

**Memorandum from the International Security Information Service  
(ISIS)**

*Summary of Main Points*

One cannot simply transpose the Cold War deterrent posture into the type of threat scenarios Britain is likely to face in the future

The Government needs to provide reassurance that it intends to maintain an extremely high threshold for nuclear use, specifically in relation to:

Britain's Negative Security Assurance

Deterring threats from chemical and biological weapons

The pursuit of military interventions overseas

Further explanation is required as to how Britain's nuclear doctrine is being adapted to meet smaller nuclear threats, including from those who sponsor nuclear terrorism

The Government needs to explain more fully how it expects to reverse the proliferation dynamic other than within the context of a significantly reduced role for nuclear weapons in international affairs

If present trends do lead to a world of multiple nuclear weapons possessors, the likelihood is that nuclear weapons will be used, whether deliberately or accidentally, by states or by terrorists, and that the consequences for Britain could be severe

The Government should be pressed as to whether it agrees with that analysis and, if so, whether it is doing enough to prevent it becoming reality

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## A. Role of nuclear deterrence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

### New deterrence scenarios

1. "The fundamental principles relevant to nuclear deterrence have not changed since the end of the Cold War, and are unlikely to change in future." (White Paper, para 3-3, p.17)

**2. The fundamental principles may not have changed but this should not be interpreted to mean that the Cold War deterrence model can be transposed to each and every other future scenario in which nuclear weapons are a factor.**

3. Nuclear weapons are not a synonymous with nuclear deterrence. This is not to deny that Britain's weapons primarily are intended to act as a deterrent, or that they may perform this function: but we need to be clear that Britain's nuclear weapons are only capable of deterring particular actions by certain actors in particular circumstances.

4. Any serious analysis of deterrence and how this relates to Britain's nuclear forces, therefore, should involve disaggregating the term "nuclear deterrence", including a focus on the *context* in which models of deterrence are being applied.

5. The threat to use Trident in order to deter a potential adversary from taking action against Britain's vital interests has to be credible to be effective. In other words, the potential adversary has to believe that it is plausible that Britain *might* use nuclear weapons in response to his action. Depending on the action he is taking, he would have to calculate the likelihood that Britain might use its nuclear weapons and decide whether or not it was worth the risk.

6. A degree of uncertainty or ambiguity about whether or not Britain might retaliate with nuclear weapons is deemed to strengthen deterrence. The logic being that if the adversary knew precisely the circumstances in which Britain *would* use its nuclear weapons it could take action up to that point. Hence, the White Paper states:

7. *"we deliberately maintain ambiguity about precisely when, how*

*and at what scale we would contemplate use of our nuclear deterrent. We will not simplify the calculations of a potential aggressor by defining more precisely the circumstances in which we might consider the use of our nuclear capabilities. Hence, we will not rule in or out the first use of nuclear weapons." [1]*

8. An essential corollary though is that Britain needs to adopt a *credible* deterrent posture. If it makes unrealistic claims about the actions that it intends to deter with its nuclear weapons, and an adversary then tests these, and Britain does not then actually use its nuclear weapons - the deterrent posture will have been undermined and credibility lost.

9. In 1982, non-nuclear-armed Argentina rightly calculated that Britain would not retaliate with nuclear weapons when it invaded the Falkland Islands. For Britain to have used a nuclear weapon against Argentina itself - with the resultant widespread civilian casualties - would have been a disproportionate response that would have been condemned by the international community to a far greater degree than was the initial invasion.

10. The scenario around which nuclear deterrence was most commonly articulated during the Cold War was one in which Soviet Union and its Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) allies had invaded Western Europe and its forces were advancing towards the English Channel. Under those circumstances, whereby the United Kingdom's very existence as an independent state was at stake, a threat to use nuclear weapons would have had far greater credibility than in the Falklands, for example.

11. Indeed, it is this scenario that encapsulates the public perception of deterrence, and is the image that is conjured up in the public mind whenever the term 'nuclear deterrent' is mentioned. But it is a very precise scenario, constructed in a very particular historical context. Britain is subject of overt aggression by a military alliance with numerically superior conventional forces and is on the brink of invasion. In this situation Britain's deterrent posture is clearly defensive, responsive and has strong credibility.

12. Clearly, with the Cold War over and the Soviet Union no longer a threat, this particular scenario no longer applies to Britain's nuclear weapons. The question is whether it applies to other plausible scenarios against which Britain's nuclear weapons might play a crucial and unique deterrent role, against which it is prudent to plan for?

