

UK Breaks Law on Nukes: Boris Johnson Announced a 40% Increase in Britain's Nuclear Arsenal

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Yesterday Boris Johnson announced a 40% increase in Britain's nuclear arsenal.

Today the arsenal stands at around 200 nuclear warheads. Each is about 8 times the power of the Hiroshima bomb which killed over 200,000 people. That's a killing capacity of hundreds of millions. How can Johnson conceivably justify that arsenal, never mind increasing it?

A key question being asked across media and parliament is: Is it legal?

The answer is a resounding No. Increasing Britain's nuclear arsenal contravenes our legal obligations under the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which Britain ratified in 1970. The Treaty requires countries that have nuclear weapons to disarm, and those that don't have them not to get them. There is no way in which increasing a nuclear arsenal is legitimate under the Treaty.

But it's not just new warheads that are illegal, it's the whole Trident replacement project as well. When Blair's government was first pursuing Trident replacement in 2005, Matrix Chambers gave a legal opinion which found that the replacement of Trident would be a material breach of the Treaty because it requires 'each of the parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament.'

So not only are additional warheads illegal, but Trident replacement is illegal, and the failure to disarm our existing nuclear weapons contravenes the Treaty.

Bizarrely, British governments always assert their unflinching commitment to the NPT, and the Integrated Review is no exception. It states: 'We are strongly committed to full implementation of the NPT in all its aspects, including nuclear disarmament'.

Sadly, that's just not true. Indeed our government – with all its Review's talk of the 'rules-based order', the super soft power of the BBC, its leadership in diplomacy – completely ignores the Treaty, and its decision this week has fired a Trident missile through any

pretence at fulfilling its legal obligations. It has racheted up global tensions, presumably to reinforce Johnson's image of a 'global Britain', punching above its weight and being a force in the world.

Despite its non-compliance with the Treaty, the Review is quick to assert that 'there is no credible alternative route to nuclear disarmament' except the NPT. This is a thinly veiled reference to the government's hostility to the UN's new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons which came into force in January. The government's decision to increase its nuclear arsenal very clearly demonstrates why so many countries – largely from the global south – have given up hope in the NPT process which has been rendered meaningless by the actions of states such as ours.

Johnson's decision to increase Britain's nuclear arsenal is a serious problem. It's not just that we would rather the money was spent on something more useful; or that this flagrant breach of the NPT may encourage others to pursue nuclear weapons; it's a question of what kind of world we want to see, what role we want Britain to play and what it actually stands for. Rearming with weapons of mass destruction is not something that we can accept.

We must find it in ourselves to reject the dangerous humbug the government spouts about nuclear weapons, their claim that 'the UK will continue to work internationally to reduce the risk of nuclear conflict and enhance mutual trust and security'. This is just nonsense and we know it. I urge everyone to [join CND](#) and get active: this is getting out of hand.

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