

Consideration of the Government's White Paper

"The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent", December 2006.

1. Summary

This submission makes brief reference to the general content of the White Paper, but focuses specifically on elements of the White Paper relevant to the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Aldermaston, and in particular, Chapter 7, warhead replacement.

Aldermaston Women's Peace Campaign (AWPC) will argue that the Defence White Paper fails to reveal the true extent of the Government's progress on developing a successor system; that it asks parliament to approve in principle the development of a new warhead without giving any details about the programme; while having already made the decision in advance of the debate.

We are submitting this evidence in the tradition of the Greenham women who contributed to nuclear disarmament, as enshrined in the 1987 INF Treaty.

We note that the promised consultation of the future of Trident has not taken place; that this Select Committee is not part of any official consultation, and that the UK Government have taken measures to prevent lawful and peaceful protest at AWE Aldermaston.

2. Recommendations

Aldermaston Women's Peace Campaign (AWPC) are calling on the government to come clean on the fact that at AWE Aldermaston, the Ministry of Defence has already started work to build facilities to test, design and build new warheads, in advance of any parliamentary decision.

Although we at AWPC see the debate as a 'done deal', we continue to call for an open and transparent *public* debate on whether nuclear weapons provide us with the security we really need.

AWPC calls for a halt for all building work at AWE Aldermaston until such time that the British people are given the opportunity to inform to the government whether they really want a new generation of nuclear weapons.

3. General Comments

While AWPC welcomes the publication of the White Paper in setting out the Government's intentions with regard to the replacement of Trident, we note that there is no accompanying process to ensure the promised public debate.

With regard to the forthcoming parliamentary debate, we note that:

1. The White Paper was published in advance of the conclusion of the DSC's series of inquiries.
2. Although several options are discussed in the White Paper, they are not presented as choices; all options not favoured by the government are dismissed.
3. There is no consideration of the option not to replace Trident.
4. There is a failure to abide by the letter and spirit of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

4. Introduction

AWPC condemn the Government's White Paper for its commitment to retaining a UK nuclear weapons system and for its failure to come clean about measures the government has already taken at AWE Aldermaston to build new facilities to test, design and build a new generation of nuclear warheads.

In this submission, and in our previous submissions to this committee, we have shown that the financial commitment already made at AWE Aldermaston is unrelated to the continued maintenance of the extant stockpile ("stockpile stewardship"), but relates to the construction of new facilities. Through references to AWE ML's public statements and publications, and other documents already in the public domain, we have demonstrated that a substantial investment has already been made in facilities, and in the recruitment of staff, which will allow the development of a new warhead system.

We note that in their previous report, the committee noted that they were "less convinced that the investment in the new Orion laser, the supercomputer and hydrodynamics facilities could not

have waited for a decision in principle on the future of the UK's nuclear deterrent" [\[1\]](#).

We again argue that the Government should inform parliament and the DSC about the detail of their financial and contractual commitments already undertaken at AWE Aldermaston [\[2\]](#), and that those details should have been included in the White Paper.

5. Warhead replacement

Although the White Paper proposes in section 7 a decision in principle to replace the Trident Warhead after 2025 [\[3\]](#), it gives no detail about the plans for the design, capacity and killing power of the warheads proposed. The Government is, in effect, asking Parliament to consent, in both policy and financial terms, to an unknown.

We submit that although the Government state that the decision on warhead replacement does not need to be made until the next parliament, they have advanced plans, as we have shown in our two previous submissions, and AWE Aldermaston is already at an advanced prototyping stage. [\[4\]](#)

In section 7 of the White Paper, the Government states "Decisions on whether and how we may need to refurbish or replace this warhead are likely to be necessary in the next parliament." Given that work had already started at Aldermaston when the government was stating in its December 2003 White Paper that "Decisions on whether to replace Trident are not needed this Parliament but are likely to be required in the next one", it seems likely that by the next Parliament, work will be at such an advanced stage that Parliament will merely be required to rubberstamp a decision made years previously. [\[5\]](#)

It is clear from the timeline [\[6\]](#) that the death-span of the current warhead will last until the 2020s, when the new submarines and the life-extended missiles will be built. Although the Government say they will not have decided on the warheads until the next Parliament, this decision has already been made: in the commitment to a new delivery platform; in the declared intention of producing new missiles "in collaboration with the US"; the warheads too, will be produced in conjunction with the US, as was the Trident system, under the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement. So, we wonder, where are the details?