13. Are there other potential crises for which our leaders are

preparing a possible role for nuclear weapons: scenarios in which the UK may be instigating military action, where the stakes are not so high for the UK but are perceived to be much higher for the adversary?

14. *"The UK's nuclear weapons are not designed for military use during conflict but instead to deter and prevent nuclear blackmail and acts of aggression against our vital interests that cannot be countered by other means."* White Paper, Para.3-4, P.17

15. Informed speculation vis-à-vis a possible future confrontation with a nuclear-armed Iran might illustrate some of the issues at play here. (An exercise that Government is unable to conduct publicly.)

16. What if Iran does succeed in developing and then deploying nuclear weapons? Could Britain's nuclear weapons play a role in deterring any possible aggressive Iranian intent in the region? If used to back up a wider policy of containment, including the deployment of conventional forces in the region, perhaps they could (although it is difficult to imagine what they would add if the US were directly engaged as well).

17. But what if deterrence failed: Iran invaded and took over control of part the Middle East oilfields, and subsequently brandished its nuclear weapons in an attempt to hold the West to ransom for access to energy supplies? Indeed it is probably a scenario such as this that the Government has in mind when it refers to the need to deter and prevent nuclear "blackmail". How realistic is it to think that the threatened use of nuclear weapons after the event would bring about withdrawal, or that a British government could win domestic or international support for such an action?

18. What if Britain and the international community were faced with another scenario akin to the one involving Iraq in 2002/3 - only this time involving a nuclear-armed Iran? **Could a UK Prime Minister successfully make a case to the British people that he wanted to use military means to disarm Iran forcibly and that this could well result in a nuclear war in the Middle East? Surely his chances of winning majority public support would be negligible.** Moreover, in such a scenario, with the Iranian regime probably defending its national survival and the UK embarking on a 'war of choice', whose nuclear threats would carry most weight?

19. *"... there is a risk that some countries might in future seek to sponsor nuclear terrorism from their soil. We must not allow such states to threaten our national security, or to deter us and*

*the international community from taking the action required to maintain regional and global security."* (White Paper, Executive Summary, p.6)

20. *"Any state that we can hold responsible for assisting a nuclear attack on our vital interests can expect that this would lead to a proportionate response."* (White Paper, para. 3-11, p.19)

21. The key issue here is whether or not Britain could *prove* that such assistance was derived from a particular source. To this end the Government intends to strengthen Aldermaston's capabilities. Notwithstanding, the technical challenge involved (about which this author cannot offer an assessment), it would be a highly charged political act to deliver a strike commensurate with, if not actually involving, a nuclear weapon against another state on the basis of forensic evidence alone.

22. **How Britain would prove not only that the source of the fissile material was from facilities operated by a particular state, but also that its presence in a nuclear device used against the UK was there as a result of *deliberate* collaboration from the government of that particular state may be highly problematic. It would be difficult for Britain to launch a nuclear retaliatory strike against the guilty party on the basis of 'balance of probability', as opposed to cast iron proof.**

## **Preserving the Nuclear Threshold**

23. Due to their unique characteristics - scale of destructive power and long-lasting radioactive fallout - nuclear weapons remain in a category separate from, and above, conventional weaponry. Traditionally, the major powers - including Britain - have recognized the significance of the distinction and consequently to preserve the nuclear "threshold".

24. *"The threshold for the legitimate use of nuclear weapons is clearly a high one."*

Para 2-10

25. Arms controllers have been keen to raise, or at least preserve, the level of that threshold as a means of preventing the use of nuclear weapons.

26. According to international humanitarian law, states that use

force must do so with discrimination i.e. not make civilians the object of attack. Nor should states cause unnecessary suffering. In other words, they are prohibited from causing harm to combatants greater than that which is absolutely unavoidable to achieve legitimate military objectives.

27. "Recourse to nuclear weapons could never be compatible with the principles and rules of humanitarian law and is therefore prohibited. In the event of their use, nuclear weapons would in all circumstances be unable to draw any distinction between the civilian population and combatants... and their effects, largely uncontrollable, could not be restricted... to lawful military targets. Such weapons would kill and destroy in a necessarily indiscriminate manner, on account of the blast, heat and radiation occasioned by the nuclear explosion and the effects induced; and the number of casualties that would ensue would be enormous. The use of nuclear weapons would therefore be prohibited in any circumstance, notwithstanding the absence of any explicit conventional prohibition."

