weapons to ‘take out’ facilities that are seen as threatening the development of a nuclear weapons capacity would be unethical. And I would argue that just as the use of killing by a tyrant within a country to perpetuate his power is a violation of human rights and a denial of democracy, so concerted killing in wars against tyrants is a violation of human rights and an act of tyranny.

The moral dilemma comes when it appears that minor infringements of otherwise important ethical principles (such as those of not killing or torturing) might produce some major benefit. ‘Proportionality’ is, for instance, a ‘just war’ condition. And recent debates about torture have suggested that a little of it at judicious moments might do a lot of good. Many of us might agree that lying to a member of the Gestapo about harbouring fugitive Jews in your house would be ethical, although lying for narrow personal advantage would not. But are there some moral imperatives that are non-negotiable? I believe that the prohibition of gross infringements of human rights must be so, and that the principle purpose of ethical systems is to provide grounding constructive social living (not merely the good of souls): in itself a practical and necessary goal. It

¹ See Francis, Diana. *Rethinking War and Peace*. London: Pluto Press, 2004

is clear that even sincere commitment to ethical behaviour will not make for ready agreement in every case, but this should not be a pretext for giving up on ethics.

Then there is the overlapping dilemma of ‘competing goods’ (Isaiah Berlin’s term): for instance, those of security and freedom (much debated at present); or personal freedom and the common good; or the immediate needs of the poor and the long-term needs of the environment. Finding ways of doing things that transcend the dilemma may at times be possible. At other times some judicious and principled balancing will have to be done. But the ethical principles will remain as ‘goods’ to be pursued and not denied or contradicted.

These questions, just a few of the many that could be raised here, point to an enormous area for explanation if ‘ethical foreign policy’ is to be grounded in any common understanding.

Foreign

My OED says that ‘foreign’ means ‘dealing with matters concerning other countries’ (OED meaning 10). This sounds straight forward enough. But the ‘otherness’ resonances of ‘foreign’ are far reaching in their implications. ‘Foreigners’ are not of us – they are different and separate. They do not belong to the same collective and are not included in ‘the national interest’, that is, ‘our’ self-interest. Moreover, they are often not given the same moral status as ‘our own’. So the number of Iraqis who have died since the 2003 invasion is deemed unworthy of estimation, while the number of ‘our’ dead is constantly catalogued.

My idea of ethics includes altruism – putting other people’s needs before our own – and the idea of ‘the common good’. Our interest is included in the common interest but cannot override it. Can the common interest be confined to one’s own group? I would have thought that ‘the common good’ should not be so restricted. I admit that I find it ‘natural’ to care more about my family and friends than about anyone else. But my reason, imagination, compassion, belief system and will power enable me to go beyond that. And this, I believe, is the general human experience. It seems to me that the notion of ‘the national interest’ has no particular logic in ethics and lacks the emotional pull of direct, personal connectedness, which could be seen as having some useful social and therefore moral base. ‘The nation’ is a construct and a unit of organisation and (ideally) of political participation, but it is, I would argue, largely an ‘imagined community’², rather than a real, day to day one, based on living relationships and joint activities. As such, it could be replaced by a wider community of the imagination: that of human kind.

I do not want to be too pious here. I realise that self-interest plays a potent role in human motivation and relationships, mine included, and that awareness of it provides the reference point for understanding the needs and interests of others. But I do wonder how far it is for our common good, once we have left the world in which ‘us’ describes immediate, intimate connectedness, to be guided by such an arbitrary and divisive unit as ‘nation’ in our construction of collective interest. As the globe shrinks and the problems that threaten it expand to engulf it, national self-interest may be not only a notional but also a practical contradiction in terms. Current shifts in international economics threaten the old order. Military power, while militarism continues, is going to shift, too. Migration is a function of violence and inequality. Climate change threatens us all. Selfish behaviour in these circumstances not only demeans us but will not, beyond the very short term, produce for us the security and prosperity to which we are so passionately attached.

Moreover, the state is now transcended (and subverted) by many other organisations and systems, commercial and political. Many of these are designed to serve the interests of private ownership, and operate unethically. Others (like the UN) were founded to serve common interests but are hijacked by powerful factions or perform inadequately. Most, if not all, need to be curbed or transformed, in line with ethical policies.

It is necessary to have units for organisation and participation (direct and indirect). But the notion of 'nation', when based on ethnic identity, is problematic and the notion of 'state', as an alternative, is strongly associated with militarism. I would like to see the dominance of the 'nation state' in political organisation diminish and other concepts and units, both more local and more inclusive, take on greater importance. And I think that an ethical view would demand that the 'national interest', however described, is seen always in relation to the greater whole and considered in the light of the needs of others.

