

10 March 1993]

REAR ADMIRAL RICHARD IRWIN, DR JOHN CATCHPOLE,
MR GEOFFREY BEAVEN, MR JOHN COLSTON,
and MR NICK WITNEY

[Continued

[Mr Campbell contd]

(Rear Admiral Irwin) Yes, technically that is absolutely correct.

1544. I take it therefore that in time of low threat or risk a political decision could be taken to put submarines on station with a lower number than perhaps might be thought appropriate at a time when the risk was conceived to be more acute?

(Rear Admiral Irwin) Again technically that is absolutely correct.

1545. Are you in a position to tell us whether any decisions have yet been taken as to the normal complement of warheads to be deployed on one of these submarines on station?

(Rear Admiral Irwin) The only decision that has been taken is what to buy, which bounds the choice that can be made closer to the time. There is no need to take a decision today, nor will there be until much closer to the time, as to what each submarine will deploy with when she goes out.

1546. I think it is self-evident really from our previous questions and answers that the determination of this is something which will lie entirely within the political arena based on an assessment of the risk which is thought to be prevalent at the time?

(Rear Admiral Irwin) Yes, absolutely correct.

1547. Let me take you on to another matter. It has been suggested on a number of occasions that the Trident system could be used to provide a sub-strategic deterrent. I think Lord Lewin first gave that a fair wind approximately 12 months ago, and as recently as Jane's "Defence Weekly" of 6 March in discussing analyses about the United Kingdom's tactical nuclear weapons it says, "Perhaps the most logical, and among the cheapest, options is a tactical warhead Trident or a Tomahawk cruise missile bought or leased from the United States." Perhaps I could concentrate on the tactical warhead Trident. Is it technically possible—I think you may already have answered this—to put one warhead on one missile and for that to be capable of being used if circumstances required it?

(Rear Admiral Irwin) Yes, that is technically possible.

1548. Would one warhead on one missile be capable of fulfilling the expectations of a tactical air to surface missile?

(Rear Admiral Irwin) Yes.

1549. Do I take it then that in terms of accuracy and in terms of range there is no, as it were, prejudice in using one warhead on one missile on the Trident system as compared to using a tactical air to surface missile with no optimum range for Trident, which would not, as it were, permit the use of Trident for sub-strategic purposes?

(Rear Admiral Irwin) There is no range constraint that would seriously affect Trident. It has a maximum range, it does not go the whole way round the world, but there is little constraint on range.

1550. The CEP remains the same, whatever the range, from zero to maximum?

(Rear Admiral Irwin) Not absolutely exactly, but within small bounds that is correct. There is a minimum range but not one that gives a problem operationally.

1551. Are you able to tell us what that minimum range is?

(Rear Admiral Irwin) I regret not.

1552. If you will not tell the world, will you tell the Committee by way of note?

(Rear Admiral Irwin) Certainly.

(Mr Colston) Perhaps we could make the point that it is always possible to move the submarine.

Mr Home Robertson: Are you sure?

Mr Cook: That is not a secret.

Mr Campbell

1553. Is it also feasible then that the submarine could go on station with the capacity to deliver both a strategic deterrent and a sub-strategic deterrent?

(Rear Admiral Irwin) Yes. You do not have to have different weapons; it is just the different use of the same weapon.

1554. I am not particularly well versed in the technicalities of these matters, but would that loading, as it were, have to be made before the submarine left port or is that a flexibility which the commander would have, depending on the instructions he was given by his political masters? Could he do it, as it were, within the ship?

(Rear Admiral Irwin) There is not a straight yes or no answer to that, because it depends on how far you want to explore flexibility. Once the load has been put on board then that provides a constraint. Within that constraint there is a certain amount of flexibility, but it is pretty well constrained by what has been put on board when the submarine deploys.

1555. So, putting it rather crudely, when you load up the submarine and send it out, you have within certain constraints determined the nature of the deterrence that might be available?

(Rear Admiral Irwin) Not entirely, because again it depends on the use to which it is being put. A weapon that can be put to a strategic use by one form of targeting can be put to a different form of use by a different form of targeting.

1556. So the flexibility then is to be found in the targeting of the weapon, is that what you are saying?

(Rear Admiral Irwin) Part of the flexibility is to be found in the targeting. The load of the weapon in the first place; how many warheads it has on it is of course another factor and that cannot be changed once it is loaded.

1557. So you have load, and then you have targeting as being the two components which give flexibility? Are there any other components in this analysis?