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REPLACING TRIDENT: WHO WILL MAKE THE DECISIONS AND HOW?

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Executive Summary

The government has declared that a decision will be made during the current parliament that will determine the medium to long-term future of Britain's nuclear arsenal that consists of the Trident nuclear weapon system.¹ The decision will either be to replace the Trident system, to upgrade the existing system, or to run the system to the end of its service life and then relinquish a nuclear capability altogether. It is unlikely that the UK will choose not to replace or upgrade the Trident system and become a non-nuclear weapon state. It is far more likely that a successor system will be chosen or the service life of the current system extended and that the UK will remain a nuclear weapon power for the foreseeable future.

Decisions about Britain's nuclear arsenal have traditionally been shrouded in secrecy. Whilst it is clear that some secrecy is needed for the security and effectiveness of nuclear weapon systems once deployed, this justification is often used to render decisions about Britain's nuclear future unaccountable to parliament and the British public. In order to maximise government accountability for its forthcoming decision it is necessary to understand the likely policy-making process and the context within which decisions are likely to be made.

The paper begins by briefly examined what decisions are required in the current parliament. It then argues that there are three powerful drivers in favour of the status quo that will shape the policy-making process. First, the pervasiveness of the concept of deterrence; second, the central importance of maintaining political and military credibility in Washington; and third, financial opportunity costs. The paper argues that these three underlying factors will drive the government's internal debate rather than the government's more public rationale that nuclear weapons are needed for strategic deterrence of unknown future adversaries in an uncertain world.

The paper then explores the likely policy-making process, the government departments involved and the difficulties faced in holding the government to account for its decisions. It argues that the policy-making process will be tightly controlled and secretive with little hope of effective accountability through parliament and advocacy groups. Nevertheless, the timescale for the post-Vanguard policy-making process is long, political decisions are rarely set in stone and although the replacement of Trident with a new or upgraded nuclear capability is likely, it is not inevitable.

The paper concludes by arguing that the British government should take the opportunity afforded by forthcoming nuclear weapons decisions to conduct a full review of Britain's strategic security policy. This should examine the difficult subjects of the nature of the UK's relationship with the US and what role, if any, nuclear weapons have in securing Britain's foreign and defence policy goals. Finally the paper argues that advocacy organisations must also place the post-Vanguard debate in this wider context. It suggests that ideological ant-nuclear arguments will have little or no impact in Whitehall and that the most productive and pragmatic approach may be to argue forcefully for a much reduced and cheaper post-Vanguard nuclear capability to reflect the vastly diminished role of nuclear weapons in Britain's defence posture since the end of the Cold War.

¹ In May 2004 Admiral Alan West, First Sea Lord, stated that a decision on replacing the Vanguard SSBNs is expected in the next two or three years. Chuter A., 'U.K. Debates Trident Sub Replacement', *DefenseNews*, 31 May 2004.

1. What decisions are required?

Britain's single remaining nuclear weapon system comprises three core components, all of which have a finite service life. These are the Vanguard-class nuclear powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), the Trident submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and the nuclear warheads that arm each missile. Collectively, and sometimes misleadingly, the composite system is usually referred to as Trident. Decisions on the missiles and warheads are not required at this stage. According to the government it is the service life of the Vanguard submarines and the long lead time required to commission and deploy a possible replacement submarine fleet or an alternative nuclear delivery platform that requires government action in the current parliament. For accuracy this paper refers to forthcoming decisions as post-Vanguard rather than post-Trident decisions.

The submarines

Britain's first Vanguard SSBN was commissioned into the Royal Navy in 1993 and entered operational service in 1994 and the fourth and final submarine in 2001. The submarines have a stated service life of 25 years. The figure of 25 years has only recently emerged from government.² In the past the government has said that the four boat Trident system as a whole must provide "an effective deterrent for up to 30 years".³ The original design lifetime was closer to 40 years.⁴ In fact a 2005 RAND report for MOD states that "originally the Vanguard-class submarines were to have a life of 25 years, and that plan has not yet officially been changed, but the new reactor cores should permit operation until age 40".⁵ The 25-year service life appears to stem from the safety justification given by the UK Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate for the submarines' nuclear propulsion reactors.⁶

Taking the figure of 25 years, the first SSBN, HMS Vanguard, is therefore due to retire in 2019. British nuclear doctrine is based on a policy of 'continuous at-sea deterrence' (CASD). The Ministry of Defence (MOD) insists that CASD ensures a continuous, survivable and credible nuclear deterrent threat and that it requires four SSBNs to ensure that one submarine is always on patrol whilst others are at port or undergoing refit. This also ensures a sufficient level of continuous training for SSBN crews.⁷ If the UK plans to retain the current CASD policy and the service life of the submarines has been formally set at 25 years, then new SSBNs will be required between 2019 and 2026 to replace the current Vanguard fleet.

² The Ministry of Defence's April 2006 submission to the House of Commons Defence Committee hearing on the future of Trident states that "The submarines were procured with a designed operational life of 25 years". *Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Defence*, House of Commons Defence Committee hearing on the UK's strategic nuclear deterrent, 14 March 2006. Appendix B: The Expected Life of the Trident System.

³ Ministry of Defence *Strategic Defence Review*, 1998, p.17. This was echoed by a 2005 House of Commons Library report on the future of Trident that says "it is anticipated that the Trident system will have a thirty-year lifespan". Youngs, T. and Taylor, C., *Trident and the future of the British nuclear deterrent*, House of Commons Library International Affairs and Defence Section, 5 July 2005, p. 10. However, this does not necessarily mean that each submarine has a design life of 30 years (although this is often how the statement in the Strategic Defence Review has been interpreted), but that the Trident system as a whole comprising four boats deployed between 1994 and 2001 will provide a nuclear force for up to 30 years from the deployment of HMS Vanguard in 1994..

⁴ McInnes argues that when the final procurement decisions for the submarines to house Britain's Trident missiles were taken in 1982 the submarine "was to be the most advanced possible to enable it to survive in the seas 40 years from now". McInnes, C. (1986) *Trident: The Only Option?* London: Brassey's, p. 60

⁵ Schank, J et al *Sustaining Design and Production Resources*, The United Kingdom's Nuclear Submarine Industrial Base, Volume 1, Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2005, p. xviii.

⁶ Former Director of Nuclear Policy at MOD, Commodore Tim Hare, stated in evidence before the House of Commons Defence Committee hearing on Trident that "It is the submarine platforms which is the issue, in particular the nuclear steam raising plant which has a safety justification of 25 years. To renew that safety justification is a non-trivial activity largely because of the very laudable, strong safety rating and criteria that have to be met. To extend the safety justification is non-trivial. It can be done but, to my understanding, not for much more than five or six years." *House of Commons Defence Committee hearing on the UK's strategic nuclear deterrent*, House of Commons Defence Committee: London, 14 March 2006, Q170.

⁷ According to McInnes, MOD estimated that a four boat fleet would mean that three of the submarines would always be in the operating cycle – either starting patrol, in the middle of patrol or returning from patrol – with the fourth boat in refit and therefore unavailable for operational activity. This gives MOD one boat permanently on station thereby providing an assured nuclear deterrent capability with a degree of extra insurance provided by the high likelihood of one or boats also being available. It was argued that a three boat force was too risky because it could not be guaranteed with absolute certainty that one boat would always be on patrol. McInnes, C. (1986) *Trident: The Only Option?* London: Brassey's, p. 55-57.

The final decision to acquire the current Trident missile system was taken by the Thatcher government in 1979/1980. It therefore took 13-14 years to progress from that political decision to the deployment of the first SSBN carrying Trident missiles.⁸ There is nothing to indicate that procurement times have reduced significantly since then. A 2005 RAND report prepared for MOD on Britain's nuclear submarine industrial base argues that "design of a follow-on SSBN class would have to start approximately 15 years prior to the desired in-service date for replacement submarines".⁹ MOD stated in July 2006 that "it would be imprudent to assume that any successor to the Vanguard-class could be designed, procured and deployed within 14 years".¹⁰ We assume, therefore, that the government is working to a timeframe of a minimum of 15 years. If a similar timeframe is required to procure a new SSBN, then a political decision should have been taken in 2004/05, if not earlier, if the government wanted to begin replacing the current fleet of Vanguard SSBNs with new submarines in 2019.¹¹

Even if a decision to replace the submarines is taken in 2007, it will be difficult to have the first of a new fleet entering service as HMS Vanguard retires. Therefore instead of retiring the submarines after their 25-year service life, it is likely, if not inevitable, that the government will opt to extend the service life of the submarines by 5-6 years. In fact questions were asked in MOD some time ago about a service life extension programme (SLEP) for the Vanguard SSBNs.¹² It would be possible to recertify the nuclear reactor for a further 5-6 years, although the process of proving the safety of the reactor to the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate would be a time-consuming, costly and arduous process. The degradation of the submarine hull is also a factor affecting service life, but the life of the hulls could certainly be extended a further 5-6 years.¹³ This would extend the life of HMS Vanguard to around 2024-2025 and could conceivably postpone decisions on a post-Vanguard nuclear arsenal by several years.

The missiles

The Trident missile is an American designed, built and maintained system. The US currently fields 14 SSBNs armed with the Trident II D5 nuclear missiles, which is now America's only SLBM. The UK leases its Trident missiles from a common pool in the US and returns the missiles to the US for periodic refurbishment.

The US SSBNs have had their service life extended from 30 to 44 years. The oldest US SSBN is scheduled to retire in 2029, the youngest in 2042. The US has also initiated a life extension programme for its stockpile of Trident D5 missiles to ensure a full supply through to 2042. The D5 missiles will be upgraded to a modernised variant called the D5LE or D5A.¹⁴ It is not clear whether the British government has decided to participate in the D5 life extension programme.¹⁵ If it does, the British government can be confident that it will have access to Trident SLBMs until the early 2040s.