Policy

The policy of a government is (in theory at least) collectively (if largely indirectly) formulated, by people elected to represent the rest of us. (The weaknesses of UK electoral systems will not be discussed here.) Since the policies that are made by governments, and the way they are (or are not) implemented, have such an impact on people's lives, their nature is necessarily of great importance. Those of us who work in the field of conflict transformation have first hand knowledge of this. What we (and above all our partners) do is ethically understood and driven, and it is often obstructed, undermined or swept aside by what we would see as unethical action by our own and other governments.

The ultimate ethical arbiter must be the conscience of an individual human being, who may, quite properly I believe, choose to defy the state's legal requirements in a matter of conscience and commit acts of civil disobedience or resistance. Without individual ethical commitment, the corporate conscience will be weak. Nonetheless, we cannot separate the individual conscience from public affairs and political policies, for which we are all responsible. There must be some kind of collective influence exerted by a population on the policies produced by its politicians, if those policies are to be legitimate. And ethical centres of gravity do shift. Many things that were regarded as right and proper in the past (colonialism, slavery, torture and so on) are now seen as morally beyond the pale. Unfortunately, when they reappear in new guises they are not recognised and denounced for what they are. The special pleading of self-interest or appeals to the wider good are all too often used to mask them. Moral effort and challenge is an ongoing responsibility for us all.

In the prevailing discourse, war is taken for granted as 'part of life', a 'necessary evil', or an honourable and effective route to prestige and power. This is fundamental to existing foreign policy. Now there is a new debate about the 'responsibility to protect', and the role of armies in providing protection. And while that debate goes on, at the other end of the interventionist spectrum, there are widely differing public views on 'nuclear deterrence', or the incorporation of weapons of mass destruction into foreign policy. But broadly speaking there is little debate on these and other dimensions of international relations.

Policies do not exist separately from politicians. Ethical policies need to be enacted by people who are ethically motivated. It is hard to recognise any genuine ethical component in the UK government's foreign policy, as evidenced by recent action – despite the endless justifications for it. But was there a policy, agreed between relevant government departments, or were there only decisions, taken by the Prime Minister? Were those decisions determined by the belief that they were in the national interest or were they influenced by personal self-interest and ambition? We need to think about ethical psychology as well as policy. Perhaps changing norms and strengthening moral formation, at all levels of society, is what is most needed. If ethical appetite could be stimulated and a broader social consensus could be reached on what is ethical, there might be a better chance of creating ethical policy on international affairs that commands the respect of the population.

A prescription for change

Ethical policy on international affairs

In the first place, I would change the words and focus, from 'ethical foreign policy' to 'ethical policy on international affairs'. I believe that the word 'foreign' is so locked into the notion of national interest that it blocks thinking about ethics and perpetuates the idea that a nation can, ethically and successfully, separate its own wellbeing from that of others. I do not agree with these assumptions. I believe that the nature of our ethical understanding is fundamental to our human dignity, wellbeing and fulfilment and that humanity rather than nation needs to be at the heart of our approach to the ethics of international relations. I also believe that the big threats we currently face, as humankind, are international or global in nature and call for an international philosophical, relational and political response, which is based on and informs our responses at the personal level. Formulating 'ethical policy on international affairs' means applying ourselves to engagement with matters of mutual interest and influence, and recognition of international responsibility.

An international approach to policy is needed to address the problems of climate change, war and endemic violence, inequality and poverty (with all their effects on human wellbeing), oppression and discrimination. These problems cannot be addressed by the policy or action of any nation alone and solutions cannot be imposed. (Imposition itself is part of the problem.) They will require the co-ordinated efforts of all people and a reduction in the sense of separation that currently plays such a dominant role in the way we think about who we are and what we do. Ethical policy on international affairs will be grounded in the notion of an international community. This too will be a community of the imagination, but one with an ethical basis that could take us beyond the old self-interest.

International politics and dialogue

Unfortunately, the phrase 'the international community' is mainly used by a few powerful countries to refer to themselves, implying that they act on behalf of all right minded governments, rather than in their own interests. To reclaim the term will be extremely difficult, taking us far from the current reality of the domination by the few over the many. A radical change of will be needed and it is hard to see how the current structures are going to allow that. But it must be attempted. A global conversation is needed that will start a movement of ideas. And it should begin at home.