(International Court of Justice Report, July 8, 1996, para 92)

**28. The circumstances under which Britain's nuclear weapons might be used are, therefore, an extremely important aspect of this entire debate. Any suggestion that Britain or any other nuclear weapon state might be attempting to lower the threshold deserves to be subject to very careful scrutiny, as this would have major potential implications for non-proliferation and international security.**

29. The more that the nuclear weapon states appear to be expanding the roles afforded to their nuclear weapons the greater are the implications for the non-proliferation regime. This is because the deal underpinning the entire non-proliferation regime, embodied in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), is that those states entitled to retain nuclear weapons (pending their eventual abolition) do so on the basis that they gain no explicit coercive military advantage over non-nuclear weapon states by so doing.

30. That is why the five acknowledged nuclear weapon states have provided negative security assurances (NSAs) to non-nuclear weapon states parties to the NPT. The UK issued its NSA in 1978. In 1995 these assurances - including the UK's - were reiterated and strengthened into political commitments to coincide with the indefinite extension of the NPT. Although these are not legally binding they do constitute very important political commitments.

31. *"The United Kingdom will not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-weapon States parties to the Treaty on the Non-*

*Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons except in the case of an invasion or any other attack on the UK, its dependent territories, its armed forces or other troops, its allies or on a State towards which it has a security commitment, carried out or sustained by such a non-nuclear-weapon State in association or alliance with a nuclear-weapon State." [2]*

32. Again, the provision of these assurances was an extremely important element of a package of measures offered to non-nuclear weapons states by way of reassurance that their continued abstinence would not result in any diminution of their security vis-à-vis being subject to nuclear threats from others.

33. As a corollary, the nuclear weapon states offered positive security assurances by way of stating their commitment to come to the assistance of non-nuclear weapon states that found themselves subject to nuclear threats, or which became victims of actual nuclear attack.

**34. Hence, it is extraordinary that this White Paper contains no reference to the UK's Negative Security Assurance. Its omission deserves explanation by the Government and reassurance that the United Kingdom remains committed to its terms. If this is no longer the case it could have profound implications for the non-proliferation regime.**

35. This leads naturally to a closer examination of UK nuclear doctrine.

## **UK nuclear doctrine**

36. The White Paper states:

*"We would only consider using nuclear weapons in self-defence (including the defence of our NATO allies), and even then only in extreme circumstances. The legality of any such use would depend upon the circumstances and the application of the general rules of international law, including those regulating the use of force and the conduct of hostilities." (Para 2-11, p.14)*

37. (The question of legality will be considered in the second part of this submission.) The language of the White Paper compares to previous statements by the then Defence Secretary in 2002 who said that Britain's nuclear weapons "...would be used only in what are described as extreme conditions of self-defence... I can

*stress... that nuclear weapons would be used proportionately and consistently with our obligations in international law.*" (Rt. Hon. Geoff Hoon, Secretary of State for Defence, Official Report, 17 Jun 2002, Column 11)

38. In 2004, a Foreign Office Minister said that *"the circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated would be extremely remote, and that we would use them only in extreme circumstances of self-defence and in accordance with our obligations under international law."* (Bill Rammell, 16 March 2004, col 297).

39. This might give the impression that only if the UK were on the point of invasion or had already been subject of nuclear attack, would the British government even contemplate using its nuclear weapons. On that basis, in the absence of an overwhelming military power, that has territorial ambitions towards the UK itself, it would be almost impossible to imagine when the UK might even need to think about launching its nuclear weapons in anger.

40. But before drawing such a conclusion one first needs to explore this language more closely, including the refusal to adopt a 'no first use' policy (repeated in the White Paper in para 3-4. p.18).

41. The government continues to rule out a 'no nuclear first use' policy because it wants to retain the option of being the first to use nuclear weapons in conflict. This stance was originally predicated on a Cold War scenario whereby the only means of stopping an onslaught by numerically superior WTO conventional forces might need to be the use of nuclear weapons. Yet, today there are no conventional forces that are superior to those of the Western Alliance of which Britain is part.

42. The scenarios about which the British Government (along with US, Russian and French governments) appears concerned nowadays relate to deterring the use of chemical and biological weapons (CBW). Moreover, this may not be confined solely to retaliation to the use of such weapons but also extend to pre-emptive use against such weaponry.

