

UK nuclear attack on the US

There is a unique nuclear relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom. The US supplies Britain with the capability to launch a substantial nuclear attack. In December 2006 President Bush wrote to Prime Minister Blair and said that the US would provide Britain with a delivery system to ensure that they continued to have a nuclear capability throughout the life of a new submarine system that is being developed for the Royal Navy. The new submarines would be in service until at least 2055.

Britain was a partner in the Manhattan project and developed its own atomic bomb in 19xx and hydrogen bomb in 1957 ? However since 1958 the US has provided Britain with the detailed plans for nuclear weapons and essential warhead components. The US Navy provided all the submarine-launched missiles that have been at the heart of the British nuclear system since 1968.

British Ministers consistently affirm that, while the missiles may be American, they retain operational independence and that the US has no veto over their use. If true, this means that Britain could launch a devastating nuclear attack on the Continental United States.

In April 2007 Martin Caton MP, in a written question to the Secretary of State for Defence, asked –

“whether the United States Administration has sought any (a) technical and (b) diplomatic reassurance that Trident D5 nuclear missiles provided under a leasing contract by the US Navy to the UK could never be targeted at United States assets.”

On 8th May Des Browne, the Defence Minister, replied –

“As long standing allies with mutual defence obligations under the terms of the North Atlantic treaty, the United States Administration has not sought any technical or diplomatic reassurances that UK Trident D5 missiles would never be targeted against United States assets.”

Britain may be regarded as far less likely to attack the US than Iran or North Korea. It may have a nuclear force far smaller than Russia. There is clearly no sign that London has the intention of attacking the US. But it would appear to have the capability of doing so.

If Britain launched a nuclear attack on the US, with American missiles and technology, what would the effect be ? What level of destruction could these missiles cause ?

The Royal Navy has three operational Vanguard class submarines. Each submarine carries 48 nuclear warheads. So there is a total force of 144 warheads that could be deployed. One submarine is at sea on patrol at all times. The warheads are copies of the US W76 design. Most of them have a yield of around 100 kilotons. A small number have been modified to lower their yield.

Here are some examples of the effect of a British nuclear attack:

- An attack on the Manhattan area of New York with a single Trident nuclear warhead would result in around 400,000 deaths.
- Two Trident missiles carrying a total of 10 warheads could completely devastate New York city, leaving over 3.6 million killed immediately and many more fatalities in the following days, weeks and years.
- An attack by one British submarine with 48 nuclear warheads would result in 8 million immediate fatalities.
- An attack by three British submarines with 144 nuclear warheads could destroy over 100 of the main cities across the United States.

The map below illustrates the effect of an attack on New York with 10 British Trident warheads.

Within the inner zone 98 % of the population would be killed. In the second zone 55 % would be killed and 40 % injured. In the third zone 25 % would be killed and 45 % injured. In the outer zone 1 % would be killed and 25 % injured.

