

Arms Control aspects

36. The possible effect of any future arms control agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union upon the continued availability of UK *Trident* missiles has been widely commented on. The Prime Minister has sought and received assurances from the United States that the supply of *Trident* missiles to the UK will in no way be affected by any future arms control agreement. At present we see no cause for concern on this point.⁵⁶

The UK element

37. **Although only 5 per cent of expenditure on the Strategic Weapon System is to be made in the UK, this is the area where potentially serious problems have arisen.** According to the Comptroller and Auditor General:

“... proving the effectiveness of the system for UK purposes is dependent on the production in the UK of software for targetting, modelling and effectiveness assessment. DGSWS⁵⁷ currently has a shortage of scientific staff to carry out these tasks and has had difficulty in recruiting such specialists since 1982. The position is not yet critical, but could become so, with a potential risk to assurance of the effectiveness of the UK system. Software work is being contracted out to complete essential tasks”.⁵⁸

38. **These problems give cause for concern.** As in the case of recruitment and retention problems at AWE Aldermaston, which we discuss in paragraphs 75 to 82 below, this demonstrates the difficulty which the public service can experience in paying the rate for the job. **In the context of the huge overall cost of such a major programme, the sums involved are very small; yet the risk to the reliability of the UK systems may depend on the recruitment of appropriate staff. It is not satisfactory that software work should be contracted out merely as an expedient.**

TACTICAL WEAPON SYSTEM

General

39. The tactical weapon system comprises such items as the sonar, command system, torpedoes and torpedo handling, electronic counter-measures (ECM), periscopes and discharge systems. The Comptroller and Auditor General noted that by the time of his July 1987 report the cost estimates had risen by 62 per cent in real terms (1986-87 prices), from £450 million to £728 million. This was due to additional requirements (26 per cent), under-estimation of development and production costs (20 per cent) and transfers from the submarine budget (7 per cent). These increases occurred early in the project. **We are glad to note that the National Audit Office now appears satisfied with the management and financial control of this element of the programme.**⁵⁹

40. The Secretary of State for Defence has reported to us that:

“The development programmes for the major items of weapon equipment have now consolidated and progress is satisfactory. The risk involved in bringing together the many diverse equipments to function as a system will be minimised by the integration work to be undertaken in the shore development facility at VSEL, Barrow. Production programmes are well established for the sonar suite, command system and the weapon handling system. The first production contract for the self protection system will be placed early in the new financial year. Significant savings have been made in the cost of this equipment by the adoption of later technology. Overall, the tactical weapon system is meeting its required programme”.⁶⁰

The Shore Development Facility

41. **Although the tactical weapon system “overall” may be meeting its required programme, some elements of its cause concern.** The main problem relates to the Shore Development Facility (SDF), which brings together in one place the various equipments so that “they can be worked on, assessed, improved and eventually used for all sorts of useful purposes ashore and not afloat”.⁶¹ Delivery of the sonar suite and the command system for the SDF are showing signs of slippage, but at present are not affecting the submarine build programme. With the exception of the self protection mast (SPM) system, production contracts have been placed for a substantial part of the Tactical Weapon System for SSBN 05.⁶²

⁵⁶HC 280 of Session 1987-88, Q.40 (Foreign and Commonwealth Office evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee, 11 May 1988).

⁵⁷Director General Strategic Weapon Systems.

⁵⁸C&AG's 1987 Report, paragraph 3.11.

⁵⁹C&AG's 1987 Report, paragraph 3.13; Q.64.

⁶⁰Evidence, p15.

⁶¹Q.67.

⁶²Evidence, p20, A18; Q.67.