6. Decision Making

The decision to replace Trident missiles, and or the Trident system, was flagged up in the 1998 Strategic Defence Review. However, in March 2000, shortly before taking their contract to run AWE, Dr John Rae (Chief Executive, AWE ML) told the AWE Local Liaison Committee that, "Having decided to make the UK deterrent smaller MoD expects a lower cost, therefore the funding from MoD will come down to a level which allows the programme to be delivered. As a rough guide there will be a 1/3 reduction in staff and funding will be reduced on a similar basis."[\[7\]](#) It would therefore appear that some time between March 2000 and July 2002, the decision to build new warheads was made, and subsequently confirmed in the publication of AWE Aldermaston's Site Development Strategy Plan.[\[8\]](#) The extension AWE ml's contract to 25 years was announced in early 2003.

In our two previous submissions, we presented evidence to inform the committee about the nature and extent of investment at AWE Aldermaston, arguing that it far exceeded that required for stewardship of the extant stockpile and indicated that the Government has already made substantial progress in making decisions critical to the development of a successor to the present system.

We suggest that Government's claim that no decision has been taken on whether to replace the warhead or not to replace them is not true.

The Site Development Strategy Plan in both July 2002, as updated in and fleshed out more fully in the Site Development Context Plan[\[9\]](#) set out plans to construct a range of facilities which are now recognised by most professionals and experts working in this field to be unnecessary solely for maintenance of the current system, but essential for the development of a new weapons system.[\[10\]](#)

We suggest that the Government have taken a pragmatic approach to the truth where the decision-making process is concerned. Where Watergate gave us the non-denial denial, John Reid, in his previous role as Defence Secretary, has given us the non-decision decision, as the following illuminating statement reveals:

"My hon. Friend posits something that envisages a qualitative and quantifiable watershed between the maintenance of facilities, whereby they are updated and rendered continually safe so that our existing nuclear deterrent is made more effective, and, a new weapon. The world does not work like that [...] I do not think that the world develops like that. The reality is that the

preparations necessary to maintain a nuclear deterrent in a safe condition, which is constantly updated to meet new threats in terms of accuracy and new technology, are an integral part of what might become-I do not say will become-one possible avenue for one of the many alternatives that we might have to consider if are going to update, replace or modernise our nuclear deterrent. That is as honest an answer as I can give to my hon. Friend. In the real world, there is no such complete gap."[\[11\]](#)

Influences on decision-making

The decision-making process in relation to the procurement of a new warhead system is subject to external pressures including the relationship between the UK and USA under the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement, and significant commercial interests.

In para. 7-3, the Government state, that the "[Trident] warhead was designed and manufactured in the UK by AWE, although it was decided that it would be more cost effective to procure certain non-nuclear components of the warhead from the United States".

What they do not state is that the UK version of the Trident warhead is based on a US system and was produced in conjunction with the US, although the White Paper acknowledges in sections 4-7, that it makes no sense to be operationally independent from the US, and it would make sense to carry on in the same way.

All UK nuclear weapons have since 1958 been developed by AWE Aldermaston in conjunction with their colleagues at US nuclear establishments and, as have we have previously reported, scientific and other collaboration continues through regular visits and exchanges. We note in particular, collaboration, in both 2005 and in 2006 on subcritical warhead tests[\[12\]](#). The nature of these collaborations has already been presented to you in detail in previous sessions.[\[13\]](#)

We note that the White Paper was published one week before a US Freedom of Information inquiry revealed evidence of the United States assistance in the development of its nuclear warheads. According to the recently released document, half of the tests conducted between 1999 and 2001 at US laboratories were to assist with Britain's Trident system. Although claims that the weapons were designed in Britain, the tests conducted used the American W-76 submarine based warhead.

Commenting on this, a spokesperson for the Federation of American Scientists said, "This FoI document links the British warhead design directly with the nukes carried on US ballistic missile boats, despite the claim by the British government only last week in its white paper on the future of nuclear deterrence that its

own warheads were designed and manufactured in the UK." [\[14\]](#)

On 7 January 2007 the *New York Times* reported that the US Government was likely to announce its intention to pursue a new warhead programme the following week. Estimated to cost up to US\$100bn, Presidential authorisation would be required in the next 1-2 years, reportedly, engineering would begin in 2010 and warheads would be apparently in production by 2012. [\[15\]](#) A happy coincidence for the US, were they to wish to take advantage of the sparkling new facilities at the Orion laser facility - due to be commissioned between 2008 and 2012.

