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BRITISH NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT – A UTOPIAN AIM OR A REALISTIC TARGET?

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SUMMARY

Prior to the 1997 election, the Labour Party pledged that they would pursue a goal of global elimination of nuclear weapons and when satisfied with verifiable progress towards that goal, they would ensure that British nuclear weapons were included in multilateral negotiations. Their manifesto noted that Britain faced a range of security challenges, including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and promised to build strong defences against such threats. These statements were amplified in the Strategic Defence Review, which re-evaluated minimum deterrence, and led to a further reduction of nuclear forces.

This paper sets out to establish the critical factors that shape British nuclear weapon policy, to forecast how these may change in the future and consider whether nuclear disarmament is an achievable objective or just an utopian ideal. First the paper seeks to explain the dialectic of deterrence in terms of 5 contradictory arguments: credibility of use, a political weapon, rejection of non-first-use, flexibility of response and the inevitability of proliferation. These arguments are then developed to explain how deterrence has survived the Cold War and remains fundamental to today's British defence policy. However, it is concluded that nuclear weapons are of limited value in deterring the use of chemical and biological weapons in the hands of terrorists.

Threat assessment and technological developments, that undermine the nuclear balance of power, are the primary factors that influence British nuclear policy. However, when threat perceptions are low, secondary factors such as public opinion and economics become influential and can produce increased pressure for disarmament. It is argued that the debate over replacement of the Trident system will be a difficult political issue to handle and that, therefore, the existing Trident system will be stretched to its maximum technically achievable life to delay such a debate.

The paper concludes that total nuclear disarmament remains a utopian aim. Before disarming, there is a need to focus on creating the political climate that engenders lasting trust between states. With little sign of such a climate being created, Britain will retain nuclear weapons for the foreseeable future primarily because of the status and confidence they bring and as insurance in the unlikely event of needing deterrence.

"Nations don't distrust each other because they are armed; they are armed because they distrust each other".

Salvador de Madariaga[1]

INTRODUCTION

1. The Labour Party manifesto for the 1997 general election pledged that:

> *"Once satisfied with verified progress towards our goal of the global elimination of nuclear weapons, we will ensure that British nuclear weapons are included in multilateral negotiations".*[2]

These words were carefully chosen and highlight both the sensitivity of the Labour Party to nuclear weapons (NW) and the difficult issues that arise from NW ownership in today's globalised world. The end of the Cold War brought great expectations for reduction in nuclear force readiness and for nuclear disarmament. Whilst some progress has been made, much has been peripheral and some has been either pure rhetoric or unverifiable. This paper considers whether Labour's pledge is a utopian ideal or a realistic target. Firstly, by seeking to explain the essence of deterrence thinking and understanding how this dialectic has shaped British nuclear policy. Then by identifying the key factors and events that have influenced current British nuclear policy and finally considering how these factors may change or develop in the *"future less state-centred and more nuclear pregnant world".*[3]

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[1] S de Madariaga, *Morning Without Noon*, Hemel Hempstead, Saxon House, 1974, pp 48-49

[2] *Labour Party Manifesto*, M/029/97, HH Associates, Cheam 1997, p38

[3] S J Cimbala, *The Past and Future of Nuclear Deterrence*, Westport Connecticut, Praegger, 1998, p108 argues that in today's multipolar world, with increased proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the potential for nuclear miscalculation is now greater than ever in the bipolar Cold War era.

AIM

2. The aim of this paper is to establish the critical factors that shape British NW policy, forecast how these may change in the future and consider the potential for British nuclear disarmament.

SCOPE

3. This paper considers only:

a. British NW policy.

b. A time frame of the next 15 years, to align with the Strategic Defence Review.

c. Information that is available in the public domain; to ensure that this paper can remain unclassified, the author has deliberately avoided any source of classified information.

d. Defence policy rather than the details of disarmament philosophy.

