

## **Nuclear planning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: the future of the British bomb.**

### Reasons for writing the report

In 2003 the Defence White Paper said that the next Parliament is expected to make a decision on British nuclear weapons. It will decide whether Trident will be replaced, not just what will replace Trident. If the Government concludes that there should be no successor to Trident then it would become increasingly difficult to sustain expenditure on the system. The decision is expected around 2008. Until then there will be a unique opportunity to make progress towards the elimination of British nuclear weapons.

Because of this I have carried out research, in my own time, since December 2003 to clarify aspects of British nuclear policy. This work should be completed in the first quarter of 2005. I would like to publish this to provide background information for a political and public debate on British nuclear weapons. The report will stress the irrelevance of British nuclear weapons and the lack of any coherent policy behind their deployment. It will also expose the extent of dependence on US support. In assessing future options it will identify a number of major problems facing planners in the Ministry of Defence.

### Timescale

The report is intended to be of value for several years. It will be printed and distributed in April 2005 and will be available shortly before the predicted date for the General Election and the Non Proliferation Treaty Conference in New York.

### Target Audience

The target audience for the report is people in Britain with an interest in nuclear policy including decision makers, politicians, the media, peace groups and academics. The publication will also be of value to parties outside Britain including participants at the NPT conference and those interested in US and NATO nuclear weapons.

### Publication

The final report will be around 50,000 words of which 48,000 have already been written. One sub-section has still to be drafted and the whole publication will be revised. I have received advice from other experts and additional comments will be sought prior to publication.

The report will be printed on 100 A4 pages with a colour card cover. 1,000 copies will be printed for £3,000. Printing will be done by Clydeside Press, a workers co-operative in Glasgow. The report will be perfect bound and include several black and white illustrations.

350 copies will be distributed free to key members of the target audience. The remaining copies will be sold for £3 through Scottish CND. Proceeds from initial sales will be used to offset dissemination costs, £500, and direct costs of research, £400. The direct costs of research include expenditure on purchasing and printing documents and internet access. Recompense for time spent carrying out research is not included or sought. Proceeds from later sales will be donated to Scottish CND. The production figure of 1000 copies is based on long-term sales of reports produced by Scottish CND. The full report will also be available on the internet.

## Personal background

I served in the army from 1971 to 1980 and during this time completed an honours degree in International Relations at Keele University. As part of this I wrote a dissertation on NATO nuclear strategy. I served as an officer in the Intelligence Corps and left as a conscientious objector. I then studied theology at Glasgow University and was ordained in the Church of Scotland. From 1986 to 1991 I worked as a minister in Glasgow. Since 1991 I have been employed as Co-ordinator of Scottish CND. I am a member of the British Pugwash Group. I have had several opportunities to discuss nuclear policy directly with senior officials within the Ministry of Defence.

Since the 1970s I have maintained an interest in nuclear strategy, and have carried out extensive research in my own time. I have studied the Trident system and have collected most of the information on it that is in the public domain. In addition to producing briefings and handouts on nuclear weapons and nuclear submarines I have also written three reports that have been published by Scottish CND:

- Cracking under Pressure: the response to defects in British nuclear submarines, 1992, 32 pages,
- The Safety of Trident: an assessment of the radiation risks associated with the UK Trident programme, 1994, 76 pages, funded by Scottish local authorities,
- Trident: Britain's Weapon of Mass Destruction, 1999, 32 pages, funded by the Iona Community.

## Outline of the report

While focusing on British nuclear weapons, the report also analyses US and NATO practice. A considerable number of recent reports written within the US military and nuclear weapons establishments have been examined. These provide valuable insights into British policy.

Technical details of nuclear planning systems have been pieced together to give a unique description of the inner workings of these computerised processes. These mechanisms are the bridge between policy statements and the weapons themselves. The sub-section on Trident warheads also provides a level of detail that is not available in other publications.

US nuclear policy says that nuclear weapons have a role in countering the proliferation of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. The report discusses problems with this American strategy, differences with her European partners and Britain's approach. Planners recognise that there would be so much radioactive fallout from existing weapons that any threat to use them in a Counter Proliferation role is unlikely to be credible. Lower yield weapons have been proposed but the arguments for these are flawed. Plans to develop lower yield weapons and more accurate Trident missiles have both stalled. Russia remains the hidden focus of most US, NATO and British planning, budgeting and hardware.

The Counter Proliferation role does not provide a coherent rationale for retaining British nuclear weapons. Neither does concern about Russia. A third approach has been proposed, that Britain needs nuclear weapons to deal with any potential, unidentified threat. However the dangers associated with retaining these weapons undermine this argument.

There is a political imperative to stress the independence of British nuclear forces. The extent of dependence on the US is deliberately concealed. The most likely future use of British

nuclear weapons is neither in an independent operation nor in a NATO mission, but in a bilateral Anglo-American attack.

British nuclear policy is difficult to unravel because uncertainty and ambiguity lies at its heart. Secrecy is not just an aspect of British nuclear policy, it is the policy. With this come the dangers of bluffs, lies and deception.

Information technology is having a major impact on nuclear planning. US, NATO and British systems are becoming more flexible. US nuclear planning computers can also plan conventional attacks. New hardware and software was installed in 2003 on British and US Trident submarines. The missiles can be quickly retargeted against new targets around the world or during a strategic exchange with Russia. The US could alter Trident software to restrict the ability of Britain to use the missiles independently. Trident submarines operate within prescribed areas and receive regular updates of weather over the target area. If British Trident missiles can be used independently they would be less accurate.

The primary example of US and NATO sub-strategic nuclear forces are the dual-capable aircraft deployed in Europe. A number of US reports conclude that these forces have no military utility. NATO retains a strategy for sub-strategic nuclear weapons that was created in response to a perceived threat of Soviet invasion. This anachronistic approach also underlies British policy for sub-strategic Trident. Although both Britain and the US have some provision for the use of Trident in a sub-strategic role the missiles are not well suited for this task.

The US has a substantial programme to extend the life of all components of the Trident system. Britain is involved in this. Some components of British warheads are procured from the US but a different High Explosive is used. The complex relationship with the US will be a crucial factor determining future options for British nuclear weapons. Nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missiles might be regarded as one possibility, but their future within the US Navy is uncertain. An official review of options will be influenced by whether the emphasis is on attacking Russia or countering the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction.

Several of the most powerful computers in the world are used to design nuclear weapons in the US. This development, which will continue throughout this decade, is a crucial part of the nuclear programme. British efforts in this regard are modest in comparison. In order to design a new British warhead a substantial simulation capability would be required. This would be very expensive. Currently both US and British programmes are focused on extending the life of existing weapons.

When they consider the future of British nuclear forces policy makers should be forced to address the lack of any coherent rationale for retaining these weapons. The myth of nuclear independence should be exposed. The only likely way that British nuclear weapons would ever be used would be to support and validate a US nuclear attack. Any future system would come with a very large price tag.

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