The simple maxim of 'do as you would be done by' might be the most effective starting point for this conversation, engaging the heart and imagination as well as the head. Global ethics can also be embodied in experimental action, which can communicate more than mere words about the ethos of human responsibility and the ways in which it can be expressed. Such action is the most effective counter to engrained theories and assumptions, and enables the realisation that there are indeed other ways of doing things. In our field of conflict transformation we encounter this kind of action. It is our job not only to assist it where we can but also to make it known, so that it makes its own contribution to transforming the way we do international politics.

Those of us who work with people in different countries, experimenting with them in creative ways of addressing violent conflict, and learning from and with them as we go, should be able to play a very specific role in developing transformative theory and building bridges between activists in different places.

Then local activists need to connect to and strengthen the already existing and growing international movements for change. In this way they will not only strengthen their own understanding and influence; they will also exemplify the global co-operation for the common good that they are seeking to promote.

Thirdly, it is vital to remember that politicians are also 'ordinary people' and susceptible to change, and that the systems within which they operate, which may present seemingly-intractable obstacles, are in fact created by human beings and can therefore be changed or replaced by them.

Creating broad movements that are both cohesive and un-bureaucratic, and that avoid quarrels and division, is, to say the least, a challenge. But experience of local activism has shown me that surprising coalitions are possible, and new international movements give hope. And I believe that human nature gives our species not only the potential to destroy our planet but also the moral, social and intellectual capacity to do what is needed to survive and to live creatively together. Time will tell, and our effort can make a difference.

Diana Francis

Democracies and armed conflict: towards defining an ethical foreign policy

by Michael Hammer¹

Ethical foreign policy – in the sense of a policy which defines the principles and practice of international relations based on the respect for human rights, international obligations, transparency and accountability – encompasses a whole range of areas of activity in which the state is involved internationally. But it is the response to armed conflict which is often the litmus test for the integrity and coherence of a nation's policy, in particular when it does NOT appear to directly affect the lives and wellbeing of its own population.

Traditionally, the engagement of a country in armed conflict has been considered a matter of foreign policy – foreign as opposed to domestic – and it is often governed by a set of different approaches, and certainly by different bodies and people compared to those involved in the governance of domestic affairs. However, more recently and in the light of significant discrepancies between public opinion and government policy on armed conflict, people in Britain have expressed a particular desire that foreign policy should be informed by ethical principles.²

In 1997 the then new Labour government announced, with a certain fanfare, that its foreign policy would have 'ethical dimensions'³, rejecting the previous primarily utilitarian approach to it. Indeed, the then Foreign Secretary Robin Cook proceeded to make significant changes, including instituting a review of how far existing policy conformed with Britain's international obligations. However, the years since Cook left office have seen a complete turnaround in goals and approaches. The current British government's statements clearly set out the purpose of making the 'projection of power' the central plank of its foreign policy⁴. As a result, it is arguably as far away from having a foreign policy with 'ethical dimensions' as its predecessors.

The move away from the principles set out in 1997, and the lack of response to the deep unease about current goals and activities in relation to armed conflict, such as in the Middle East, within a large section of the British public, and amongst parliamentarians and neighbours in Europe,

¹ Michael Hammer is Executive Director of the One World Trust, London. The article represents the views of the author only.

² ICM Research, commissioned by Democratic Audit, Federal Trust and One World Trust, interviewed a random sample of 1007 adults aged 18+ by telephone between 13 -15 January 2006. Interviews were conducted across the country and the results have been weighted to the profile of all adults. ICM is a member of the British Polling Council and abides by its rules. Further information can be found at www.icmresearch.co.uk

³ First introduced into the British debate by the late Robin Cook's speech on 12 May 1997 which promised to put human rights at the heart of foreign policy, secure the respect of other nations for Britain's contribution to keeping the peace of the world and promoting democracy around the world.

⁴ Illustrated by Tony Blair's emphasis given to '... a British foreign policy [which] is prepared to project hard as well as soft power ...' in his 12 January 2007 speech on the role of the UK's Armed Forces in the 21st century.

demonstrate that a singular focus on goals in foreign policy, which even today often remain cloaked in human rights language, is not enough to ensure the necessary accountability of the policies. Experience in the UK parliamentary system shows⁵ that parliament cannot exercise effective oversight in this critical area as long as foreign policy remains the domain of the executive branch of government, protected under the Royal Prerogative. Strengthening parliamentary oversight including through reform of the Royal Prerogative, however, is primarily a matter of process as a focus on the goals alone will not be sufficient to ensure the accountability of policies eventually put into practice. Such processes need to encompass consultation and decision-making in defining, implementing and evaluating policies.⁶

There have undoubtedly been powerful attempts by some governments over the last six years to roll back rights, accountability, and multilateralism in global governance. However, there are signs that this approach will not last. Key for this more optimistic outlook is that the distinction between what is foreign and what is domestic in politics and policy, is becoming increasingly blurred, in a globalised world characterised by migration, information exchange and diversity of the heritage of citizens in many countries.

