

U.K.'s decision to increase nuclear warhead stockpile cap defies logic

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British Prime Minister Boris Johnson says the move will allow the U.K. to amass an nuclear arsenal the size of France's, which is rumoured to possess approximately 300 nuclear warheads. *Photograph courtesy of Wikimedia Commons*

The U.K. government's [recent decision to increase](#) its nuclear warhead stockpile cap to 260 from 180 nuclear weapons defies logical comprehension, and is dismaying UN supporters worldwide. Many hoped the 2020 UN Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference—

rescheduled because of the pandemic to take place for 4 weeks this August in New York City—might be more of a success than the last debacle in 2015. But now the nuclear non-proliferation regime is under an even greater threat with the U.K.'s announcement that it intends to increase its arsenal by 40 per cent.

Held every five years, the NPT Review Conference is an important venue for all 191 states bound to the longest-serving nuclear arms control treaty that negotiates cuts. More countries have ratified the NPT than any other arms control and disarmament agreement.

The U.K. could become a nuclear pariah state, except that the British people, by a majority, do not want to spend billions of pounds, and violate international law. Beset by the coronavirus and the costs of Brexit, they have set their face against siding with Scotland and its people, its government and its Parliament, which have sought to entirely rid themselves of the U.K. nuclear arsenal, stationed in its entirety on Scottish soil and waters. It leaves one to wonder what the average Briton must think? As they sip their tea, surely they must now ponder a future of their nation with an ever-reducing credibility on the international stage.

It may feel like it, but the Queen and Prince Philip cannot live forever, nor can outdated ideas about nuclear deterrence—not in a world where the idea that one nation can annihilate billions of people on the planet defies logic. Gone are the days of Empire, and a Commonwealth, where decisions made in the City of Westminster were accepted unquestioningly as logical and true.

Instead, we are in a world where Meghan Markle, married to a British prince, can credibly run for U.S. president in 2024. We are in a world where a nation that intended to spend billions on modernizing its nuclear weapons voted out its president and installed a wiser, careful man who is already approaching Russia to restart arms-control negotiations, and revisit a comprehensive deal with Iran.

Former U.S. president Donald Trump dealt the doctrine of nuclear deterrence a severe blow when he mused publicly about bombing North Korea, and how his nukes were bigger than Kim Jong-un's. Their rhetoric about who had a bigger button on his desk was childish, and antiquarian. Further, by throwing out the historic Iran deal, Trump made the world a more destabilised place. But now British Prime Minister Boris Johnson—like a petulant Trumpian love-child who wants to retain membership in the bigger kids' nuclear club—has issued his own declaration that Britain will approach the arsenal-size of France, rumoured to possess approximately 300 nuclear warheads. This means that the other members of the nuclear club, China, with its 350 nuclear warheads, and India and Pakistan, with approximately 100 each, can confidently brandish their own nuclear weapons at this year's NPT conference, while the rest of the world looks on in disbelief.

But nations are no longer feeling cowed into standing by in silence, because 86 signatories and 54 parties have signed the new UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons that bans nuclear weapons under international law. Moreover, [Article VI of the NPT](#) binds signatory states to pursue negotiations in good faith towards nuclear disarmament—yet the U.K. seems to be fully intent on being in full breach of these such treaties.

The Westminster government is defying international law— and its own public's on-record majority opinion against nuclear weapons—as well as provoking the Scottish people, all of which it will regret. The likely outcome will be a bifurcated British Isles with Scotland, Ireland, and perhaps Wales going their own separate ways. Scotland has promised not to join a nuclear-NATO, leading to a decrease in the nuclear alliance's number and credibility.

Extended deterrence will continue to be questioned, and fears of abandonment and entrapment will heighten as the illogic of Britain's decision reaches general publics across the world. This week's decision

seems to have no rhyme or reason except that it reflects an undemocratic toxicity reflected by the U.K.'s Conservative cabinet caucus—now strutting post-imperially outside of the EU.

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