The warheads

The British nuclear warheads that arm the Trident missiles are based on an American design and also require routine servicing. This is undertaken at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) at

⁸ Design work was completed and approved by the Admiralty Board in 1984. The submarines themselves took 5-6 years to build each one. McInnes, C. (1986) *Trident: The Only Option?* London: Brassey's, p. 60.

⁹ Schank, J et al *Sustaining Design and Production Resources*, The United Kingdom's Nuclear Submarine Industrial Base, Volume 1, Arlington, VA: RAND Corporation, 2005, p. xviii.

¹⁰ *The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the Strategic Context: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2005-06*, House of Commons Defence Committee: London, 24 July 2006, p. 8.

¹¹ Michael Clarke notes that industrial decisions were taken several years before the final political decision in 1979, evidenced by the decision in 1977 to begin construction of the Devonshire Dock Hall in Barrow for SSBN construction. Clarke, M., 'Does my bomb look big in this: Britain's nuclear choices after Trident', *International Affairs*, 80 (1), 2004, p. 55 footnote 28.

¹² Personal communication. All personal communications cited in this paper are from former MOD officials, independent experts and MPs interviewed in March 2006.

¹³ Personal communication.

¹⁴ Young, C. *Statement of RADM Charles B. Young, Director, Strategic Systems Programs Before the Strategic Subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee*, United States Senate: Washington, DC, April 8, 2003; Norris, R. and Kristensen, H., *U.S. Nuclear Forces 2006*, Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. Available at <http://www.thebulletin.org/article_nn.php?art_ofn=jf06norris> (accessed on July 3, 2006).

¹⁵ *The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the Strategic Context*, House of Commons Defence Committee, June 2006, p. 31.

Aldermaston. Periodic refurbishment will ensure the reliability of current Trident nuclear warheads into the 2020s.¹⁶

2. Key factors affecting the policy-making process

Major decisions on British nuclear weapons are infrequent. Which ever post-Vanguard decisions are made in the next few years, they will have major ramifications for Britain's status as a nuclear weapon state and the perceived utility of nuclear weapons in the international system. It is very important, therefore, that a full and open debate takes place before final or irreversible decisions are made. The government profess to recognise this, with the Prime Minister promising in February 2006 "the fullest Parliamentary debate possible".¹⁷

In order to maximise government accountability it is vital to know how these forthcoming nuclear weapons decisions are likely to be reached, who will make them and the context in which they will be made in terms of the main assumptions and factors likely to influence policy.

2.1 Strategic and institutional caution

The policy process will revolve around the Ministry of Defence (MOD) as the custodian of Britain's nuclear arsenal, but MOD's position is far from clear. Public statements by and private conversations with former MOD officials suggest a degree of ambivalence about the long-term future of the nuclear weapons MOD deploys with neither a strong pro- nor anti-nuclear lobby within the Ministry. Former MOD officials have stated that if Britain did not possess nuclear weapons today, it is unlikely that it would decide to develop them now. Nuclear weapons are considered political weapons only with little military utility and no role to play in war-fighting doctrine.¹⁸ They have argued that MOD will not be overly concerned if the UK relinquishes its nuclear capability after Vanguard because it has such a small impact on UK military operations. At the same time there is a strong desire to maintain the status quo. This view expects to see the Vanguard SSBNs' service life extended and then replaced with a comparable capability. It is likely that strategic and institutional caution in favour of the status quo will outweigh any sense of ambivalence about the fate of Britain's nuclear weapons status.

Military organisations and large bureaucracies are characteristically cautious, pragmatic and resistant to what may be perceived as radical change. MOD is no exception and pragmatism informed by options that entail minimal risk is likely to guide MOD's role in the policy-making process. From MOD's perspective there are a number of powerful drivers in favour of the status quo: institutional caution, credibility in Washington, cost, and the pervasiveness of the concept of deterrence. Military rationales for retaining a nuclear force to deter a specific or potential threat are unlikely to exert decisive influence on the policy-making process. This paper explores these factors before examining the policy-making process.

MOD's cautious institutional pragmatism suggests that it will aim to keep as many options open for as long as possible. A decision to replace Trident can always be reversed later; a decision not to replace Trident could be difficult to reverse as expertise fades, facilities decay and the nuclear relationship with the US withers. From an organisational perspective the path of minimum risk entails planning to retain a nuclear force after Vanguard.

¹⁶ Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Defence, House of Commons Defence Committee hearing on the UK's strategic nuclear deterrent, 14 March 2006. Appendix B: The Expected Life the Trident System.

¹⁷ House of Commons Liaison Committee, *The Prime Minister: Oral and Written Evidence*, February 7, 2006.

¹⁸ For example at the 2005 NPT Review Conference UK Ambassador John Freeman stated that "We continue to emphasise that our nuclear weapons are for deterrence only and have a political role – not a military one." Freeman, J., *Statement by Ambassador John Freeman to the Seventh Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons*, May 2005. See also Hare, T. 'What next for trident?', *RUSI Journal*, April 2005, p.30.

The concept of deterrence

The concept of nuclear deterrence remains powerful in MOD and the wider British political-military establishment. Nuclear deterrence, it is argued, successfully prevented a nuclear conflict with an aggressive and expansionist Soviet Union during the Cold War. The institutionalisation of nuclear force as the foundation of British security in the Cold War has successfully carried the concept into the post-Cold War era. Fifteen years after the collapse of the Soviet Union many government officials and politicians continue to insist that nuclear weapons serve a useful, even vital, deterrent function and will do so for the foreseeable future. This is not a deterrent against a specific threat, but against general international political uncertainty and the possibility of the emergence of a major strategic security threat to the UK.

The working assumption in MOD is that nuclear weapons will be kept because it cannot be demonstrated 100% that there is no longer any need for them.¹⁹ Given the uncertainties of the contemporary international security environment, it is argued, it would be foolish to unilaterally surrender a nuclear deterrent however unlikely it may seem that a country in Britain's secure geo-political position might need recourse to a retaliatory nuclear threat to deter aggression over the next 20-30 years. The burden of proof, they claim, is on nuclear abolitionists to show beyond doubt that the UK would be secure without nuclear weapons.²⁰ This is evidenced in a number of statements: MODs 'New Chapter' for the Strategic Defence Review published in July 2002 stated that "the UK's nuclear weapons have a continuing use a means of deterring major strategic military threat and they have a continuing role in guaranteeing the ultimate security of the UK"²¹; and in November 2005 Defence Secretary John Reid reportedly said "I defy anyone here to say we will not need a nuclear weapon in 20-50 years time".²² The concept of a non-nuclear strategic military doctrine seems antithetical after the Cold War.

2.2 The costs of replacement

Financially there appear to be only two long-term options open to MOD: replace the aging SSBNs with new submarines to host the Trident D5 missile, or not replace them at all and relinquish a nuclear weapons capability. A third possible option that may prove to be cost effective could involve modifying the Astute-class of nuclear attack submarines that is currently being built to accommodate the Trident D5 missile. By participating in the US Navy's Trident programme and collaborating with the US on warhead and submarine development for the Trident missile, Britain's current Trident system was procured at relatively low cost. Costs would have been judged prohibitively expensive if Britain had tried to research and develop wholly indigenous missile, warhead, targeting and submarine capabilities together with continuous in-service support.²³ The US took most of the risks in developing, testing and ensuring the safety and surety of the Trident system. The US agreed to provide the UK with Trident missiles off-the-shelf and assisted the UK in the development of its nuclear warhead for the Trident missile and the submarines to carry the missiles.

In the process of procuring and operating the current Vanguard SSBNs the UK has built a host of facilities at Coulport, Faslane and Devonport to support the Trident system leading to a large support infrastructure in both the UK and the US.²⁴ If the UK were to opt for a replacement system that did not involve the Trident missile it would have to pay for new support facilities, extensive testing programmes to ensure the safety and reliability of any new system, and all the inherent financial, technological and political risks associated with building a sophisticated weapon system that the US shouldered for the

¹⁹ Personal communication.

²⁰ This is the wrong question ask since it is impossible to answer. A more appropriate question is to ask is how can potential strategic threats, particularly those involving WMD, be addressed and countered without recourse to direct or existential nuclear threats.

²¹ *The Strategic Defence Review: a New Chapter*, Ministry of Defence: London, 2002, p. 12

²² Wintour, P., 'MPs press Reid for vote on Trident replacement', *The Guardian*, 1 November 2005.

²³ Freedman, L. (1999) *The politics of British defence, 1979-98* Basingstoke: Macmillan, p. 109.

²⁴ *Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Defence*, House of Commons Defence Committee hearing on the UK's strategic nuclear deterrent, 14 March 2006. Appendix B: The Expected Life the Trident System; Hare, T., transcript of oral evidence before the House of Commons Defence Committee hearing on the UK's strategic nuclear deterrent, 28 March 2006.

Trident programme. Realistically one can only talk about submarine-based options to accommodate the Trident missile when discussing post-Vanguard nuclear options. It is unlikely that the UK could build any other system within acceptable time and cost scales.²⁵

Industrial base

The existence of the Trident programme's industrial footprint makes a replacement submarine option financially attractive. But this also operates against the non-replacement option by bringing industry pressure to bear on forthcoming post-Vanguard decisions, particularly as they affect the nuclear submarine industrial base. In 1993 the Royal Navy announced that by 1995 its entire submarine fleet would all be nuclear powered and MOD industrial policy is to retain a nuclear submarine construction capability.²⁶ MOD is currently procuring three Astute-class nuclear attack submarines (SSNs) with an option to buy four more. In evidence before the House of Commons Defence Committee, Corporate Director at Devonport Management Limited Peter Whitehouse said that the Astute building programme would likely be complete by around 2018. In order to ensure retention of nuclear submarine design and construction skills and capabilities the industry will need to be designing and building a post-Vanguard submarine by the mid-2010s.²⁷ If it is not, then it is difficult to see how MOD will be able to retain an indigenous nuclear submarine industrial base without winding down key facilities and restarting them at a later date if required – a costly process that MOD would like to avoid.²⁸ The nuclear submarine industry is therefore geared towards building a Vanguard replacement after the Astute building programme and will be expecting a positive decision.²⁹

In fact Britain's nuclear deterrent and its nuclear submarine industrial base are wholly dependent on each other. Without a post-Vanguard SSBN construction programme, which also provides a significant part of the rationale for building new nuclear-powered attack submarines to protect the SSBN fleet, there will be no nuclear submarine industrial base. Yet without that industrial base there will be no sea-based nuclear force and therefore perhaps no nuclear force at all.

