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Memorandum from the Nuclear Information Service

The Future of Nuclear Weapons in the United Kingdom: a response to the Government White Paper

Summary

On 4th December 2006 the Prime Minister presented a White Paper¹ in the House of Commons on the replacement of the UK Trident nuclear weapons system. The White Paper concentrates on proposals to build new nuclear-armed submarines (known as Ship Submersible Ballistic Nuclear (SSBNs), whereas the design and production of a new warhead at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE), Aldermaston is hardly mentioned. Throughout the Paper, language is confusing and assuming, leading the reader towards an unreasonable fear of the unknown and an unwarranted confidence in nuclear weapons. No mention is made of the constant risks of nuclear warhead transport and operations at AWE. A reduction in warhead numbers is offered as a concession to 'disarmament' whereas it is probably related to warhead servicing capacity rather than any intended disarmament. Trident is described as an 'investment' without reference to lost opportunity costs, or the difficulties of financial stability in the nuclear weapons industry. The benefits claimed for Trident are doctrinal and not military. There is nothing to dispel the conclusion that a decision to replace Trident has already been taken and that the race to seek endorsement from the House of Commons without a proper Consultation appears to be for political rather than security reasons.

White Paper Language

Deterrence

The title of the White Paper, " The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent" should more accurately read: "The Future of Nuclear Weapons in the United Kingdom".' The term 'deterrence' and 'nuclear weapons' are wrongly used interchangeably to suggest that they have the same meaning. 'Deterrence' is not a weapon but an unproven theory, a past doctrine that had many elements.

Common views:

"The theory of deterrence is essentially flawed because there is no way of demonstrating that it has worked. There is absolutely no evidence to support the view that if we had not possessed the nuclear deterrent we would have been invaded, attacked or in any

other way violated as a nation state.

Rev David A Keddie The Herald, (Scotland) June 26 2006 ²

"This 'having kept the peace for fifty years' is like pulling the rabbit out of a hat -

just a fancy sleight of sloganism meant to shut everybody up; the trouble is, it often works with those who don't really want to question and are satisfied with an easy answer."

Hazel Rennie, Woman for Peace

The word deterrent(ce) is used 170 time in the document to try to convince readers that these weapons will protect 'the safety and security of [...] citizens', the declared aim in the Prime Minister's first sentence.

Minimum

The use of the diminutive, 'minimum' is out of place with reference to Trident. The Paper acknowledges nuclear weapons to be a terrifying power, but at the same time, describes Trident as "*the minimum necessary*" in the Foreword; a "*minimum amount of destructive power required to achieve our defence objectives*" (3.4), and a "*minimum investment*" (3.13).

Investment

Trident is described as an investment, both in financial and defence terms. But investment means getting a beneficial return, which is not achieved by nuclear weapons, except for the nuclear industry.

Insurance

To equate Trident with an insurance policy is a simile that falls at the slightest examination. No company would offer insurance terms that add to the risk insured. Insurance has to be neutral, without status, and not attract a calamity or be a threat in itself. More than that, it is benevolent. In times of disaster it can be claimed to give succour and recompense, resources to rebuild or recover. The Non-Proliferation Treaty is exactly like an insurance policy: you are protected so long as you read the small print and comply with the terms of the agreement. Insurance is recommended for everyone, not just the few. To pursue the insurance analogy would be to accept that every country was entitles to it.

Consultation

There is no mention of Consultation in the White Paper, yet a PM Answer, on 28 June 2006 said:

"We will announce the means of consultation when we publish the White Paper. Of course, we believe it is extremely important to have the fullest possible debate on the subject."

Ministers and the press have led a reasonable person to assume that there was to be a normal consultation, regulated under published government guidelines. On 21st December, I asked the Department of Constitutional Affairs and the Ministry of Defence for clarification on the Consultation process and received the response 'that there is no process, but anyone with concerns about the proposal to replace Trident is invited to write in to the Prime Minister' In general, government departments are expected to abide by principles on consultation, contained in the Governments Code on Consultation, and ensure consultation follow regulation best practice.³ This has not been done.

Ad hoc efforts have been made by contributors to the No.10 website discussion site and Compass, the democratic left pressure group, to undertake a Consultation. Compass sets out the arguments, both for and against in a balanced way to inform those taking part in its consultation. see
<http://www.compassonline.org.uk/surveys/december_2006.asp>

Questions posed in the Foreword to the White Paper

Question 1: Why disarmament in the UK would help our security?