43. In a previous White Paper, entitled *Defending Against the Threat of Biological and*

*Chemical Weapons*, the MoD says that it seeks to deter the use of CBW by assuring potential aggressors of three related outcomes, one of which is that it would *"invite a proportionately serious response"*. [3]

44. In 2002, prior to the invasion of Iraq, the then Defence Secretary said:

*Let me make... clear the long standing British government policy that if our forces - if our people - were threatened by weapons of mass destruction we would reserve the right to use appropriate proportionate responses which might... in extreme circumstances include the use of nuclear weapons.*

*Clearly if there were strong evidence of an imminent attack if we knew that an attack was about to occur and we could use our weapons to protect against it... [\[4\]](#)*

45. This expands the circumstances in which the Government would be prepared to use its nuclear weapons significantly beyond that of when the UK is on the point of being invaded or when it had already been subject to nuclear attack. This contemplates using nuclear weapons not only in retaliation against a country that has used chemical or biological weapons against UK *territory*, but also if it has used them against UK *forces*. And not only in retaliation, but, *first* against a country that does not possess nuclear weapons and that Britain is itself about to invade.

46. Not only is this a significant statement in its own right, it would also appear to contradict Britain's negative security assurance (NSA).

47. Although the Prime Minister subsequently stated that Britain's nuclear weapons would not be used against Iraq - echoing Prime Minister Major's pledge prior to the first Gulf War - the government was clearly considering how Britain's nuclear weapons, and the threat of their use, might be applied in regional conflicts.

48. There is a concern amongst some observers that perhaps Britain's nuclear forces are now being afforded new 'deterrence' utilities over and above the strictly defensive deterrent role encapsulated in the Cold War scenario outlined above.

49. This shift reflects a change that has already occurred in US policy. It was the Clinton Administration that pointed out the legitimacy of invoking the long-standing international law doctrine of belligerent reprisal, if it was attacked with CBW.

50. Essentially, the US and UK postures mean that if non-nuclear-armed states use CBW at a significant level and in an indiscriminate manner, they can hardly expect the niceties of NSAs to be observed or their protection they afford to be deserved. This is not to say that nuclear retaliation is assured, sensible or desirable, simply to say that in those circumstances the NSA would no longer apply.

51. The British Government (and US Government) seems to be saying that if Britain can more effectively deter those willing to contemplate the massacre of large numbers of innocent people with CBW by not ruling out nuclear retaliation, then they should leave open the option.

52. Nevertheless, to remain consistent with the criteria of proportionality, discrimination and effectiveness, nuclear weapons could only be used if the overall harm inflicted was clearly outweighed by the good achieved and the long-term harm averted.

53. For political, humanitarian and practical reasons the use of Britain's nuclear weapons against Iraq would have been inappropriate, disproportionate, morally repulsive and proved highly counter-productive. Breaking the nuclear taboo and killing potentially thousands of innocent Iraqis on the basis of the tactical use of chemical or biological weapons by the Iraqi leadership would not have been sensible, proportionate or defensible.

54. To have used British nuclear weapons pre-emptively, on the basis of what the regime may have been about to do, would have been even more difficult to justify. Indeed, with Saddam Hussein knowing that he was doomed his best chance of winning international sympathy would have been to provoke nuclear retaliation.

55. Even in the extreme circumstance whereby nuclear use were judged to be the only effective means of preventing potentially catastrophic use of Iraqi CBW, it is likely that the 'cure' would have been worse than the 'disease'.

56. It would be far better to confine any pre-emptive or retaliatory action to the use of accurate and more discriminating conventional weaponry.

**57. It would appear that the doctrine outlined above does encompass the pre-emptive use of Britain's nuclear weapons to forestall an imminent threat to the UK territory, forces or**

allies. And that threat would not necessarily have to be from nuclear weapons - it could also be from chemical or biological weapons. Indeed, it may even extend to threats from conventional weaponry.

58. If British policy now endorses the possible use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-armed states (and especially so against those not armed with any form of WMD) - even when that use is justified through an act of self-defence, in extremis and within the confines of international law - it needs to be clearly stated. The implications for Britain's NSA should also be explained.

### **Sub-Strategic Capability**

59. **Another noticeable absentee from the White Paper is any reference to the sub-strategic role of Britain's nuclear weapons.** Essentially, the sub-strategic nuclear capability was articulated as performing a 'pre-strategic' role. It would entail the firing of a single warhead (probably of limited yield) to demonstrate to an adversary that he should desist from his aggression or Britain would escalate to all-out strategic use.