This strengthens the argument for promoting processes of political accountability which apply in similar ways to decision making in both fields. Changing the parameters that underlie the decision making process on foreign policy to ones that are in many ways already applied to internal affairs would be one step towards ensuring that the process delivers results that could be considered ethical, not only when matters close to home are being considered and evaluated, but also external affairs.

Key elements to consider would include:

Effective parliamentary oversight of governments regarding the use of force

The political processes used in most states regarding the use of force are focused either on internal affairs, such as policing, or on the protection of national integrity, leaving war, when apparently not directly affecting national territory or population, to executive government. However, this separation of spheres of influence is becoming more tenuous, with the increasing integration of affairs in a globalised world. Today, external policy impacts directly on internal affairs, on the economy, on individuals and on community relations. This makes it necessary for parliaments, in particular, to exercise oversight of the use of force in relation not only to internal affairs and territorial integrity but also to its use abroad. In concrete terms, the debate and formal decision to go to war should be a power of Parliament and not of the executive.

Acceptance of multilateral authority for international responses to armed conflict or widespread and systematic human rights abuse

The principles established under the terms of the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, namely recognition of the absolute sovereignty of governments over their own territory and population, and non-interference in a state's internal affairs, were dominant right through the Cold War. However, today this approach to national sovereignty is being increasingly challenged, on the grounds that governments should be accountable internationally for policies affecting their own citizens, and may be legitimately subjected to international sanctions or intervention where they grossly violate the human rights of their citizens. International human rights standards, humanitarian law and the emerging doctrine of the 'responsibility to protect' are clear expressions of this trend. Any sanctions associated with such accountability, however, can only acquire legitimacy if they are not

⁵ See Burall, S.; Weir, S; Donnelly, B., eds. (2006): *Not in Our Name: Democracy and Foreign Policy in the UK*, London, Politicos

⁶ The One World Trust, Democratic Audit and the Federal Trust argue that Parliament should have continuous involvement in the policy process, not just conducting ex post scrutiny but also engaging in larger decisions at an earlier point in the process.

seen as the outcome of the decisions of individual nations or limited coalitions but result from wider multilateral debate and due process in decision-making. This is particularly clear from cases such as Iraq, Darfur, and the 2006 Lebanon cease fire process. Parliaments need to be able to oversee, and if necessary direct, the initiatives of governments to ensure that they work through multilateral authority in responding to armed conflict abroad or widespread and systematic abuses of human rights.

Recourse to international law and judicial process for review of decisions

The principle of access to justice is well established in internal affairs, not only regarding individual cases but also, by means of judicial review, of policy processes, where these are seen to be in violation of established interpretation or obligations to individuals and groups. On external affairs, accountability to international human rights standards and humanitarian law often remains elusive in practice because of the lack of political support from international courts and governments. The clearest case of this is the failure of the USA to ratify the Rome Statutes of the International Criminal Court, arguing that US citizens should be exempt from its jurisdiction. Other instances include the essentially consensus-based operation of tribunals such as the International Court for the Law of the Sea or the International Court of Justice, which require acceptance of its adjudication by all parties to the dispute on a case-by-case basis. If actors at the international level could be effectively held to account in law for their actions, this would provide an additional option for challenging and reviewing the policies of individual nations or other powerful global institutions.

Conclusion

Even a brief review of statements by the leadership of some of the world's most powerful countries, such as the USA and the UK, about the goals of their foreign policy, shows a continuing drive to erode the achievements of decades of international efforts to establish standards of good practice in international affairs. Ethical principles which, for a short period of time in the 1990s, appeared to have a chance of taking hold have been abandoned. The limitation of these principles to the level of goals left them vulnerable to abuse. Thus, changes in international accountability, in the language of human rights, and in the way sovereignty is interpreted coincided with a shift to a unilateralist approach to the use of force at the international level and a return to a utilitarian approach in foreign policy. In addition to the efforts needed to rebuild trust and strengthen international frameworks to secure the realisation of rights and responsibilities, national parliaments need to develop processes of policy making and oversight to help ensure that external policy is based on ethical principles.