MOD's financial opportunity costs

The cost of replacing the Vanguard fleet with a new SSBN fleet is likely to be in the region of £20 billion, although this could be significantly lower if the Vanguard submarines are replaced with near-identical copies. Costs over the 25-30 year lifetime of a new SSBN could run to £30-40 billion.³⁰ This sounds a lot, but from MOD's perspective with a current annual defence budget of £31-32 billion, spending £30-40 billion on procuring and running new SSBNs for 30 years would only consume an average 3-4% of the defence budget over the lifetime of the system. This can certainly be managed by MOD. Given enduring pressure on the defence budget MOD may well conclude that it will get little in return for not replacing Trident in terms of additional resources for conventional capabilities.

A number of factors could nevertheless change the opportunity cost calculus in favour of replacing or not-replacing Trident. First, the Treasury could fund additional conventional capabilities in place of replacement SSBNs, presenting MOD with a tangible capability opportunity cost that could work against

²⁵ Personal communication. Despite this, in June 2005 Chief of the Air Staff Sir Jock Stirrup (now Chief of the Defence Staff) suggested that a cheaper nuclear force could be deployed by fitting nuclear warheads on stand-off missiles carried by the new Typhoon fighter-bomber. Fox, R., "Trident: the done deal", *The New Statesman*, 13 June 2005.

²⁶ Hartley, K., "The UK Submarine Industrial Base: An Economic Perspective", Centre for Defence Economics, University of York, unpublished, May 1999.

²⁷ Whitehouse, P., transcript of oral evidence before the House of Commons Defence Committee hearing on the UK's strategic nuclear deterrent, 28 March 2006.

²⁸ On April 4, 2006 the *Financial Times* reported that Peter Whitehouse of DML, the company that owns the Devonport nuclear submarine yard in Plymouth, stated "If we are not to see a very big gap in throughput, Barrow needs to be getting on with the design and build of the submarines ([post-Vanguard SSBNs]). (3)"

²⁹ Following Chancellor Gordon Brown's 21 June 2006 statement suggesting that he would retain nuclear weapons after Vanguard should become Prime Minister, Harry Knowles, chief executive of Furness Enterprise said "The fact the Gordon Brown has come out and indicated there would be a presumption about replacing Trident is very beneficial as far as we are concerned...we would obviously want the Trident replacement to be a submarine-based system and we will continue to lobby or that." 'Barrow Jobs Joy at Brown's Trident Pledge', *North West Evening Mail* 22 June 2006.

³⁰ Personal communication.

Trident replacement. Second, between 2008 and 2015 the current procurement programmes, including the Type 45 destroyer, Future Carrier and Astute class submarine programmes, will exceed available funding. This could push some programmes back into later years to ease pressure on the defence budget. MOD cannot do this with its nuclear arsenal if it wishes to retain the current CASD policy based on four SSBNs.³¹ If the Treasury does not provide additional funding for a replacement SSBN programme MOD will have hard choices to make between replacing the Vanguard fleet at the expense of other conventional programmes. Third, MOD argues that Britain's nuclear arsenal is a national political asset managed by MOD, rather than a military asset integral to MOD's mission. Therefore, the argument runs, the cost of any replacement should not be drawn exclusively from the defence budget. If the Treasury agrees and provides some additional extra-budgetary funding for Trident replacement, this would make a replacement option much easier for MOD to manage. Fourth, there is a risk that if the Vanguard fleet is not replaced the Treasury, and others in MOD, will question the need to fund a submarine capability at all. Part of the nuclear attack submarine fleet's role is to protect the Vanguard SSBNs. If a decision is taken not to replace the Vanguard submarines the Treasury may well decide not procure any additional Astute-class submarines after the initial order of three and to effectively wind down Britain's nuclear submarine industry. MOD will be anxious to avoid losing such a key asset having gone to considerable lengths to consolidate the submarine programme around a nuclear submarine industrial base.

One option that has emerged to reduce some of these opportunity costs lies in the Maritime Underwater Future Capability (MUFC) submarine programme. This programme, originally called the Future Attack Submarine (FASM), was established to replace the fleet of aging Trafalgar-class SSNs. A number of commentators have suggested that the MUFC submarine could incorporate ballistic missile launch tubes for the Trident missile as well as conventional cruise missiles, leading to a much smaller nuclear force.³² Given the cost of operating two nuclear submarine lines (either an ongoing Astute programme and a Vanguard replacement programme, or a non-nuclear MUFC programme and a Vanguard replacement programme) the Treasury may insist on incorporating Trident missiles into the MUFC programme. RUSI's Lee Willett concurs, arguing that following the Astute building programme: "they [MOD] will look to have a single generic platform able to conduct land attack, nuclear deterrence and deploy special forces".³³

From MOD's budgetary perspective a decision not to replace Trident is unlikely to improve funding for conventional forces and could undermine its SSN programme and perhaps the long-term viability of the British nuclear submarine industry. On the other hand a decision to proceed with replacement could place major pressure on the defence budget at a time when UK forces are likely to be deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq for the foreseeable future and delay key conventional force programmes, unless the Treasury were forthcoming with additional funding. On the balance of financial and capability opportunity costs MOD is likely to opt for replacement. Medium-term pressure on the defence budget will be difficult but manageable whilst the costs of a Vanguard replacement over the lifetime of the system can be accommodated. A viable submarine industrial base is considered a vital asset for an island nation and a nuclear MUFC submarine could reduce some of the opportunity costs associated with a direct SSBN replacement programme. Furthermore, MOD is unlikely to get additional funding for conventional forces if it does not replace the Vanguard fleet.

2.3 Britain's relationship with the United States

The Labour government and wider British political establishment argue that the UK should play a major role in global affairs and that it is important for global order and stability that it does so.³⁴ This interventionist strategic outlook was reinforced by the events of September 11, 2001. The following November Secretary of State for Defence Geoff Hoon said "we have no choice but to be prepared to intervene and actively manage the international security environment".³⁵ Blair is an ardent Atlanticist

³¹ Youngs, T. and Taylor, C., *Trident and the future of the British nuclear deterrent*, House of Commons Library International Affairs and Defence Section, 5 July 2005, p. 11.

³² Ripley, T., "Secret plans for Trident replacement". *The Scotsman*, 9 June 2004.

³³ "UK debates Trident sub replacement", *Defense News*, 31 May 2004.

³⁴ Freedman, L., *Defence*, in Seldon, A. (ed), *The Blair Effect: The Blair Government 1997-2001*, Little Brown and Company: London, p. 295.

³⁵ Hoon, G., "Intervening in the new security environment", Speech to the Foreign Policy centre, 12 November 2002.

and firmly believes that Britain's fortunes on the world stage, particularly its security, necessitate a very close relationship with Washington. For example in 2003 Blair stated that the UK's primary foreign policy goal was to "remain the closest ally of the US, and as allies influence them to continue broadening their agenda", and his Labour government has remained fully committed to politically and militarily supporting America's global war on terrorism.³⁶ In Blair's view this interventionist doctrine requires a significant power projection capability backed by a nuclear arsenal, leading many to argue that he has already decided to retain a British nuclear weapons capability beyond Vanguard.³⁷ The Foreign Office shares the view that HMG's relationship with the US is fundamental to UK security. FCO's 2003 Strategy White Paper, *UK International Priorities*, states that the relationship with the US is a "vital asset...essential to achieving many of our objective, especially in ensuring our security".³⁸

From MOD's perspective Britain's relationship with Washington is not only considered crucial to the UK's fundamental security, but also as a key enabler of an interventionist strategic doctrine. The UK has developed an interventionist doctrine primarily to support a US interventionist doctrine, in addition to supporting its own ambitions to be an independent stabilising force in international security. MOD's 2003 White Paper, *Delivering Security in a Changing World*, argues that the UK should be prepared to pursue an expeditionary and interventionist strategy, but that intervention can only be conducted if "US forces are engaged, either leading a coalition or in NATO."³⁹ The White Paper goes on to declare that it is the "significant military contribution the UK is able to make to such operations" that allows the UK to "secure an effective place in the political and military decision-making process." Consequently UK forces must be "interoperable with US command and control structures, match the US operational tempo and provide those capabilities that deliver the greatest impact when operating alongside the US". The centrality of the US cannot be overestimated in the government's strategic security policy and planning. The importance of political and military credibility in Washington through interoperability with US armed forces at all levels is clear.⁴⁰

The UK enjoys an unparalleled level of exchange with the US Department of Defense. Two areas of particularly close interaction are nuclear weapons and intelligence. MOD would be concerned that a significant dilution in the closeness of the relationship on nuclear weapons could lead to a comparable dilution in intelligence cooperation and perhaps more general areas of military-to-military exchange and interaction. MOD does not want to jeopardise this relationship and it has determined that its unprecedented level of access stems from its standing as a credible and powerful political and military ally.⁴¹ It is therefore crucial importance to MOD to retain credibility with the US.