DETERRENCE

4. Without doubt the development of NW changed the traditional Clausewitzian thinking on war. The use of tactical NW, as part of flexible response, could perhaps fit Clausewitz's concept of absolute war. However, the development of nuclear deterrence strategy, with the threat of massive retribution, challenges both classical thinking and the concept of Just War (Just Intention is to restore peace, there must be no intention of revenge or retribution). A great deal has been written on deterrence and whilst there have been some subtle changes in

thinking over the last 50 years. Bernard Brodie's *The Absolute Weapon*[4] remains the essential primer for those seeking to understand the subject. The following two quotations help to highlight the revolutionary impact of NW and to set the scene for understanding the development of deterrence thinking:

> *"Thus far the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars. From now on its chief purpose must be to avert them. It can have almost no other useful purpose".*[5]

> *"Everything about the atomic bomb is overshadowed by the twin facts that it exists and that's its destructive power is fantastically great".*[6]

5. Brodie recognised, that in the atomic age, *military superiority could not guarantee security; and that superiority in numbers was no longer necessarily synonymous with military advantage.*[7] However, he argued that the most revolutionary aspect of atomic bomb was that it radically changed the cost benefit analysis of warfare set out by Clauswitz. No longer could a state rationally expect to benefit from a war once its enemies were in possession of the absolute weapon and able to use it in retaliation against an attacker. Brodie was the first to recognise that this threat of retaliation was at the centre of deterrence and that such:

> *"A threat does not have to be 100 percent certain; it is sufficient if there is a good chance of it.... The prediction is more important than the fact".*[8]

6. It is this uncertainty that it at the heart of understanding the deterrence dialectic, about which so much has been written and which frequently results in

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[4] B Brodie. *The Absolute Weapon*. New York. Harcourt Brace, 1946
[5] *ibid* p76
[6] *ibid* p52
[7] R Kolkowicz. *Dilemmas of Nuclear Strategy*. London. Frank Cass, 1987. p16
[8] Brodie, *The Absolute Weapon*. p74

reductio ad absurdum. The development of this debate is a paper in itself. However, it is important to understand the contradictory and paradoxical arguments that deterrence is built on to enable an insight into past and future thinking:

a. **Credibility of use**. If deterrence is to be credible, it cannot be argued that NW are only for deterrence but not for use. *Weapons deter by the possibility of their use, and by no other route.*[9] It is therefore essential that there is a plan for use, that training and demonstration of capability is frequently practised and has some transparency. The paradox is that actual use is a total failure of deterrence and would be a disaster. The possessor must recognise that both the option of simply not using them always exists and that the crucial aim of possessing them must be to help prevent circumstances arising which might leave their use as the least worst option. Underlying credibility of use must be NW survivability and thus the requirement for a second strike capability.[10]

b. **A political weapon**. Robert McNamara argued that there can be no meaningful victory in nuclear war. NW are purely political weapons:

> *"I do not believe that we can avoid the serious and unacceptable risk of nuclear war until we recognise... that nuclear weapons serve no military purpose whatsoever. They are totally useless except only to deter ones opponents from using them".*[11]

This argument links with that of credibility of use: the more seriously the possessor is believed capable *in extremis* of using his nuclear armoury, the

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[9] M Quinlan, *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons*, RUSI Whitehall Paper Series 1997, Weymouth, Sherrens, p15

[10] Second strike capability has been achieved either by having large nuclear forces or by the employment of the SSBNs with their ability to remain undetected even by modern satellite technology.

[11] R McNamara, cited in *New York Times*, 15 September 1983, pA-27

less likely that others will allow circumstances to arise allowing its use. Deterrence is thus political and diplomatic negotiation to avert war and the potential of escalation to nuclear war. It is not the number of NW that matter but the resolve of a state and the skill of bargaining that count. The key is that NW are for deterrence and not for defence. Within this argument lies a vital assumption; that the enemy will employ similar criteria of rationality.

c. **Non-first-use policy**. Since the end of the Cold War an increasing number of Europeans have argued in favour of a non-first-use (NFU) policy. The argument centres on the superiority of conventional non-nuclear forces within NATO and that use of NW in response to conventional or WMD aggression would be unnecessary. In particular, a conventional response to a limited biological or chemical attack would be far more proportionate. However, it is rightly argued[12] that a NFU policy would encourage an aggressor to believe that he could pursue conventional aggression to achieve political and territorial gains without the risk of crossing a nuclear threshold. Conventional deterrence as a strategic policy has failed countless times in the past, and costly arms races could result from exclusive reliance on classical weapons to deter major threats. NFU would encourage WMD proliferation as it would signal that under no circumstances would a chemical or biological strike prompt a nuclear response. Yost summaries the current situation well:

> *"It is widely accepted that 'purposeful ambiguity' offers more to Alliance security than does no first use. .....a non-first use pledge*

[12] See B Tertrais, *Nuclear Policies in Europe*, Adelphi Paper 327, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp42-44, for a detailed analysis of the range of NFU options that have been considered within Europe. Tertrais concludes by quoting Sir Michael Quinlan: "The idea that a nuclear power would let itself be overwhelmed simply because of a no-first-use promise is plainly absurd."

would undermine deterrence, including against chemical and biological threats".[13]

d. **Lower yield weapons and flexibility of response.** There has been much debate over whether the production of lower yield weapons, to provide flexibility of response and more constrained targeting, is destabilising. By lowering the threshold of use, development of such weapons has often been criticised in the West as making nuclear warfare more probable and potentially tolerable. Quinlan correctly dismisses this argument:

> *"Such criticisms failed to recognise the inevitability of the paradox. Ultimately, accepting them would lead towards less credible deterrence and more, not less risk of war. The evident possession of practical options is directed entirely to making war as remote an eventuality as possible".*[14]

Sub-strategic weapons are therefore also seen purely as political weapons, providing the ability of limited strike to demonstrate the will to defend own vital interests to the utmost and as the final warning of intent [15]

e. **Proliferation and Stabilisation.** The final contradictory argument of the nuclear dialectic is that of proliferation. Realists, drawing on the lessons of the Cold War, argue that ownership of NW brings with it an enormous responsibility, which makes states more risk adverse. Therefore limited proliferation, such as in India and Pakistan, is potentially stabilising by raising the threshold of war, creating bipolarity at regional

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[13] D S Yost, *The US and Nuclear Deterrence in Europe*, Adelphi Paper 326, 1999, p66
[14] Quinlan, *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons*, p16
[15] See M Rifkind, *UK Defence Strategy: A Continuing Role for Nuclear Weapons?* Speech to the Centre for Defence Studies, 16 November 1993. This provides a good explanation of the logic behind the possession of a graduated level of response.

level and producing a balance of power relationship that is less sensitive to other factors such as changes in conventional force levels. As proof of the argument, realists refer to the Cold War and claim the success of deterrence in a bipolar world where the military strengths of the US and Soviet armed forces, though asymmetric, were balanced by NW. However, Cimbala argues, that the post-Cold War spread of NW is the most dangerous trend threatening the present multi-polar world order.[16] The potential leakage of NW and other WMDs, plus the associated delivery technology, from already weaponized states into the hands of frustrated state and non-state actors is considerable and inevitable. Proliferation, therefore, increases both the likelihood of nuclear war and the risk that WMD may fall into terrorist or irresponsible rogue state hands. It is further argued, with the collapse of bipolarity after the Cold War, that fewer reliable predictions can be made about a state's behaviour. This is well illustrated by the then US Secretary of State for Defense William Perry's comment that future terrorists or rogue regimes "may not buy into our deterrence theory. Indeed, they may be madder than MAD".[17] In short, the temptation to nuclear first use in regional conflicts must grow, which brings a new dimension to nuclear thinking and planning; the concept of nuclear war termination. Up to now thirking has centred on deterrence and the assumption that the break down of deterrence brings an apocalypse.

7. These five contradictory arguments of deterrence (credibility of use, a political weapon, NFU, reduced threshold and the inevitability and danger of proliferation) have been key in shaping Britain's nuclear weapon policy. The next section will review how this policy has developed up to the end of the Cold War.

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[16] S J Cimbala, *The Past and Future of Nuclear Deterrence*, pp85-86

[17] W J Perry, *On Ballistic Missile Defense*: Excerpt from a speech to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 8 March 1995, pp1, cited in K P Payne, *Deterrence in the Second Nuclear Age*, Lexington, Universal Press of Kentucky, 1996, p58

BRITISH NUCLEAR WEAPON POLICY

COLD WAR POLICY

8. As early as 1945, British military planners were expressing the belief that if others were to have the atomic bomb, then Britain's best defence would *be the deterrent effect that the possession of the means of retaliation would have on a potential aggressor.*[18] The decision to develop NW was taken by the first post-war Labour government, and since then successive governments, whatever their political colour, have remained committed to the nuclear programme. The McMahon Act, passed by the US congress in 1946, prevented the transfer of classified nuclear information to other countries. However, the US's position softened towards Britain, resulting in July 1958 with the Agreement of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defence Purposes. This agreement, renewed in July 1994, provides US-British co-operation on the production, design, testing, deployment, training of personnel and potential use of NW.

