

2014: Renewal of the 1958 US – UK Mutual Defense Agreement

Opportunity:

In 2014 the US and UK governments will renew the terms of the 1958 US – UK Mutual Defense Agreement. Renewal of the agreement for a further ten year round will set the parameters for US - UK collaboration over a critical period in the Trident renewal programme. This provides an opportunity to highlight the nature of the US – UK nuclear relationship, the costs to both sides of this arrangement, and in particular the contradictions inherent in the UK's dependence on the US for many aspects of its nuclear weapons programme. Work on research and coalition-building to capitalise on this opportunity will need to commence well before 2014 to be effective.

Broad aims of project:

- Highlight the dependence of the UK's nuclear programme on US support, particularly in relation to the Trident replacement programme and the credibility of the UK's 'independent deterrent'.
- Create debate about the value of this relationship to the UK in a changing world and challenge the fundamental assumptions underpinning the 1958 Agreement. Is an agreement born from a 1950s Cold War emergency arrangement in relation to the cancellation of Skybolt really appropriate for both countries in the 21st century?.
- Raise the profile of the 1958 agreement in the USA and provoke questions about its strategic value to the USA.

Some areas for further exploration:

- What is the timetable and process for renewal of the agreement?
- Has there ever been a cost-benefit study of the value of the 1958 agreement to the UK?
- What are views in the US State Department about the 1958 agreement?
- How do the deep personal connections between staff in the US and UK weapons labs influence the renewal process?
- How much influence do FCO and other official UK bodies have on the renewal process?
- To what extent will the Agreement and technical appendix be modified from the current version to accommodate for the needs of the Trident replacement programme.
- What is the political context and political opportunities in the USA?
- Are there any legal routes for obstructing the renewal process?
- How does the ratification process for the amended Agreement work?

Ways forward:

- Will need to be flexible in the light of the outcome of the 2012 US Presidential election.
- Begin by asking questions (Parliamentary Questions, FOI requests etc) rather than taking a campaign approach. Look for events and opportunities to raise issues.
- Look initially at the US-UK military and political relationship in broader terms at first, then focus in more on nuclear issues. Emphasise the decreasing relevance of NATO.
- Use the US Presidential election as a hook to raise issues. Question whether the UK should be developing pro-European rather than pro-US alliances.
- Raise issues of relevance to the USA: how does renewal of the 1958 Agreement match

Obama's non-proliferation agenda; does the USA want to be seen to have its global strategy captured by Europe.

- Work with US groups that like to challenge elites and the relationship with the 'Old Country'. Could this include the Tea Party, Cato Institute??
- Question how UK gains status in the view of the world. Present a more positive vision to the public mind than piggy-backing on US foreign policy, with all the risks this entails.

Timeline

- November 2012: US Presidential election
- Summer 2013 - April 2014: discussions on scope of agreement (possibly commencing earlier)
- Spring 2014: Ministers discuss strategy for Parliamentary handling of renewal / PR strategy.
- May - June 2014: Newly amended Agreement laid before Congress / Parliament for ratification, followed by Exchange of Notes between governments to bring into force.
- May 2015: UK Parliamentary election, followed by Trident replacement Main Gate decision.
- Annual 'Stocktake' meetings between US and UK weapons scientists to pool information on programmes.

Some possible measures of success:

- Disclosure (at least in summary) of the technical annex to the Agreement.
- Parliamentary debate on renewal of the Agreement. Before ratification? Adjournment debate or debate in government time (would the Liberal Democrats support this?)
- Debate / some kind of intervention in Congress.
- Media attention and debate on the issues surrounding the Agreement – perhaps some lengthier in-depth review, including the history and big-picture context questions.

Next steps

Map out the issues in more detail and identify lines for further inquiry, opportunities, project strategy, and possible alliances. To be done through a half day workshop in London combining face-to-face attendance with virtual attendance via Skype. Preparation in advance with those unable to take part.

People to invite:

- Andrew Cottey
- Dan Plesch
- Ian Davis
- Nigel Chamberlain
- Martin Butcher
- John Ainslie
- US contacts: Hans Kristensen? Stephen Young (UCS)? NRDC?
- Others?

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