The government is also aware that a decision to become a non-nuclear weapon state would leave the US as the only country providing NATO with a nuclear deterrent capability (Britain's nuclear weapons are formally assigned to NATO; the French nuclear arsenal is not). The government will be well aware that there is a constituency in Washington that favours leaving European defence to the Europeans. A decision that leaves the US as the only country committed to the nuclear defence of NATO could amplify charges from the US that Europe is not providing enough for its own defence, that the US is shouldering too much of the European defence burden and that perhaps the only way to redress the balance is to reconsider the level of its commitment to the defence of Europe, particularly given the Pentagon's desire to reorient its military forces to the Pacific and the Middle East.⁴² For good or bad, the government considers the NATO alliance and Britain's relationship with the US as the foundation of British defence and MOD will instinctively balk at any decisions that could cause the United States to rethink its role in

³⁶ Blair, T., "Britain's Place in the World", Prime Minister's speech at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Leadership Conference, 7 January 2003. Available at <<http://www.pmo.gov.uk/output/Page1765.asp>> accessed on 16 March 2006.

³⁷ Freedman, L. (1999) *The politics of British defence, 1979-98* Basingstoke: Macmillan, p. 98; Brown, C., "Revealed: Blair to upgrade Britain's nuclear weapons", *The Independent*, 2 May 2005.

³⁸ *UK International Priorities*, UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, December 2003. Cited in "UK White Papers on defence and Foreign Policy", *Disarmament Diplomacy*, 75 January/February 2004.

³⁹ *Delivering Security in a Changing World*, Ministry of Defence White Paper, December 2003, p.8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 8.

⁴¹ Personal communications.

⁴² Personal communications.

Europe and the NATO alliance.⁴³ This, as William Hopkinson, former Under Secretary of State (Policy) at the Ministry of Defence, argues, has an inhibiting effect on policy-making in Whitehall and “has led to a tendency to concentrate on aspects of defence policy that do not raise fundamental questions about why the USA is in Europe and what NATO is for”.⁴⁴

Quite how valid these concerns are is difficult to assess. There is little evidence to suggest that Britain relinquishing its nuclear weapons status would have any significant impact on Washington’s view of Britain or the degree of defence and intelligence cooperation it currently enjoys. Furthermore, if the US decided to significantly lower or end its defence commitment to Europe it is unlikely that Britain’s nuclear weapon status would be an important factor in that decision.

Whilst the nuclear relationship may not be integral MOD’s overall relationship with the US, any decision not to replace the Trident system will be viewed as detrimental to that relationship by a significant military and political constituency in Whitehall. A UK decision to become a non-nuclear weapon state could be managed with the US as long as Britain remained committed to Washington’s international security goals and philosophy, but MOD would prefer not rock the boat at all. The Foreign Office is perhaps a more Euro-centric organisation than MOD and has less at stake in a close relationship than MOD. It is therefore likely to be more sceptical of the necessity of remaining close to the US in the nuclear field.⁴⁵

It is difficult to gauge what the reaction of the US military and nuclear establishment might be to a British decision to renounce nuclear weapons. In all likelihood the decision would be met with indifference. The UK would probably still be employing substantial conventional forces in support of US military operations, US nuclear weapons will remain in at least four NATO countries under dual-key arrangements (Germany, Italy, Holland and Belgium) for the foreseeable future, and the UK will remain wholly committed to the conventional defence of Europe through NATO. It is also important to recall that the US has not always looked positively on the existence of the British nuclear arsenal. During the Cold War Presidents Kennedy and Johnson hoped the UK would phase out its nuclear arsenal to minimise the complications of deterrence.

Britain’s national defence is so tied up with America that the relationship between Washington and Britain’s military doctrine can become almost tautological: in essence the UK seeks a close relationship with the US to support the UK’s military doctrine of closely supporting the US. This applies equally in the nuclear field where the UK seeks a nuclear force in large part to reinforce its defence and security relationship with Washington, a relationship it needs in order to retain its nuclear arsenal.

There will be those in government, including MOD, who will be concerned that if it loses credibility in Washington by relinquishing its nuclear capability it may lose credibility as a major power on the world stage.⁴⁶ But being viewed as a major and responsible world power and the closest ally of the US is intrinsic to the defence and wider political establishment’s enduring identity and issues that challenge or threaten identity are generally resisted. It is perhaps this factor that will prove decisive in determining post-Vanguard options. Arguments about the strategic necessity of a British nuclear arsenal are arguably unlikely to be amongst the most pressing factors affecting forthcoming decisions. Nevertheless arguments about the need for an enduring nuclear deterrent for strategic security reasons are likely to constitute the main rationale presented to the public.

3. The likely policy-making process

Government policy-making does not generally follow a ‘rational actor’ model where policy-making is based on an objective calculation of cost-benefit analysis and proceeds hierarchically up a particular

⁴³ Hopkinson, W. (2000) *The making of British Defence policy*, London: The Stationery Office Books, p. 40.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 40.

⁴⁵ Personal communication.

⁴⁶ Arguments about the influence that being a nuclear weapon state confers Britain in its international relations are ambiguous at best and devoid of reason and evidence at worst.

bureaucratic system. Instead policy-making is a continuous iterative process in which policy evolves “from a subtle interplay of individuals, officials and often fairly junior players sharing particular concerns with colleagues and ministers.”⁴⁷ Decisions on the future of Britain’s nuclear weapons will evolve through formal and informal contact primarily between MOD and FCO officials and continuing dialogue and interaction between the responsible ministers and their civil servants.⁴⁸ Throughout this iterative process the lower level decisions within the civil service that set the parameters for debate are as important as senior level ministerial decisions and discussions.⁴⁹

Power in the policy-making system resides in departments, ministers and the executive. Parliament has an arguably negligible impact on decisions that do not require legislation. Considerable power may have accumulated in the executive considerably under Blair, particularly through the transformation of the Cabinet Office into a Prime Minister’s Department in all but name, but No. 10 is not omnipotent.⁵⁰ Predominance of executive power may allow the Prime Minister to lead on policy, but he or she cannot command, dictate or directly control the evolution and implementation of policy. Just as strong pressure from the centre can impose a particular policy, strong senior officials in the civil service with established views and interests to advocate and defend can impose a departmental view directly on ministers and indirectly on the executive.⁵¹ It will be the balance and exercise of political power between the civil service, ministers and Downing Street that will determine the outcome of the post-Vanguard policy-making process.

The process of exploring options for a post-Vanguard nuclear arsenal has already begun.⁵² In fact, as timelines suggest, options for a SLEP have already been fully investigated, as discussed earlier.⁵³ Defence Secretary John Reid’s comment in April 2006 that work had already been done “to keep options open in considering platforms to carry the Trident D5 missile in the longer term pending future decisions on any replacement for Trident” also suggests that service life extension options have already been assessed by MOD.⁵⁴

It is likely that study groups have already been formed to thoroughly examine post-Vanguard options beyond any service life extension programme, as indicated by Reid’s statement that initial preparatory work was underway on possible options beyond the life of the Vanguard SSBNs.⁵⁵ It was also reported in February 2005 that MOD officials were drawing up options to be presented to ministers within the next two years,⁵⁶ in September 2005 that MOD had begun to explore technology options for the nuclear power plants that could power the next generation of nuclear powered submarines,⁵⁷ and in April 2006 that MOD officials had initiated talks with the defence industry on options for a post-Vanguard nuclear platform.⁵⁸

Whether the option of not replacing the Vanguard SSBNs and becoming a non-nuclear weapon state after the Vanguard submarines expire will be examined is open to question. Some former MOD officials argue that this option will definitely be explored, Whitehall being nothing if not thorough. Others maintain that since official policy is to have a nuclear weapon system MOD will assume there is a continuing need

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 27.

⁴⁸ Wallace, W., *The Foreign Policy Process in Britain*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs: London, 1975, p. 9.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* p. 7.

⁵⁰ Hennessey, P., *The Blair style of government*, Lecture at the Royal Society of Arts, University of Bath, 10 June 2002.

⁵¹ Weir, S. and Beetham, D., *Political power and democratic control in Britain*, Routledge: London, 1999, p. 151, 153, 156;

Wallace, W., *The Foreign Policy Process in Britain*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs: London, 1975, p. 9.

⁵² Hoon, G. *Hansard*, House of Commons, 30 June 2004, Column 356W.

⁵³ In June 2004 Secretary of State for Defence Geoff Hoon stated that “concept studies on options for platforms to carry Trident missiles in the longer term” began in May 2002 and were completed in May 2003. These, he said, were part of routine studies undertaken by MoD into the optimum operational life of key defence capabilities, including Trident. Hoon, G. *Hansard*, House of Commons, 30 June 2004, Column 356W.

⁵⁴ Reid, J., *Hansard*, House of Commons, 19 April 2006, Column 672W.

⁵⁵ Secretary of State for Defence Des Browne revealed in Parliament on 24 July 2006 that there are currently nine full-time civil servants in MOD working on Trident and nuclear weapons policy.

⁵⁶ Burke, J., “MoD plans multibillion upgrade of nuclear subs”, *The Observer*, 20 February 2005.

⁵⁷ Scott, R., “UK funds nuclear propulsion studies”, *Janes Defence Weekly*, 21 September 2005, p. 13.