Answer: Our security needs are threatened by climate change, unsustainable increasing energy needs, potential pandemics, HIV/Aids, global poverty, the competition for basic resources and the growing gap between rich and poor internationally and domestically. None of these threats are addressed by nuclear weapons but the resources released by disarmament could be available to directly tackle them.

Question 2: How to change the minds of hardliners and extremists in countries that are developing these nuclear capabilities?

Answer: Not by threatening to attack them with nuclear weapons but by recognising that responsible governments must seek to lower international tensions not escalate them. Nuclear disarmament is the only action that will remove the justification for countries to waste \$billions to develop, produce and maintain such weapons. This cannot be proved, as demanded, any more than the corollary, that replacing Trident will cause hardliners and extremists to desist from using them should they succeed in developing or acquiring nuclear weapons.

Question 3: Would terrorists be less likely to conspire against us with hostile governments because we give up nuclear weapons?

Answer: No. Nuclear weapons are irrelevant to terrorists. Nuclear weapons based in the UK are the easier target and pose a real risk of terrorist attack that should be eliminated if we are serious about the security of citizens in the UK.

Question 4: Would we be safer by giving up nuclear weapons?

Answer: Yes we would be safer by not being a potential threat of starting a nuclear war.

Question 5: Would our capacity to act be constrained by nuclear blackmailers?

Answer: At present Britain is a nuclear blackmailer, but Trident does not constrain any current identifiable threat. If Britain were to so antagonise a nuclear state in the distant future, that a nuclear attack was threatened, our best defence would be to negotiate and listen to their grievance rather than to threaten to join in any nuclear exchange.

Warhead Numbers

The White Paper offers a reduction in warhead numbers from below 200 to 160. But Nukewatch already puts the stockpile at around 178 with any further reduction probably due to logistics relating to warhead servicing rather than any intended disarmament. The AWE Burghfield assembly/disassembly plant has been condemned by the NII⁴ and there may well be a go-slow there until the new facility is built. Nukewatch figures⁵ suggest that at least two warheads were scrapped in 2006. In common with previous defence statements, the process announced had already begun. Warhead delivery into service is down on previous years by an estimated six in 2006. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimates the figure at about 165, consisting of 144 deployed weapons plus an extra 15% as spares.⁶

Submarines

Stealth and secrecy are the principal military capabilities of

submarines that naturally attract a following of submarine enthusiasts. But nuclear submarines are politically and militarily destabilising and should be the subject of an international disarmament agreement and confined to museums sooner rather than later.

Safety

No mention is made in the White Paper of the constant risks posed by nuclear warhead transport and operations at AWE. The highest risk we have from nuclear weapons in Britain, is from nuclear convoys trundling weapons up and down our motorways between Scotland and Aldermaston every very few weeks. The insecurity and environmental hazards created up is an un-acknowledged human cost. Local Councillors in Oxford, Preston and elsewhere have expressed concern that secrecy is a higher priority than safety, just as Baroness Helena Kennedy did in 1994.⁷

Aldermaston and new warhead development

The White Paper fails to mention the current £5.3billion expenditure at AWE. The 2002 AWE Aldermaston Strategic Development Plan is now well into the building phase of the high powered laser, following a new computer building and modular office buildings. However major office plans have met local opposition and a special meeting is to be held by West Berkshire Planning Authority on 22nd January to discuss the plans.³ cursory mention in the White Paper of a possible new warhead does not sit well with the reality on the ground, where the infrastructure for warhead development is being built to last another 50 years, bringing a lifetime of unacceptable nuclear discharges into the environment and the constant risk of an accident or terrorist attack.

The Trident Vote in the House of Commons

The White Paper says that a government decision to replace Trident has already been taken. It can only be re-appraised if Members of Parliament vote to have more details of what is proposed before agreeing to an unknown financial commitment.