Evidence we have previously put before the committee also suggests that the decisions which have already made have been fuelled by commercial interests rather than by the national interest [\[16\]](#). For example, we remind the committee one of the responsibilities of a "Lead Systems Engineer" which AWE are advertising is to "attempt to influence the MoD on warhead options". [\[17\]](#)

Timescale

Work on the construction of the new Orion laser has been progressing throughout 2006; AWE have recently purchased the world's most advanced supercomputer (co-developed by Sandia National Laboratories in the US); submitted to West Berkshire District council for consideration on 22 January 2007 plans for a £60 million office building to house some of the 1,200 new staff it is currently recruiting; entered into contracts with hundreds of private companies; and will shortly submit plans for the construction of a new hydrodynamics facility. According to AWE ml - who manage the site for the government - the new developments are expected to be on the scale of Terminal 5 at Heathrow.

By the next Parliament, the Orion laser will have been commissioned, and - according to documents published by AWE [2 SCCP] many of the new facilities planned at AWE, (and which experts agree would only be necessary for the production of a new warhead, will have been built.

7. Costs

In section 5-11, Costs and Funding, the WP estimates "£2-3 billion for the possible future refurbishment or replacement of the warhead".

AWPC does not consider this is an accurate reflection of the true costs.

It appears that, if a decision has not yet been made on refurbishment or replacement, this £2-3 billion must be in addition to the costs estimated in section 5-13, identified for continuing the "programme of investment in sustaining capabilities at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), both to ensure we can maintain the existing warhead for as long as necessary and to enable us to develop a replacement warhead if that is required."

Additional funding for Aldermaston was announced in 2005, as a one-off investment over three years.[\[18\]](#) This has to date averaged £350 million per annum over the years 2005/06 and 2007/08. However the White Paper states that - rather than as originally claimed - that there will be further investment, likely to cost "the equivalent of about 3% of the current defence budget (compared to about 2.5% today)"

In addition to the above, the current 25 year contract held by AWE ml until 2025 to run AWE Aldermaston, runs at £5.3 billion.

So is the estimated £2-3 billion is in addition to the normal operational costs of running Aldermaston? - (which include maintaining the current warhead stockpile and transporting the current warheads back and forth from Aldermaston to Coulport for refurbishment).

As acknowledged in section 5-14 of the White Paper, once the warheads are built, further costs will be incurred to maintain the warheads and presumably continue to transport them back and forth between Aldermaston and Coulport for refurbishment.

According to reports in the national media, industry analysts are expecting an investment at AWE of around £12bn over the next 12 years.[\[19\]](#) However, the government will not give any figures beyond 2007 until after the next Comprehensive Spending Review.

8. Legality

"Our decision to maintain the deterrent is fully compatible with all our international legal obligations."

AWPC considers the designing, testing and building of new nuclear warheads to be in breach of our international treaty obligations and sets a very bad example to the rest of the world. The Government claims that, "Britain continues to set an example for others to follow in our commitment to work towards a peaceful, fairer and safer world without nuclear weapons." This is more than

disingenuous, it is a lie.

For legal obligations under the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) we refer you to Philippe Sands' recent opinion[\[20\]](#); for the relationship between the Mutual Defence Agreement and obligations under the NPT, see Christine Chinkin and Rabinder Singh.[\[21\]](#)

We also note that the White Paper continuously refers to the need to have nuclear weapons "to safeguard our vital interests". It does not once refer to the need for nuclear weapons for "self-defence", the only condition under which the ICJ was divided in its opinion on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons. A minority of the judges considered it might possibly be legal to use nuclear weapons in self-defence. [\[22\]](#)

To justify nuclear weapons a climate of fear has to be created which is damaging in itself and destructive to our international relations, including on non-nuclear states and those who the government condemns for apparently wanting to develop their own. .

We also consider that by developing the technology (the Orion laser) to test a weapon in conditions replicating a nuclear explosion, the UK government would also be in violation of the spirit of the CTBT (of which it is a founding signatory)

9. Real security

As some of the women who contributed to nuclear disarmament, as enshrined in the 1987 INF Treaty, through protest at Greenham Common, we note that the government have been forced to rake up decades old Cold War arguments to support the proposals contained in the White Paper.

The Government is asking us to imagine a hypothetical enemy appearing suddenly at any point in the next 50 years even though they agree that the scenario they are "insuring" against is highly improbable. The idea that if we cannot guarantee that a ridiculously unlikely event may happen we have to take extraordinarily dangerous and costly measures - which there is no likelihood would address the imagined threat - is dangerous. The government can justify almost any amount of political repression or aggressive military action using the imaginary mythical enemy.

Time has moved on, security threats are completely different. We therefore suggest that the debate is widened to include alternative notions of security, based on the experience and

thinking of women in the global south - for whom security means access to water, to housing, to health, to education and to be free of violence.

For 22 years we have held a monthly camp outside the fence at AWE Aldermaston.