60. The sub-strategic role was described in the Committee's Eighth Report thus:

*"... a sub-strategic strike would involve the launch of one or a limited number of missiles against an adversary as a means of conveying a political message, warning or demonstration of resolve. Commodore Hare told us that this sub-strategic role "offers the Government of the day an extra option in the escalatory process before it goes for an all-out strategic strike which would deliver unacceptable damage to a potential adversary"."*

*"Although the Government has revealed little information about the precise number and yield of UK warheads, it is widely believed that Trident missiles intended for this sub-strategic role carry only a single warhead, potentially with a significantly reduced yield.*

*"It is important not to confuse this sub-strategic role with a tactical role. Trident is not designed or intended to fulfill a tactical role on the battlefield." (paras 41/42)*

61. The Committee may want to ask the Government to clarify whether this role remains a component of Britain's nuclear

doctrine, or whether this 'pre-strategic' 'signaling' function is no longer necessary.

62. Instead, the White Paper places emphasis on the importance of lower yield warheads in making deterrence against smaller nuclear threats more credible:

*"... the ability to vary the numbers of missiles and warheads which might be employed, coupled with the continued availability of a lower yield from our warhead, can make our nuclear forces a more credible deterrent against smaller nuclear threats." (Para 4-9, p.23)*

63. The reasoning here is that if Britain can only threaten an all-out nuclear strike this will lack credibility when faced with more limited threats posed by smaller nuclear-armed powers.

**64. There is a danger, however, that the deployment of lower yield warheads in the context of meeting threats posed by smaller nuclear threats will lower the nuclear threshold and increase the likelihood of nuclear use to achieve more limited, war-fighting objectives. In other words, the sub-strategic function becomes a tactical one.**

65. Further doubts must be placed upon the credibility of threatening to launch a limited nuclear strike against a smaller nuclear-armed state that has not itself used nuclear weapons first.

66. This specific point was addressed by Sir Malcolm Rifkind, when he was Defence Secretary, in 1993:

*"There is sometimes speculation that more so-called "usable" nuclear weapons - very*

*low-yield devices which could be used to carry out what are euphemistically called*

*"surgical" strikes - would allow nuclear deterrence to be effective in circumstances*

*where existing weapons would be self-detering.*

I am thoroughly opposed to this view. The implications of such a development of a new war-fighting role for nuclear weapons would be seriously damaging to our approach to maintaining stability in the European context, quite apart from the impact it would have on our efforts to encourage non-proliferation and greater confidence

outside Europe. This is not a path that I would wish any nuclear power to go down."

(Addressing the Centre for Defence Studies, London, November 1993)

**67. The present Government should be challenged to say whether Sir Malcolm's views still represent an accurate representation of British Government policy: and if they do not, in what respects.**

### **Pressing the Button**

68. For nuclear deterrence to retain credibility requires the UK Prime Minister to indicate his or her preparedness *in extremis* to use Britain's nuclear weapons. The mere presence of UK nuclear weapons is likely to have at least some bearing on the calculations made by any potential adversary, regardless of what any Prime Minister might say about their intentions to use the country's nuclear weapons.

69. Nevertheless, Tony Blair has stated publicly that he would be prepared to press the button. "*You do have to be prepared to use it and I do make that clear.*" [5] At some point his successor as Prime Minister will be asked to confirm the same. As long as the Prime Minister does not exclude the possibility of use under any circumstances, British nuclear weapons may serve a deterrent effect.

70. It is difficult to square a preparedness to use Britain's nuclear weapons with the Prime Minister's other humanitarian pronouncements, especially in respect of targeting despotic regimes, rather than those they subjugate. **A Trident nuclear warhead is an extremely blunt instrument of death and destruction and in that sense is incompatible with the modern, more discriminatory application of military force**, which, in other contexts, Tony Blair is keen to advocate.

71. In the Prime Minister's defence, it is possible to make a case that by threatening to use nuclear weapons *in retaliation* one is - through deterrence - actually preventing war from starting and thereby saving the lives of all those who would have died in such a war. In other words, signaling intent to commit mass slaughter in order to prevent it ever happening.