⁵⁸ Boxell, J., “MoD tests water on Trident replacement”, *The Financial Times*, 4 April 2006.

for one unless advised to the contrary. Given recent statements by Prime Minister Tony Blair, Chancellor Gordon Brown and recent Defence Secretaries in favour of nuclear weapons it seems unlikely that civil servants will spend much time developing a serious non-replacement option.⁵⁹ MOD may not be very proactive or have a firm view at this stage, preferring instead to take a lead from the centre whilst ensuring that it can respond thoroughly to any government requests on the future of the Trident system.⁶⁰

These study groups will involve the naval staff and the naval element of the central staff, the team under the Director of Chemical, Biological and Nuclear Policy, and perhaps the Joint Defence College and the Royal College of Defence Studies. Options will be set out in a series of classified papers and opened up for further development with the Foreign Office and Treasury to cost the various options and examine the likely international political and security ramifications. It is likely that the Joint Intelligence Committee and Defence Intelligence Staff will be involved and perhaps external think tanks such as the Royal Institute for International Affairs (RIIA) or the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) will be consulted.⁶¹

The Foreign Office will be tasked with elaborating the geo-political rationale for nuclear weapons through an assessment of the future international security environment. It will have to answer fundamental questions on the need for nuclear weapons, make judgements and reach conclusions on the UK's role in international relations and whether that role needs to be underpinned by a nuclear arsenal.⁶² FCO will also have to examine the extent to which decision to retain nuclear weapon beyond Vanguard will directly or indirectly affect international nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament efforts, particularly within the context of the NPT. The political establishment appears to be of the view that nuclear retention will have little or no impact on the global nuclear non-proliferation regime.⁶³

These study groups will directly and indirectly set the parameters for forthcoming major decisions by defining the terms of the debate, the appropriate variables to consider, and the legitimacy of particular view points. If a non-nuclear option is not considered at this stage then it is unlikely to get a full hearing as the policy-making process gathers momentum. The terms of the option review process are therefore crucial. There is a clear danger that the pre-structuring of options and outcomes by MOD's civil servants and its near monopoly of ministerial advice and information can create a one sided view of an issue in the department and government.⁶⁴ This could lead to a subjective assessment of post-Vanguard options that deflects dissenting questions, opinions and assumptions deemed invalid under the formal and informal terms of the debate.

The key people in MOD overseeing the study groups will be the Policy Director and the Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff (Policy) overseen by the Permanent Secretary. Other senior officials within the Ministry of Defence will include the Chief of the Defence Staff, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for Procurement, First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff, and the Chief Scientific Advisor. The officials currently holding these and other relevant positions are listed in the appendix.

A number of key players in FCO will be involved in the evolution of nuclear policy options and FCO officials will interact with MOD formally and informally as options are developed. Senior officials may include the Permanent Under-Secretary, Director General Defence and Intelligence, the Director for International Security, and the Director for Defence and Strategic Threats. Policy option studies will likely

⁵⁹ See for example Norton-Taylor, R and Wintour, P. "Defence Minister backs nuclear arms", *The Guardian*, July 18, 2006, p. 18.

⁶⁰ Hare, T. 'What next for trident?', *RUSI Journal*, April 2005, p.32; Personal communication.

⁶¹ Personal communication.

⁶² Personal communication.

⁶³ Others disagree. For example the 2006 Report of WMD Commission chaired by Hans Blix states that both Britain and France "will have to decide whether it will be meaningful to retain costly nuclear arsenals that were developed for an enemy that no longer exists, in order to meet hypothetical threats against which such weapons are of questionable value. Both countries are now at a crossroads: going down one road would show their conviction that nuclear weapons are not necessary for their security, while the other would demonstrate to all other states a belief that these weapons continue to be indispensable."

⁶⁴ Weir, S. and Beetham, D., *Political power and democratic control in Britain*, Routledge: London, 1999, p. 171.

involve the Security Policy department, Counter-proliferation department and relevant sections of the Research Analysts division. In addition Sir David Manning, UK Ambassador to the USA and former Foreign Policy Adviser to the Prime Minister, will almost certainly be involved along with the two special advisors on the foreign secretary's staff and the UK ambassadors to NATO and the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva.⁶⁵

It is almost certain that studies and discussions at this stage will involve US officials, both civilians in the Office of the Secretary of Defense and civilian and military officials from the US Navy and perhaps National Security Council staff. The British Embassy in Washington and its atomic coordinating office will have a key role to play in facilitating this process. It was reported in July 2005 that defence secretary John Reid had authorised officials to begin negotiations with Washington on the nature of Britain's post-Vanguard nuclear force.⁶⁶ The UK is likely to look to the US for political and technical support. If American technology is sought, it is likely that the US will be approached informally, options discussed and agreement reached before the US President is approached formally by Prime Minister and an official agreement is concluded.⁶⁷ A possible *quid pro quo* could be reward for past, present and continued support in Iraq, or perhaps deployment of US missile defence interceptors in the UK in the future.⁶⁸

The initial options in classified papers will evolve iteratively as different departments and key individuals in MOD, FCO, Treasury and Cabinet Office interact. Eventually five or six costed options will emerge out of the miasma of possibilities, probably only two of which will be considered realistic: for example nuclear cruise missiles on the new Astute-class nuclear powered attack submarines, or a new SSBN, either a new but upgraded Vanguard submarine or a new SSBN/MUFC design, perhaps based on the Astute-class. It is unlikely that non-replacement will be put forward by MOD as a realistic option even if it is explored in the initial option review phase.⁶⁹ From MOD's institutional perspective the issues of cost, the perceived credibility of the deterrent or war-fighting threat posed by different nuclear options, and wider political ramifications will determine the selection and narrowing of options.⁷⁰ These two options will then circulate around the relevant centres of power in the policy-making process.

3.1 Downing Street

Historically the formulation of nuclear policy and nuclear weapons decisions has been tightly controlled by the executive, and it is the decisions taken in No. 10 that will ultimately count in the post-Vanguard policy-making process.⁷¹ The historical record suggests that decisions about the future of the UK nuclear arsenal will be led and taken by the Prime Minister advised by a select group of Ministers and advisers.⁷² Blair, like a number of his predecessors, keeps difficult and sensitive decisions away from Cabinet, preferring instead to align a coalition of interests behind his preferred policy and take key issues into small centralised policy-making groups.⁷³

⁶⁵ Dickie, J., *The New Mandarins: How British Foreign Policy Works*, I.B.Tauris: London, 2004, p. 119.

⁶⁶ Cracknell, D., "Talks start with US on Trident's 15bn successor", *The Sunday Times*, 17 July 2005

⁶⁷ Indeed President Bush stated in June 2004 when transmitting the amended Mutual Defense Agreement to Congress that "The United Kingdom intends to continue to maintain viable nuclear forces. In light of our previous close cooperation and the fact that the United Kingdom has committed its nuclear forces to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, I have concluded that it is in our interest to continue to assist them in maintaining a credible nuclear force". Bush, G. W. (2004) *Message to the Congress of the United States*. Available at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2004/06/20040614-16.htm>>, accessed on 3 November 2004.

⁶⁸ On October 18, 2004 the *Guardian* reported on page 9 that "Ministers have bowed to a US request that details of a deal on the deployment in Britain of a US missile defence system should be kept secret...US and British officials have been discussing the deployment of US interceptor missiles in Britain."

⁶⁹ Personal communication.

⁷⁰ Personal communication.

⁷¹ Freedman, L. (1999) *The politics of British defence, 1979-98* Basingstoke: Macmillan, p. 134.

⁷² In June 2004 *The Scotsman* reported that the Prime Minister has all but made up his mind to replace the Trident system with a new nuclear weapon system, according to 'naval sources'. Ripley T., 'Secret plans for Trident replacement', *The Scotsman*. In May 2005 *The Independent* reported that the Prime Minister "has secretly decided that Britain will build a new generation of the nuclear deterrent to replace the ageing Trident submarine fleet at a cost of more the £10bn". Brown C., 'Revealed: Blair to upgrade Britain's nuclear weapons', *The Independent*, May 2, 2005.

⁷³ Weir, S. and Beetham, D., *Political power and democratic control in Britain*, Routledge: London, 1999, p. 128.

In the Prime Minister's Office the Chief of Staff, Head of the Overseas and Defence Secretariat, Cabinet Office Security and Intelligence Coordinator, and the Prime Minister's Senior Policy Advisers on Foreign Policy are likely to be involved in the policy-making process. It is likely that policy will be developed informally based on meetings and discussions between Blair's senior advisors and MOD and FCO officials and ministers.⁷⁴ The decision-making process is likely to be secret and conducted behind the closed doors of a miscellaneous Cabinet ad hoc committee convened by the Prime Minister. Cabinet members will probably include the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Secretary of Defence, Foreign Secretary, Chancellor and possibly the Secretary of State for Trade & Industry and Cabinet Secretary.

This is evidenced in the historical record on previous major nuclear weapons decisions and more recently in the decision to invade Iraq with the United States. The report of the UK Committee to Review Intelligence on Weapons of Mass destruction chaired by Lord Butler suggests that decision-making on matters of national security within the Cabinet remains tightly controlled and largely unaccountable. In particular the report's discussion on 'Machinery of Government' states that "two former Cabinet members, one of the present and one of a previous administration, expressed their concern about the informal nature of much of the Government's decision-making process, and the relative lack of use of established Cabinet Committee machinery."⁷⁵ When it came to discussion of attacking Iraq, Butler reports that the decision-making was conducted by a small group of Ministers, officials and military officers and that wider collective Cabinet discussion was circumscribed by this process.

Given Blair's commitment to a strong defence, his considerable sensitivity to defence issues after they became an electoral liability for Labour in the 1980s, and the widespread assumption that he has already made up his mind that Britain will continue to deploy nuclear weapons post-Vanguard, it is extremely unlikely that non-replacement will be one of the final options.⁷⁶ Philip Stephens of the *Financial Times* wrote on 27 June 2006 that "Tony Blair's visceral attachment to nuclear status is explicable enough. His political character was forged against Old Labour's pledge of unilateral nuclear disarmament. For all that he is often called a foreign policy radical, Mr Blair's worldview is what might be called postwar conventional. It was written by Harold Macmillan, the Conservative prime minister who picked up the wreckage of the Suez debacle in 1956: Britain has ceased to be a great military power, but it must remain a leading one. The bomb buys a seat at the table."

