

Nuclear insanity

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As the Guardian reports in its morning briefing today:

Britain is lifting the cap on the number of Trident nuclear warheads it can stockpile [from 180 to 260](#), Boris Johnson is expected to announce today, ending 30 years of gradual disarmament. A leaked copy of the defence and foreign policy review paves the way for a £10bn rearmament. Britain has far fewer warheads stockpiled than Russia, estimated to have 4,300, the US on 3,800 or China, which has about 320.

I confess I wonder how far my heart can sink on occasion.

I should put my cards face up on the table. As a teenager during the Cold War I decided that nothing could ever justify the use of nuclear weapons. My opinion has never changed.

As a (although at present, not often practicing) member of the Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers) I, perhaps unsurprisingly, think that there are almost always better ways to solve disputes than through conflict.

But let's also be clear that this decision has nothing to do with either issue. No one, at least in their right minds, thinks that the UK's nuclear weapons are for use. Instead this is all about post-Brexit posturing to the world to suggest that despite alienating almost everyone, and despite having no influence of any sort left anywhere, Britain remains a world power.

The message could not be more inappropriately delivered in that case. What we come across as is a small country struggling to be noticed that has to make a nuclear threat for anyone to pay attention. The message could not be clearer that we are now playing in the lower echelons of the world defence league.

Apart from some nuclear-crazies in the Conservative Party no one will be in the least bit fooled by this message. But billions will be wasted, nuclear waste will be created, a dangerous precedent of reversing disarmament will have been set, and the world will be more in safe, all for no gain.

If the UK was wise now (and but isn't) it would be pursuing a very different foreign policy, based on that of Norway. That country does punch above its weight. It has a strong foreign policy based on aid. It uses that to build strong diplomatic links around the world. And in the process it works, quietly, on conflict resolution.

That's the way foreign policy should be done. We are just aggressively waving colonial flags. And that's a disaster as well as being nuclear insanity.