72. This sounds persuasive until and unless one is faced with the ultimate choice. At which point a British Prime Minister may have to decide whether to concede to an adversary a degree of military and political cost to Britain's interests or to carry out its

threat to use nuclear weapons to forestall such cost. It is quite conceivable that because the latter would probably provoke worse ramifications than the former, it makes sense to rely on other, conventional, military options. In which case, strengthening non-nuclear deterrence options in preparation may make more sense than an over-reliance on the nuclear option.

73. Another problem is balancing the Prime Minister's insistence on the UK retaining the option of using nuclear weapons, against the dangers of legitimizing other political leaders enjoying the same right. This would be particularly pertinent in relation to those leaders who may be less scrupulous about exercising it, or who prevail in regions where they are far more likely to be faced with the choice about whether or not to push the button, than is Tony Blair.

74. It is critical that British Prime Ministers continue to view nuclear weapons as being in a special and distinct category of their own, and not just as another - albeit most powerful - weapon in the arsenal. The threshold for nuclear use must be kept high and raised higher: not lowered, as it might be under pre-emptive and preventive war doctrines.

## **B. The impact of the decision to replace Trident on UK's non-proliferation efforts**

### **The changing nature of nuclear threats**

75. The Defence Committee has already examined the nature of the existing and future nuclear threat. The following is a summary of my conclusions in this respect and is necessary to include here because it informs my subsequent assessments - especially in relation to the importance of denuclearization in achieving successful non-proliferation.

76. According to The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan:

***"We also face a real threat that nuclear weapons will spread. Without concerted action, we may face a cascade of nuclear proliferation,"*** (speaking at a conference in Hiroshima, 5 August 2006)

77. If the world reaches this stage, then it will be hugely more difficult to deal with the problem. We might be faced with

fifteen, twenty, perhaps thirty national nuclear weapon programmes; massive new investment being poured into developing nuclear weapons; tons of weapons-grade fissile material being produced; and hundreds of people acquiring the knowledge of how to make nuclear weapons.

78. How many of these new proliferant states will be able to establish safe, secure, well managed programmes under centralized control - and how many not? Hopefully, they would all be able to develop robust command and control procedures that would function well in crises, but the expectation must be that a proportion will not. Some new proliferants may be democracies; others will be authoritarian regimes. Some governments may well be relatively stable, others far less so.

79. In addition, there would be the extremist and fundamentalist terrorist groups with growing opportunities to acquire the wherewithal to acquire nuclear weapons of their own. Almost inevitably, there would be many more potential A. Q. Khans around - willing to sell nuclear 'know how' and blueprints to the highest bidder.

80. **To believe that such a world might settle at a new equilibrium of multiple deterrent relationships would be dangerously complacent.** Unpredictable governments developing weapons of mass destruction in volatile regions of the planet, with inadequate command and control mechanisms, reliant on "use them or lose them" doctrines, would vastly increase the risks of nuclear war - whether started deliberately or accidentally.

81. This is a vision of the future that should frighten every policy maker in every capital around the world. Most analysts probably believe this is the future towards which the world is now heading.

82. Hence, I would list contemporary and foreseeable nuclear threats in order of importance as follows:

- A regional nuclear war between two nuclear-armed states through misunderstanding or deliberate act (for instance - India/Pakistan, North Korea/South Korea, Iran/Israel) in volatile regions of the world with unstable deterrence and 'hair trigger' alert status adding to the likelihood of use.

- The insecurity of nuclear weapons, material and expertise, especially within states that collapse or experience internal conflict, and a nexus with terrorists gaining access to a nuclear weapon or sufficient weapons-grade fissile material to make a

nuclear weapon, which they then threaten to use and/or actually use.

- Nuclear-armed state directly threatens the UK's vital national interests.
- Accidental nuclear war between the major nuclear powers.

83. These threats have been re-ordered since Cold War days. Deterrence is only relevant to meeting one of these four threats. It is non-proliferation policy that has the primary role to play in meeting the main nuclear threats. **Questions need to be asked whether the continued pursuit of a national nuclear capability and its accompanying force posture might in some way serve to undermine Britain's efforts to counter these other nuclear threats.**

84. The challenge is how to reduce and/or eliminate these nuclear threats. We need to:

- 
- Prevent additional states acquiring nuclear weapons.
- Reduce the number of states with nuclear weapons programmes and further reduce the actual number of nuclear weapons.
- Assist those states embarked upon nuclear disarmament to safely dispose of nuclear weapons, guard and neutralise weapons-grade materials, and ensure that nuclear weapons expertise is securely re-assigned to other employment.
- Press for all nuclear weapons to be taken off hair trigger alert, and provide assistance to states with their command and control procedures, and confidence-building measures, within the context of moving towards denuclearization.
- Marginalise nuclear weapons within security strategies and international affairs by reducing their purpose to that of deterring other nuclear weapons - remove their coercive role.
- Begin a new multilateral process of denuclearization, involving carefully staged reductions in nuclear weapons and posture with a view to achieving the ultimate elimination of all nuclear weapons.