One of the two options that emerge is likely to have the full support of the Defence Secretary in agreement with the senior civil servants that have overseen the development of the options to be presented to the Prime Minister.⁷⁷ Momentum will develop behind this option, which may be set out in the defence White Paper expected late-2006. The White Paper will also set out MOD's analysis of the future strategic context relevant to a post-Vanguard nuclear force.⁷⁸ This option may then bounce back and forth between MOD and No. 10 until Downing Street and/or Treasury are satisfied. This final option will then be formally confirmed by Cabinet, either in a sub-committee of the Defence and Overseas Committee or an ad hoc committee. The full Cabinet will play no major role in post-Vanguard decisions since it is now largely expected to approve decisions taken elsewhere within government and to deal with political crises rather than major policy decisions.⁷⁹ It is likely that a formal public announcement will be made once the decision has been taken in Cabinet.

⁷⁴ Hopkinson, W. (2000) *The making of British Defence policy*, London: The Stationery Office Books, p. 24; Personal communication.

⁷⁵ Butler R., "Review of Intelligence on weapons of Mass Destruction", London: House of Commons Stationary Office, 2004.

⁷⁶ Ripley, T., "Secret plans for Trident replacement". *The Scotsman*, 9 June 2004; Freedman, L., *Defence*, in Seldon, A. (ed), *The Blair Effect: The Blair Government 1997-2001*, Little Brown and Company: London, p. 289.

⁷⁷ McLean S., *Who Decides? Accountability and Nuclear Weapons Decision-Making in Britain*, Oxford: Oxford Research Group, 1986. pp. 21-22.

⁷⁸ *The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the Strategic Context: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2005-06*, House of Commons Defence Committee: London, 24 July 2006, p. 6.

⁷⁹ Weir, S. and Beetham, D., *Political power and democratic control in Britain*, Routledge: London, 1999, p. 127.

3.2 The policy-making timeframe

If a Vanguard service life extension programme is initiated then a formal decision to extend the service life of the SSBNs will probably be made in late-2006/early 2007. Study groups exploring post-Vanguard options could then work up to around 2009 when selection of a final option will be required, leaving a 15 year procurement window. Crucial expenditure decisions will occur around 2014-2015 when major construction work on any new submarines can be expected to begin (assuming a submarine platform is selected for the Trident missiles). Once this financial commitment has been made it will be extremely difficult to reverse the decision.⁸⁰

From now until 2014-15 there will be little financial outlay, perhaps several million on detailed studies. During this period there is nothing concrete to cancel. After the first 6-8 years of the procurement process there will be a period of perhaps two years that will likely fall in the mid-2010's where a political reversal on replacing the Vanguard SSBNs may be possible if this period coincides with other political developments that add pressure not to build a new nuclear weapon system. After this period billions will be committed to building the new submarines making cancellation extremely difficult.⁸¹

The period 2010-2015 will be the crucial period for shaping the future of Britain's status as a nuclear weapon power. It will be a post-Blair and post-Bush world between two of the five-yearly Review Conferences of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 2010 and 2015 where, amongst other issues, the nuclear weapon states will be expected to have demonstrated further progress towards the ultimate goal of nuclear disarmament. British decisions to procure a new nuclear weapon system (for that is how it will be viewed regardless of any government arguments that it is only the submarines that are being replaced) could have uncomfortable international political ramifications within the context of the NPT regime.

If a SLEP is not chosen then a new SSBN will be needed by 2019 and decisions will have to be made rapidly. Further flexibility can be induced into this prospective timeline if MOD decides to change its CASD policy and operate the nuclear arsenal at a reduced level based on a fleet of three or even two submarines instead of the current four. As a result a new submarine would not be required until the second or third oldest Vanguard SSBNs are due to retire one and three years after HMS Vanguard respectively.⁸²

Table 1: Timelines for different SSBN options

	No-SLEP	SLEP	No-SLEP & reduce to 2 SSBNs	USA
New SSBN needed	2019	2024/25	2028-29	2029
Final options	~2006	~2009/2010	~2013/14	~2014
Major procurement decision	~2010	~2014/15	~2018	~2019

A crucial variable in this timeframe is when and if Chancellor Gordon Brown takes over from Tony Blair and how the debate on Trident is shaped during and after the transition to a Brown premiership. On June 21, 2006 Brown made a widely debated statement suggesting that if and when he becomes Prime

⁸⁰ Hare, T., transcript of oral evidence before the House of Commons Defence Committee hearing on the UK's strategic nuclear deterrent, 28 March 2006; Personal communication.

⁸¹ Personal communication. For example the order was placed with VSEL to build three Astute-class submarines in 1997. The keel for the first boat was laid in 2001. The first Astute is due to be launched in 2007 and enter service in 2009, several years behind schedule.

⁸² It is worth noting that the UK operated with a 2 boat fleet from the end of 1996 to the end of 1998 when the first two Trident SSBNs were deployed and all four of the older Polaris SSBNs had either been decommissioned or were no longer operational. Paterson, R. (1997) Britain's Strategic nuclear deterrent: from before the V-bomber to beyond Trident London: Frank Cass, p. 93, note 21.

Minister he will retain nuclear weapons beyond the current Vanguard-based system.⁸³ Further statements from the government indicated that a decision will be made at the start of 2007 and that the government will produce a White Paper in the autumn of 2006 with options for a post-Vanguard nuclear force, one of which will be to reduce the number of SSBNs from 4 to 3.⁸⁴

If decisions are needed in 2007 this suggests that a SLEP has not been initiated and that a new SSBN will be required in 2019, or 2020 if the UK reduces to three submarines. However, a number of commentators argued that Brown's statement, which actually said very little, was a purely political one to reassure 'middle England' voters that a Brown premiership would not involve a sharp swing to the left and to hasten Blair's departure by reassuring the Prime Minister that Brown was in agreement on the future of Britain's nuclear forces.⁸⁵ Some decisions may be needed early next year, but it is unlikely that major decisions are required then. In fact a few days after Brown's statement the *Financial Times* reported that MODs review of options to replace the current nuclear force and its assessment of the likely threats facing the UK was only in its initial stages.⁸⁶

Given that the policy-making process will take a number of years and have several key decision-making periods, Brown's mind may not be made up. Brown has been reluctant to spend on some MOD items as Chancellor and when it comes to the key decisions he may not be willing to invest upwards of £20 billion to retain a nuclear capability. As Clarke argues: "without a tangible, state-centric and manifest nuclear threat, the financial costs in say, 2015, of a hedge against mere uncertainty may well appear insupportable".⁸⁷

The US SSBN procurement cycle will also have an impact. The Vanguard SSBN programme is out of sync with the US SSBN programme. The danger for the British government is that if it chooses to build a new fleet of submarines to take the Trident missile it will probably need that missile to 2050 or later, but the US only plans to keep the missile in service until 2042. The UK could then be faced with the difficult and expensive proposition of maintaining the aging missiles or refitting its new fleet of submarine to accommodate whatever submarine launched nuclear missile the US produces after Trident. As the June 2006 House of Commons Defence Committee report on Trident pointed out: "the UK will need to make sure that it does not opt for a system to which the US is only committed until 2024. As the experience of Polaris Chevaline in 1970s indicated, maintaining a system which is not in service in the US carries significant cost implications."⁸⁸ The cost of Edward Heath's Conservative government's decision in 1973 decision to independently upgrade its US-bought Polaris missiles with a new warhead, the Chevaline upgrade, rather than buy the new US Poseidon missile, rose from initial budget estimates of £200 million in 1974 to over £1,000 million in 1980 when it was finally fitted to the Polaris missiles.⁸⁹ Table 1 suggests that the best option in this context may be to reduce the SSBN fleet to two submarines and postpone a procurement decision until the middle of the next decade when the US is expected to make similar decisions.

⁸³ Brown said two things of direct relevance to the post-Vanguard/Trident debate: First, that Britain will retain its "independent nuclear deterrent" in the long term. This was nothing new. It repeated Labour language on British nuclear weapons that it has used throughout its time in office. The statement only confirmed that Labour will not scrap the Trident system before the end of its service life. The relevance of this first statement concerns different interpretations of 'long term': some have interpreted this as a definitive statement that a Brown government will keep nuclear weapons beyond the current Vanguard submarine-based system, but it could equally mean retaining nuclear weapons only to the end of Trident's service life in the late 2020s, 20 years from now – 'long term' in any politician's view. Brown was hedging his bets with this statement. Second, Brown said that the UK (and here we assume Brown is referring specifically to a UK run by a Brown government) must maintain "the strength to take all necessary long term decisions for stability and security". This said nothing definitive at all but hinted at a lot. It suggested that important decisions were coming about Britain's nuclear weapons (something well known), but it also suggested that Brown will take decisions to retain nuclear weapons beyond the current Vanguard-based system based the assumption that Brown associates retention of nuclear weapons with the UK's long-term "stability and security". See Brown, G. *Speech by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Rt Hon Gordon Brown MP at the Mansion House, London*, H. M. Treasury, 21 June 2006.

⁸⁴ Brady, B., 'Ministers seek Trident replacement', *Scotland on Sunday*, 25 June 2006.

⁸⁵ See Stephens, P., 'Politics call the nuclear missile shots', *Financial Times*, 27 June 2006.

⁸⁶ Fidler, S., 'Brown fires only first shot in missile debate', *Financial Times*, 23 June 2006.

⁸⁷ Clarke, M., 'Does my bomb look big in this: Britain's nuclear choices after Trident', *International Affairs*, 80 (1), 2004, p. 61.

⁸⁸ *The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the Strategic Context*, House of Commons Defence Committee, June 2006, p. 32.

⁸⁹ Freedman, L. (1980) *Britain and nuclear weapons* London: Macmillan for the Royal Institute of International Affairs., p. 55.