Parliamentarians and others involved in formal control of executive government decision-making, in relation to the global public sphere, need to review their approaches and claim at least the same rights and role in the oversight of external policy that they already exercise with regard to internal affairs, precisely because the distinction between what is foreign and what is domestic does not match the realities of advancing globalisation. The response to armed conflict is a particular test for the application of ethical principles in external affairs. Critical elements which national political processes ought to incorporate regarding external policy-making include parliamentary oversight of the use of force, acceptance of multilateral authority for decisions on international responses to armed conflict or the systematic abuse of human rights and strengthening institutions like the International Criminal Court so that a wider range of policies could be subjected to judicial scrutiny and, where appropriate, condemned as contrary to international law.

Michael Hammer

Why I am joining the nonviolent blockade at Faslane

Statement by Michael Randle at the Academics' Seminar and Blockade at Faslane, 7 January 2007

The crucial question is a moral one. As my late friend and colleague, Pat Pottle, put it to Air Commodore Magill at the Old Bailey trial of himself and five other members of the Committee of 100, including myself, in 1962 – ‘Would you press the button that you know is going to annihilate millions of people?’ To this the Air Commodore replied frankly – ‘If the circumstances so demanded it, I would.’

Magill’s reply exposes the intellectual dishonesty of those who assert that nuclear weapons are not for use but simply for deterrence – a claim made by spokespersons for successive British and other governments before and since that time. The doctrine and policy of nuclear deterrence depends on having not only the necessary weapons but also a body of people trained to obey unconditionally the order to unleash them. Anyone not prepared – at least in principle – to give the same answer as the Air Commodore has no moral or political right to support reliance on nuclear weapons.

Because the end of the Cold War has removed the imminent danger of a nuclear world war, and because nuclear weapons have not been used since the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, many people and governments have become complacent. That complacency is now being challenged by the spread of nuclear weapons, and their likely acquisition by states seen as unstable, or hostile to Western interests. But what is needed now is not simply an awareness of the danger to ourselves of nuclear proliferation, but a renewed sense of outrage at the idea of using nuclear weapons against our fellow human beings under any circumstances.

This does not mean it is sufficient to establish that moral imperative. If nuclear disarmament is to become a reality, the political, strategic and legal arguments put forward by supporters of nuclear deterrence have to be confronted on their own terms, and alternative security policies expounded. Academics, public intellectuals, lawyers and peace activists have been engaged in that task over several decades, as too have some statesmen and women conscious of the precariousness of civilisation and perhaps ultimately human existence in the nuclear age. However, whilst the consequences of particular strategic choices can never be predicted with absolute certainty, there is no doubt at all about the effect of launching an attack with nuclear weapons. How can any strategic calculation, fallible by its very nature, justify the manufacture and deployment of weapons whose use would constitute such an appalling crime against humanity? This is the context in which any discourse about nuclear weapons has to be situated.

Moving to a consideration of the British position, the arguments for it to have its own nuclear weapons have always been particularly weak. The decision to manufacture them was taken in secret by the Attlee government in 1947 for reasons relating to prestige and an illusion about Britain’s place in the post-war world rather than to any consideration of national security as such. (It is worth recalling that the Soviet Union did not test its first atomic bomb until 1949.) And the principal assumption during the Cold War years that there were circumstances in which Britain might use its nuclear arsenal against the Soviet Union at a time when the US was unwilling to do so was never convincing.

Today Britain’s continued nuclear posture makes even less sense. The argument that it enables the country to ‘punch above its weight’ is an open invitation to all other states with similar ambitions to follow Britain’s lead. The argument that it needs to retain nuclear weapons to protect itself against possible future threats in an uncertain world is again equally available to other states and contributes substantially to that very uncertainty. Britain lacks all credibility and authority in opposing nuclear proliferation – the outstanding threat to the future peace of the world – as long as it retains its own weapons. In opting to upgrade its nuclear arsenal, and in all likelihood deploying a

new Trident system, it is also in breach of the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty under which it and all the then existing nuclear powers undertook to negotiate in good faith to achieve nuclear disarmament.

In this situation concerned citizens are under an obligation to act against the policies of their government not only through the normal constitutional channels but also, depending on individual circumstances, by means of nonviolent direct action. That is why I am joining other academics and researchers in Faslane today to discuss with them the issues involved, to obstruct the work of the base, however briefly, and to try by means of this direct action to stimulate a more profound consideration of Britain's nuclear stance and of the decisions that are being contemplated.

Michael Randle

CCTS: Participating Organisations

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Quaker Peace & Social Witness, London
Responding to Conflict, Birmingham
War Resisters International, London
Centre for Peace & Reconciliation Studies,
Coventry University
St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and
Peace, London
International Alert, London
Peace Direct
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