### **Trident, non-proliferation and disarmament**

85. The White Paper acknowledges that the ultimate goal of Britain's policy is a world without nuclear weapons, while making the case that Britain needs to maintain its nuclear weapon capability in the absence of any multilateral agreement to that end.

"None of the present recognized nuclear weapon states intends to renounce nuclear weapons, in the absence of an agreement to disarm multilaterally, and we cannot be sure that a major nuclear threat to our vital interests will not emerge over the longer term."

## **(White Paper, Foreword by the Prime Minister, p.5)**

*"Renewing our minimum nuclear deterrent... is also consistent with our continuing commitment to work towards a safer world in which there is no requirement for nuclear weapons."* (White Paper, P.7)

"We are committed to retaining the minimum nuclear deterrent capability necessary to provide effective deterrence, whilst setting an example where possible by reducing our nuclear capabilities, and working multilaterally for nuclear disarmament and to counter nuclear proliferation. We believe it is the right balance between our commitment to a world in which there is no place for nuclear weapons and our responsibilities to protect the current and future citizens of the UK." (White Paper, p.8)

86. Essentially there is a tension in policy between extolling the value of nuclear weapons for Britain's security while seeking to deny such capability to others. The danger is that by affording nuclear forces a high importance within national defence and security strategies we undermine our efforts to persuade other states that they can do without such forces themselves.

87. This 'double standard' argument is not merely a superficial debating point; it goes to the heart of the link between nuclear weapon possession and non-proliferation. It prompts the fundamental question as to whether it is possible to tackle proliferation effectively, while still insisting that nuclear weapons are necessary for Britain's security, but not for others?

88. Is it possible to forge a stable, robust international non-proliferation regime based on an essentially discriminatory division between possessors and non-possessors? The Government appears to believe that it is. After all, this is exactly the distinction that the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) sustains.

89. This is true, but only up to a point and for how much longer? The essential bargain contained in the NPT, between those States

Parties who possess nuclear weapons and those who agree to forego them, was never intended as a permanent basis upon which to order the world. **Most analysts - including the UN Secretary General - now agree that the entire non-proliferation regime is creaking under the strain, and unless we address its underlying problems it may disintegrate with dire consequences for all of us.**

90. This is especially true in relation to the coercive value afforded to nuclear weapons vis-à-vis non-nuclear weapon states (as set out in the first part of this submission). If the role of nuclear weapons can be confined simply to the deterrence of other nuclear weapons it is possible to establish a logical construct within which the incentive to acquire nuclear weapons is substantially reduced.

91. On the other hand, when nuclear weapons are given new, more 'pro-active' roles within more overtly aggressive security strategies this can have a deleterious impact on non-proliferation policy.

92. In a number of respects Britain is the best example of all of the five acknowledge nuclear weapon states. It only uses a single weapon system, has the smallest arsenal of warheads, maintains a 'stable' force posture, and is transparent about the extent of its nuclear capability.

93. Britain has also played an active role in arms control talks and in securing the successful negotiation of number of relevant treaties. It continues to push for a strengthening of non-proliferation controls. All of which it deserves credit for. And one has to appreciate the limits of what one country can achieve within the multilateral context.

94. Nevertheless, the British Government's approach seems to be predicated on an assumption that successful non-proliferation can be achieved in the context of a privileged handful of states - including the UK - continuing to assert the importance of national nuclear forces in their security strategies, and *prior* to any serious consideration of denuclearization.

95. (I define "denuclearization" as a staged process of reduction in numbers of nuclear weapons; adjustments in force postures that marginalize nuclear weapons; further restrictions on the circumstances in which their use would ever be considered; and the conscious intent to work towards the global elimination of all nuclear weapons.)

96. The contrary view is that it is highly questionable as to whether it will prove possible to reverse the proliferation dynamic other than within the context of a significantly reduced role for nuclear weapons in international affairs - up to the point, and perhaps including, complete nuclear disarmament.