4. Holding the government to account

The post-Vanguard policy-making process is likely to be shrouded in secrecy with little indication of if and when key decisions have been made, what the parameters of the internal debate are and who has set them. It is likely that the existence of any substantive studies, any discussions or negotiations with the USA, any new research on nuclear warheads and any ministerial decisions taken will be denied with an official announcement made some months or even years after important decisions have been taken and an acquisition programme initiated.

The traumatic history of nuclear weapons decisions within the Labour Party during the Polaris and Trident debates in the 1960s and 1980s that threatened to tear the party apart remains a resonant part of the Party's history. Consequently, the Labour leadership would prefer as little debate on Trident as possible given, despite some statements to the contrary.⁹⁰

For this reason Labour will seek to keep debate on Britain's post-Vanguard nuclear arsenal to a minimum, although a vote in the House of Commons now seems likely to take place following concerted pressure by Labour backbenchers.⁹¹ Whether this will be a free vote or one where the party line is enforced remains to be seen. The Labour leadership will be keen to avoid any embarrassment caused by being caught between a centre left constituency that will not support nuclear weapons replacement decisions on the one hand and by a wholly supportive Conservative opposition on the other.

This may be abetted by the absence of any groundswell of public support for one option or another or popular interest in the issue. In 2003-2004 MOD was talking informally about engaging in public and private debates on the future of Trident in order to set the agenda for the debate before any one else did. Since the 2005 General Election MOD has backtracked. This could be for a number of reasons, for example then Defence Secretary John Reid may have taken the view that such openness was unwarranted, or MOD may have perceived that the debate was not as mature as it thought and it was not the time to shape it.⁹² Either way, it is now increasingly likely that MOD will only discuss the issues once internal decisions have been made and ministers are clear about what they want to say. As Reid said to *The Guardian* on 5 October 2005 "There is no need for a debate now. When the time comes there will be a debate". That, as *The Guardian* notes, will probably be when it is too late to influence the decision.⁹³ MOD has reflected Reid's statement by refusing to release any information about replacement options, studies and discussions with industry and Washington.⁹⁴

4.1 The role of Parliament

Parliament can attempt to hold the government's policy-making on nuclear weapons to account in a number of limited ways through its committees, parliamentary questions, and Early Day Motions (EDMs).

Parliament can hold hearings on an issue of concern. These can attempt to hold the government to account by asking ministers and civil servants to give evidence before a committee to clarify government policy. If the outcome of a hearing generates sufficient publicity it can provoke a concerted government response that may have policy repercussions. The House of Commons Defence Committee is holding a series of hearings over 2006 and 2007 on the future of Britain's nuclear arsenal and plans to produce two or three reports. The first of these will examine the strategic rationale for replacing Trident, the decisions needed and likely timetable. MOD has not engaged with the committee on the issue.

⁹⁰ Personal communication.

⁹¹ In November 2005 a number of Labour backbenchers pressed defence secretary John Reid to allow MPs a vote on any new nuclear weapon system and demanded the government publish a green paper on Trident replacement. Wintour, P., "MPs press Reid for vote on Trident replacement", *The Guardian*, 1 November 2005. On July 20 2006 the BBC reported Leader of the House of Commons Jack Straw stating that "Of course we should involve the House fully in a decision as important as the renewal of our nuclear deterrent and in practical terms it is inevitable that there will therefore be a chance for the House to express its view on this important matter in a vote." *MPs promised nuclear weapons vote*, BBC News, 20 July, 2006. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/5198708.stm> (accessed on August 4, 2006).

⁹² Personal communication.

⁹³ Norton-Taylor, R., "As the US lowers the nuclear threshold, debate is stifled", *The Guardian*, 5 October 2005.

⁹⁴ Norton-Taylor, R., "MoD shuns Trident debate", *The Guardian*, 28 September 2005.

MPs can submit oral questions at 'defence questions' for an hour every four weeks, and these can of course be on the future of the nuclear arsenal. MPs can also submit written questions that from time to time can yield important pieces of information. Early Day Motions can be used by backbenchers to raise foreign policy and defence issues. Several EDMs have been tabled and a large number of parliamentary questions on the future of Trident have been asked throughout 2005 and 2006. The level of parliamentary attention and debate can be expected to rise significantly when the government's White Paper is published.

The Labour leadership may be sensitive to backbench scrutiny of forthcoming nuclear weapons decisions, but the real importance of the backbenchers will be determined at the next election in 2009/2010 as key decisions are needed and when Labour's majority may have further declined or even evaporated altogether. However, it is reckoned that there are now only about 30 anti-nuclear MPs in the Parliamentary Labour Party. Consequently Tony Blair or the next Labour leader will be able to carry the majority of the PLP with them if they decide to retain nuclear weapons after Vanguard.⁹⁵

Parliament, however, lacks any real teeth, or perhaps more accurately the desire, for opening up and scrutinising the policy-making process because the executive is so powerful. Committees and belligerent MPs can act as points of resistance, but they have neither the time nor resources to fully scrutinise government policy and it is not at all clear how important this issue will be to parliamentarians. Beetham and Weir argue that the 560 non-ministerial MPs comprising the House of Commons cannot effectively hold the government to account because they are overworked and under resourced and have a wide range of duties only one of which is scrutiny of the executive.⁹⁶ This is further hampered by the lack of access to information on government actions and policy on which accountability depends and pressure on MPs to toe the party line and support the executive.⁹⁷ Former Chair of the Commons Defence Committee Bruce George concurs that parliament is unable to scrutinise defence policy thoroughly because of the effect of party discipline and the poor availability of relevant government information.⁹⁸

Hopkinson regards "neither Parliament nor the Select Committee on Defence as very important in the making of defence policy".⁹⁹ Other former MOD officials argue that the whole process of answering parliamentary questions is largely a waste of time since Whitehall worries about giving too much information out and therefore gives as little as possible. Comprehensive answers are subsequently never forthcoming.¹⁰⁰ A comparison with US Senate committees is instructive. In Congress the Senate committees have large professional staffs and each Senator has a large staff with some working exclusively on national security issues. More decisively Senate committees importantly have the power of the purse and can call policy-makers to hearings to justify their planned expenditure on particular items and even request detailed annual reports on specific nuclear weapons issues.

The same was true when the Thatcher government took the decision to replace the Polaris submarines with the Trident fleet. Colin McInnes argued that the House of Commons' influence through debates was negligible and that "the government clearly believed that the proper course was for them to take the decision and then for Parliament to endorse it...that the government initiated only two debates on such a fundamental aspect of its policy, and that it could afford to ignore concerns from its backbenchers, is indicative of the Commons' lack of influence in nuclear defence decision making".¹⁰¹

Secrecy confronts parliamentarians at every turn: the role of cabinet committees in policy-making is kept secret, with decisions ascribed to the relevant minister; cabinet discussions are based on convention

⁹⁵ Keegan, J., 'Britain needs a nuclear deterrent more than ever', *Sunday Telegraph*, 25 June 2006.

⁹⁶ Weir, S. and Beetham, D., *Political power and democratic control in Britain*, Routledge: London, 1999, p. 367.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* p.436.

⁹⁸ George, B. "Focus – The higher management of defence: Parliament and national security", *RUSI Journal*, June 1998, pp.24-28, cited in Dover, R., *British European Defence Policy 1997-2000 – A Liberal Intergovernmentalist Critique of Domestic Policy Formulation*, European Policy Network working paper.

⁹⁹ Hopkinson, W., "The Making of British Defence Policy", *RUSI Journal*, October 2000, p. 23.

¹⁰⁰ Personal communication.

¹⁰¹ McInnes, C. (1986) *Trident: The Only Option?* London: Brassey's, p. 29.

rather than strict rules;¹⁰² it is only ministers that are responsible to Parliament and the public, not civil servants or special advisors who are responsible only to the Minister; and norms of secrecy surround policy advice from civil servants to ministers.¹⁰³ This was evidenced in both the Butler Report and Hutton Inquiry after the invasion of Iraq that shone a light into “into the traditionally dark recesses of the strategic dimensions of the UK foreign policy process”.¹⁰⁴

The difficulty in holding the government to account is exacerbated by No. 10’s tendency to take important decisions in ad-hoc Cabinet committees or in private meetings in Downing Street, relegating Cabinet to a rubber stamping function. This is aggravated further if inconvenient and opposing voices are systematically excluded, manipulated or silenced in departmental policy-making processes that set the parameters for policy debate.¹⁰⁵

Ideally Parliament and advocacy groups would like to see government listen to a range of expertise, both within and outside government, consult widely with different interests and viewpoints and test policies against objections and alternatives and to do so openly.¹⁰⁶ It is important that the government engage in such a process to the fullest extent possible. Nuclear weapons are recognised as extraordinary weapons and major decisions about Britain’s nuclear future should be treated in the same manner as other significant defence decisions. Nor should they continue to be shrouded in excessive secrecy. Nuclear weapons no longer lie at the heart of British security, as was the case during the Cold War. It should not be beyond the scope of parliamentary democracy to insist the government answer fundamental questions on difficult issues such as the continuing role of nuclear deterrence in British security policy, and the relationship of Britain’s nuclear arsenal to international nuclear non-proliferation norms and goals.

The government could and should take the opportunity afforded by forthcoming nuclear weapons decisions to conduct a full review of Britain’s strategic security policy and parliament should advocate and encourage this. This should examine the issues and assumptions left unchallenged by the 1997 Strategic Defence Review and its subsequent New Chapter on the war on terrorism,¹⁰⁷ in particular the difficult subjects of the nature of the UK’s relationship with the US and the future of the British nuclear arsenal in the context of what British foreign policy is for, what the real threats are and what difference Britain can make.