YEAR	Convoys out of AWE	No. of TCHD carriers	Total No. loaded	Estimated Warheads	Convoys in AWE	No. of TCHD carriers	Total No. loaded	Estimated Warheads
2000	2	6	4	8	1	4	3	6
2001	3	9	6	12	5	15	10	20

					1	5	4	8
2002	4	12	8	16	5	15	10	20
					1	4	3	6
2003	4	12	8	8 (1 in each TCHD)	5	15	10	20
2004	2	6	4	16?	2	6	4	8
2005	4	12	8	16?	4	12	8	16
2006	3	9	6	12?	4	12	8	16
Total	22	66	44	88	28	88	60	120

? = Possibly Less
6 more convoys In AWE
22 more TCHD In AWE
12 more loaded In AWE

Trident Warheads Out ce 120 - 88 = 32

Notes to Table

TCHD = Truck Cargo Heavy Duty

Convoys are all loaded convoys

There are unlikely to be more than 2 warheads in each carrier, but there could be less.

Original capability 16 m x 4 subs 64 missiles x 8 warheads each = 512

Data is recorded from 80% observation and 20% deduction

Warhead Numbers

There is no certainty in numbers because it is government policy to keep them secret. But the stockpile never got anywhere near the original 512 capability. In the last six years, 22 more loaded TCHD carriers have returned to AWE from Scotland than went out, indicating a withdrawal of between 30 and 50 warheads already without being announced, leaving an operational stockpile of between 170 and 150 warheads.

White Paper Numbers

The reduction mentioned in the White Paper, reflects existing numbers that have already been made for any number of reasons.

Who is the 160 message going to?

160 is still a large figure since 4 is enough to totally destroy a rogue state

Given the limited number for use to change the balance of power in a country 160 how many countries is the PM talking about? How many wars?

References

1. Prime Minister's White Paper Statement 4th December 2006

2. No evidence that nuclear weapons deterred

Letters The Herald, (Scotland) June 26 2006

Dear Sir

R D DON states that he believes that "our deterrent has protected us and kept the peace for the past 50 years" (June 24). Why? This is not a belief I share, for the simple reason that he can offer no proof of this. The theory of deterrence is essentially flawed because there is no way of demonstrating that it has worked. There is absolutely no evidence to support the view that if we had not possessed the nuclear deterrent we would have been invaded, attacked or in any other way violated as a nation state.

You cannot make a causal connection between our ownership of a small nuclear resource and the fact that there has been peace. What evidence is there to support the view that Russia would have trampled all over us if we had not possessed a bomb? It is very inviting to postulate such a causal connection but there is none. That is the problem with a theory of deterrence. It used to be said that capital punishment was a "deterrent" - but how do you know? How many people were out there wanting to murder their wife/husband /lover, etc, but did not because of capital punishment? You simply do not know - all you do know is that it did not deter a certain number and they went ahead and committed murder anyway. Oddly enough, after capital punishment was abolished in the late 1960s the number of murders in Britain actually went down.

That there has been "peace" (well, apart from the Falklands, the Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq, Chechnya, etc) and that we have happened to own a little handful of nuclear weapons are in no demonstrable way connected. That is an opinion. And there is no evidence that Russia (or America) ever had any intention of invading us after 1945. Our possession of nuclear weapons was an irrelevance to their foreign policy.

There may be reasons for our retention of nuclear weapons (although personally I can think of none), but the concept of deterrence is most certainly not one of them. It is an illusory self-deception.

Rev David A Keddie, 21 Ilay Road, Bearsden Scotland

3.Governments Code on Consultation

The six consultation criteria are as follows:

- 1.Consult widely throughout the process, allowing a minimum of 12 weeks for written consultation at least once during the development of the policy.
- 2.Be clear about what your proposals are, who may be affected, what questions are being asked and the time scale for responses.
- 3.Ensure that your consultation is clear, concise and widely accessible.
- 4.Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced the policy.
- 5.Monitor your department 's effectiveness at consultation, including through the use of a designated consultation co-ordinator.
- 6.Ensure your consultation follows better regulation best practice, including carrying out a Regulatory Impact Assessment if appropriate.

Cabinet Office website at
<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/regulation/consultation/>

4. AWE Quarterly Assurance Report, June 2006

5. Nukewatch. see www.nuclearinfor.org/nukewatch

6. SIPRI
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stockholm_International_Peace_Research_Institute

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7. Secrecy versus Safety. The findings of the AWE Aldermston Community Inquiry by Helena Kennedy QC 1994.

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