97. **What is needed is for the existing nuclear powers to get around the negotiating table, thrash out their mutual commitment to such a course and set out a detailed 'road map' of how to go forward.** [6] The starting point should be to negate nuclear weapons' coercive influence in international relations between nation states: to devalue them as instruments of political power. The only purpose of nuclear weapons, pending their possible complete elimination worldwide, would be to negate their possession by others.

98. Although actually setting the goal of trying to achieve a world without nuclear weapons is important it does not necessarily follow that the ultimate achievement of such an objective can or will be reached. The important point is the degree to which the intention is serious and sincere, and the consequent level of commitment devoted to reaching the ultimate goal.

99. The further necessary steps to *complete* denuclearization might prove impracticable to take for any number of reasons. Nevertheless, we can travel a lot further down the road of nuclear confidence building, arms control and disarmament before such an ultimate decision stage is reached.

100. Britain should take a lead by proposing the establishment of a new international nuclear settlement based on a shared vision of: no more nuclear weapon proliferation; reduced salience of existing nuclear arsenals; staged and conditional multilateral denuclearization; and a strict verification and compliance regime.

101. In the foreword to the White Paper Tony Blair wrote:

"None of the present recognized nuclear weapon states intends to renounce nuclear weapons, in the absence of an agreement to disarm multilaterally, and we cannot be sure that a major nuclear threat to our vital interests will not emerge over the longer term."

102. This is true. But it represents a worrying acceptance of defeat in the battle against proliferation and complacency about the consequences of that defeat. Britain is not a passive bystander unable to shape the future. It is a country with a proud tradition of negotiating arms control treaties and retains significant diplomatic influence. It could take the lead in trying

to forge a new international nuclear settlement.

103. The alternative is that unless we do reverse the proliferation dynamic, major new nuclear threats will emerge in the future. **In a world of 30 or so nuclear states, eventually we can expect that there will be a nuclear war, whether started deliberately or accidentally, and that terrorists will succeed in getting their hands on the means of committing mass slaughter. Britain may not be directly involved in a nuclear war but it cannot expect to avoid its potentially horrendous political, economic, and climatic fallout.**

104. In a world of 30 nuclear weapon states Britain would still want to retain its national nuclear forces. Unfortunately, in such a world Britain would be far less safe from nuclear threats than it is today. If that analysis of current trends is correct it suggests that the governments of the major powers, including Britain, need to make a more determined effort to change those trends. It is difficult to see how they can succeed on the non-proliferation front without embarking on a parallel, multilateral denuclearization process.

18 December 2006

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[1] *The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent*, Cm 6994, HMSO, December 2006, p.18.

[2] The caveat within this statement - repeated in those of the US, France - was intended to [http://209.85.135.104/search?q=cache:bNY3W7e4J4EJ:www.isisuk.demon.co.uk/0811/isis/uk/regpapers/-4address the specific circumstance of an invasion of Western Europe by forces of the Warsaw Treaty Organization \(WTO\) \(consisting of a nuclear-armed Soviet Union and its non-nuclear-armed allies of Eastern Europe\). In that scenario Britain's NSA would not apply to the Soviet Union's WTO allies.](http://209.85.135.104/search?q=cache:bNY3W7e4J4EJ:www.isisuk.demon.co.uk/0811/isis/uk/regpapers/-4address+the+specific+circumstance+of+an+invasion+of+Western+Europe+by+forces+of+the+Warsaw+Treaty+Organization+(WTO)+(consisting+of+a+nuclear-armed+Soviet+Union+and+its+non-nuclear-armed+allies+of+Eastern+Europe).+In+that+scenario+Britain's+NSA+would+not+apply+to+the+Soviet+Union's+WTO+allies.)

[3] *Defending Against the Threat of Biological and Chemical Weapons*, MoD, July 1999. Can be found

at: <http://www.mod.uk/issues/cbw/index.htm>

[4] Rt. Hon. Geoff Hoon, MP, Secretary of State for Defence, speaking on the *Jonathan Dimbleby*

programme, ITV, 24th March, 2002.

[5] Reported in the Daily Mail, 25 November 1996.

[6] For a much more detailed analysis of what this process might involve see: Johnson, R., Butler, N., and Pullinger, S., *Worse than Irrelevant?: British Nuclear Weapons in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*,

Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy, 2006, pp.76.