We are a witness to their preparations for war crimes. We watch their contractors coming and going - building the new facilities.

We watch their nuclear warhead convoys setting off to transport their deadly loads to Coulport (something which creates insecurity and environmental hazards on a constant basis on UK's busiest roads).

We see increased police and military protection of nuclear weapons, and its impact on the public in the immediate area surrounding AWE's Aldermaston and Burghfield, Devonport, Faslane and Coulport as well as every area the warheads are transported through.

In order to possess and deploy nuclear weapons, the UK Government has to interfere with the public's freedom of movement, expression and privacy. In particular, this government, through the MoD, is actively seeking to deny the right to any form of peaceful protest at AWE Aldermaston in violation of the provisions of the Human Rights Act through the proposed introduction - outside of any parliamentary scrutiny - of bylaws which prohibit leafleting, demonstrations and meetings outside AWE Aldermaston. [\[23\]](#)

Endnote

We congratulate the Defence Select Committee in inviting AWPC to attend the hearing, and in so doing, acknowledge women's work for peace at all levels, in the UK and internationally.

Britain's possession of nuclear weapons damages us ethically, spiritually and psychologically. The effects of possessing nuclear weapons will impact the thinking of both the threatened - and the aggressors - creating further insecurity in the world. Given that nuclear weapons are generally considered to be illegal under international humanitarian law, upgrading and expanding the facilities at Aldermaston "normalises" what should be inconceivable - a factory for indiscriminate weapons of mass destruction.

If the PM has to plant a few trees to offset the environmental damage of his overseas holidays, what can we expect him to do to offset the environmental impact of developing the next generation of UK nuclear weapons?

16 January 2007

[1] DSC, Fourth Report, Recc.25, page 42

[2] Ev 91 - 99: Memorandum from the Aldermaston Women's Peace Campaign,
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmsselect/cmdfence/59/59.pdf>

[3] White Paper Table 7.1

[4] See <http://physicsweb.org/jobs/jobdetail/6853>

[5] p. 9, Delivering Security in a Changing World, Defence White Paper December 2003

[6] 2006 White Paper Table 7.1, p. 30

[7]

http://www.awe.co.uk/main_site/about_awe/community/local_liason_committee/index.html

[8] See

http://www.awe.co.uk/main_site/scientific_and_technical/publications/Strategy_Plans/index.html

[9] AWE Aldermaston and Burghfield, Site Development Context Plan 2005 - 2015, November 2005 (public http link removed)

[10] See, for example, evidence presented to the fourth DSC by Scottish CND, Ev. 99- Ev. 101.

[11] John Reid, Defence debate, House of Commons, 18 May 2005

[12] See, for example,

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,2087-2081514,00.html> on the 2006 Krakatoa test

[13] See for example, submissions to fourth DSC by Dan Plesch (Ev. 105) and Scottish CND (Ev. 99-101).

[14] See

<http://www.wagingpeace.org/menu/resources/sunflower/index.htm#b2> and "US Trident tests cast doubt over UK design claims," *The Herald*, 12 December 2006.

[15] *NYTimes* report, 7 January 2007. See <http://tinyurl.com/yz8hzm>

[16] Ev. 91 - 99: Memorandum from the Aldermaston Women's Peace Campaign,
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmsselect/cmdfence/59/59.pdf>

[17] https://careers.awe.co.uk/wd/plsql/wd_pds?p_web_page_id=30297

[18] John Reid, Written Ministerial Statement in Commons 19 July, 2005 (Hansard Volume No. 436, Part No. 36, Column 59WS)

[19] See, for example, *Daily Mail*, 13 December 2006. See http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=422489&in_page_id=1770)

[20] *The United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent: current and future issues of legality*, Philippe Sands, November 2006. See <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk/MultimediaFiles/Live/FullReport/8072.pdf>

[21], "*The Maintenance and Possible Replacement of the Trident Nuclear Missile System*". Rabinder Singh QC and Professor Christine Chinkin (LSE), December 2005. See <http://www.acronym.org.uk/docs/0512/doc06.htm>

[22] International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion of 8 July 1996 on the *Legality Of The Threat Or Use Of Nuclear Weapons*: "the Court cannot conclude definitively whether the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be lawful or unlawful in an extreme circumstance of self- defence," (summary, on matter E)

[23] "The Ministry of Defence has determined that replacement/new byelaws are required to control the following sites:
AWE Aldermaston. It is therefore proposed that the Secretary of State for Defence will make new byelaws for the above sites under the powers granted to him by the Military Lands Act 1892". For background to the proposed byelaws, see <http://tinyurl.com/yd9f86>