4.2 The role of advocacy organisations

A number of NGOs and other advocacy groups support a policy of relinquishing nuclear weapons after Vanguard (or even sooner). Advocacy groups in general can hope to make policy makers receptive to their arguments in certain situations by engaging them directly and by facilitating a greater understanding of key issues amongst government experts.¹⁰⁸ It was recognised by Sir John Coles, former Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, that “NGOs and academic institutions have knowledge and ideas which the official [FCO] machine needs to tap” and that managerial and administrative pressures inhibit strategic thinking in government departments.¹⁰⁹ Despite the obstacles advocacy groups face in their efforts to influence government policy – in particular enduring institutional momentum behind specific policies, appropriate world view and ‘ways of doing things’ – the post-Vanguard policy-making process will be a long one with opportunities for change. As William Wallace writes, “clear and final decisions are as rare in foreign policy as in much domestic

¹⁰² Williams, P. “Who’s making UK foreign policy?”, *International Affairs*, 80(5), 2004, p. 917.

¹⁰³ Weir, S. and Beetham, D., *Political power and democratic control in Britain*, Routledge: London, 1999, p. 176, 147.

¹⁰⁴ Williams, P. “Who’s making UK foreign policy?”, *International Affairs*, 80(5), 2004, p. 929.

¹⁰⁵ Weir, S. and Beetham, D., *Political power and democratic control in Britain*, Routledge: London, 1999, p. 124.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p.124; Williams, P. “Who’s making UK foreign policy?”, *International Affairs*, 80(5), 2004, p. 911.

¹⁰⁷ McInnes, C., “Labour’s Strategic Defence Review”, *International Affairs*, 74(4) 1998, p. 831. McInnes argues that the SDR did not begin with a clean sheet. Instead “assumptions were made that went unchallenged: that Britain would play a leading role in the world and that its military forces would be an important element in this position; that NATO would continue as the alliance of choice and the foundation of European security; that Britain would retain strong conventional forces (in other words the *gendarmierie* option would not be considered); and that Trident would be retained.”

¹⁰⁸ Dickie, J., *The New Mandarins: How British Foreign Policy Works*, I.B.Tauris: London, 2004, p. 194.

¹⁰⁹ Coles, J., “Making foreign policy matter”, *RUSI Journal*, June 2000, p.5.

policy. Important changes in policy evolve out of an accumulation of small decisions, of adjustments to circumstances and reactions to situations, clearer in hindsight than in the making”.¹¹⁰ He goes on to state that “governments are rarely unified, objectives rarely entirely clear; information is seldom adequate, and the consequences of a particular line of action are never certain”.¹¹¹

In order to have any impact it is important that advocacy organisations move beyond a purely ‘British nuclear weapons’ debate reminiscent of Cold War anti-nuclear campaigns that have little contemporary resonance with the public, press and government. Instead advocacy organisations would do well to frame the debate in a wider context of Britain’s role in the world in terms of its foreign and defence policy objectives, the capabilities required to fulfil that role and meet those objectives, and where nuclear weapons fit into this framework, if at all. This could gain real traction within the Labour Party and Parliamentary Labour Party. Banging an ideological anti-nuclear drum, on the other hand, is unlikely to get much, if any, interest or attention in Whitehall. MOD will consider non-replacement on cost, credibility and need grounds alone, if it considers at all. Ideological arguments that nuclear weapons are morally and legally reprehensible may be sincere, but they are unlikely to hold any sway with a government that can choose when and to whom it wants to listen and what it wants to listen to given the absence of any surge of public opinion against Trident that might put the government under pressure.

It may be that the most productive and pragmatic approach will be to examine the role of a British nuclear force in the current and project international security environment and present a persuasive case that the role of British nuclear forces has continued to diminish since the end of the Cold War to near zero such that a much reduced and cheaper nuclear capability could be fielded post-Vanguard. This might involve only two submarines with far fewer missiles and warheads. Such a reduction would not end Britain’s nuclear weapon status for another 30 or so years (barring significant change in the international system that might facilitate international consensus on a verifiable global prohibition on nuclear arms) and would signify the continuing validity of nuclear weapons in the international system. Nevertheless, it could be a positive move towards long-term British nuclear disarmament.

Summary

In 2003 the government declared that a decision on the future of Britain’s post-Vanguard nuclear arsenal was needed in the current parliament (2005-2010). Having sparked a debate in the press, parliament and the interested public it is now clear that two important decisions will be taken in this parliament. The first of these – whether to initiate a service life extension programme – may have already been taken and may be formalised in the government’s White Paper. The second decision, or more likely set of decisions, will set the terms of reference for post-Vanguard option studies. These decisions will determine whether a non-nuclear option will be examined and they are likely to be kept secret.

The policy-making process will be dominated by the Prime Minister’s Office and the Treasury with significant input from MOD, where a number of factors mitigate in favour of a status quo solution to post-Vanguard questions. Issues of cost and credibility in Washington will play heavily, reinforcing the institutional caution and pervasiveness of the concept of nuclear deterrence that support nuclear retention. The Foreign Office will also play its part, particularly in its attempts to articulate a compelling rationale for an enduring nuclear arsenal in the future international security environment and to convince those outside government that replacing Trident will have little or no direct or indirect impact on international nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament efforts.

But a nuclear replacement may not be inevitable. MOD may appear to be hardwired to replace Trident, but conversations and statements suggest there is genuinely no settled view.¹¹² MOD is going to have to tread a careful path between the risks and opportunity costs of staying nuclear and it is not

¹¹⁰ Wallace, W., *The Foreign Policy Process in Britain*, The Royal Institute of International Affairs: London, 1975, p. 6.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 6.

¹¹² Personal communication.

predetermined where this path will lead, despite current the prime minister's predilection for a nuclear replacement.

The timescale for the post-Vanguard policy-making process is long. Blair's penchant for replacement may be formalised in a political decision supported by Brown before he leaves office, but policy is seldom set in stone. As options, issues, bureaucratic conflicts and political differences evolve there will be a number of opportunities for change. Other political personalities will also be important. Policy will be taken forward by those at or near the top of the political hierarchy that have a clear vision of where they want Britain's nuclear policy and nuclear arsenal to go.¹¹³ The final outcome will be decided by powerful and persuasive political voices in favour of a particular option that capture and shape the public's attitude towards Britain's nuclear weapons at a time when key decisions are required.

Accountability is also possible but difficult. Where Downing Street's standard operating practice on nuclear weapons issues is secrecy, many (but not all) parliamentarians seek answers and accountability, whilst the public may remain indifferent. Advocacy organisations therefore have an important role to play in supporting parliamentarians, constructively engaging policy makers, keeping the press and interested public informed and, perhaps most crucially, widening the debate beyond purely anti-nuclear parameters and into the realm of Britain's role in enhancing international security. There are many difficult questions to be answered in the debate on Britain's post-Vanguard strategic security policy and neither parliament, NGOs nor government have all the answers. Therefore a major step forward would be to initiate a full strategic security review to tackle these questions and see what Britain really needs for its strategic security in the first half of the 21st century.

Anti-nuclear activists and advocacy organisations face a difficult choice. It seems they can either advocate a significant reduction in Britain's post-Vanguard as a pragmatic/realistic cost effective minimum whilst pushing for non-replacement and have a reasonable chance of being heard in Whitehall, or they can demand disarmament on moral grounds and risk shouting into the wind. The moral and legal issues surrounding the possession and threat of nuclear weapons (as opposed to their actual use) are not black and white and no side in this debate can claim to know the 'truth' on these matters. This paper is an attempt to step into the government's shoes, particularly MODs, in order to understand how post-Vanguard decisions are likely to be made, the factors affecting that process and some of the limits and opportunities for accountability. If advocacy organisations do not engage in such a process then they can only hope to talk past government rather than with it. This is not to suggest the debate can only be conducted on the government's terms, but to acknowledge the importance of understanding the government's frame of reference in order to enter into constructive dialogue.

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Acronyms

CASD	Continuous At-Sea Deterrent
EDM	Early Day Motion
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
MUFC	Maritime Underwater Future Capability
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NPT	Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty
SLBM	Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile
SLEP	Service Life Extension Programme
SSBN	Submarine Submersible Ballistic Nuclear

¹¹³ Hopkinson, W., "The Making of British Defence Policy", *RUSI Journal*, October 2000, p. 24.

Appendix

Officials involved in the policy-making process – post-holders as of 1 August 2006:

Cabinet

Prime Minister	Tony Blair
Chancellor of the Exchequer	Gordon Brown
Deputy Prime Minister	John Prescott
Defence Secretary	Des Browne
Foreign Secretary	Margaret Beckett
Trade and Industry Secretary	Alistair Darling
Cabinet Secretary	Sir Gus O'Donnell

Downing Street

Chief of Staff	Jonathan Powell
Head of the Overseas and Defence Secretariat Security and Intelligence Coordinator and Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee	Sir Nigel Sheinwald Sir Richard Mottram

Foreign Office

Permanent Under-Secretary	Sir Michael Jay
Director General Defence and Intelligence	David Richmond
Director, Defence and Strategic Threats	Mariot Leslie
Director, International Security	Stephen Pattison
Security Policy department	Hugh Powell
Counter Proliferation department	David Landsman
UK Ambassador to the USA	Sir David Manning,
Special advisors on the foreign secretary's staff	Malcolm Chalmers
UK ambassador to NATO	Sir Peter Ricketts
UK ambassador to Conference on Disarmament	John Duncan

Ministry of Defence

Chief of the Defence Staff	Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup
Permanent Under-Secretary of State	Bill Jeffrey
Under-Secretary of State and Minister of Defence for Procurement	Lord Drayson
Chief of Defence Procurement	Sir Peter Spencer
Policy Director	Desmond Bowen
Director of Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Policy	Commodore P. B. Mathias
Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff (Policy)	Major General A. R. E. Stewart
First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff	Admiral Sir Jonathon Band
Chief Scientific Adviser (MOD)	Professor Sir Roy Anderson