9. During the 1950s, British nuclear policy was founded on three themes[19]:

a. International status and prestige, expressed as the necessity not to send the Foreign Secretary "naked in the conference chamber".[20]

b. The importance of demonstrating an independent nuclear deterrent, prompted by early US reluctance to share technology.

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[18] M Gowing, *Independence and Deterrence: Britain and Atomic Energy*, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1974 p23

[19] R Johnson, *British Perspectives on the Future of Nuclear Weapons*, Henry L Stimson Center Occasional Paper No 37, January 1998, p27. Provides a detailed examination of the historic perspectives of British nuclear policy and a comprehensive analysis of the development of both Labour and Conservative Party nuclear thinking.

[20] Aneurin Bevan, *Speech at the Labour Party Conference*, 3 October 1957

c. Defence against a potential aggressor. In these early days, the potential aggressor was not named, but it was always assumed to be the Soviet Union

10. The Atlantic Alliance was a key factor in British nuclear policy, with successive governments seeing themselves as enjoying a special relationship with the US and filling the role of intermediary between the US and Europe. NATO was, and still is, regarded as a fundamental pillar of British defence. Throughout the Cold War, and today, British nuclear forces have been fully committed to NATO, and thus NATO strategic thinking has been key in shaping British nuclear policy. This policy, formulated under the West's perception that they lacked conventional superiority, led initially to the concept of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD); which by aiming to guarantee a second strike capability threatened the mutual destruction of cities and populations.

11. The credibility of use was recognised throughout this period, and the West maintained an overt policy of exercise and high state of readiness. Political will was demonstrated by the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962. Although it is argued that this crisis was about compellence and not deterrence[21] (compellence is the act of making somebody undo an action already taken), there is little doubt that after Cuba, for the remainder of the Cold War, nuclear adventurism of the Khrushchev era was relegated behind arms control and bursts of détente. By 1968, the US nuclear planners, in response to the growing belief of the West's inferiority in conventional weapons in Europe, developed the doctrine of Flexible Response and the weapons to match. Minimum force, whether conventional or nuclear, was to be used to deny an aggressor his objectives. NFU was firmly ruled out. Flexible Response envisaged the selective use of tactical NW in the early stages of conflict, as well as a much larger general nuclear response against Soviet

[21] Cimbala, *The Past and Future of Nuclear Deterrence*, p43 Provides the specific explanation of compellance. Chapter 2 provides an excellent analysis of the Cuban missile crisis and the use of nuclear weapons as political tools.

targets in the event of escalation.[22] Quite deliberately, no rigid escalation ladder was defined. NW were on a continuum of decision making with conventional weapons.

12. There will always be a debate about whether nuclear deterrence succeeded in ensuring nuclear peace after the Second World War. Was it more by luck than by the judgement of the superpower leaders? Or was it due to the relatively tidy bipolar nature of relationships between the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS)? These questions cannot be answered with certainty, however, Cimbala argues that nuclear deterrence failed to work as intended.[23] It was not the likelihood of appalling mass destruction that prevented leaders from playing the nuclear card but because *"the game of escalation could not be played to any advantage with nuclear weapons during crises or in the early stages of any plausible military conflict"*. Brinkmanship was to be avoided in crisis and the first generation NWS were fortuitously given time to learn the art of crisis management and to develop the reliable command and control systems over these weapons necessary to prevent misuse or proliferation. This is a key factor when looking to the future.

13. The summit between Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev in Reykjavik in October 1986 marked the beginning of the end of the Cold War, causing dramatic shifts in the political and military-strategic context of British nuclear policy. The risks of nuclear war between the superpowers had faded and arms control gathered a new momentum; it was quickly recognised that the dangers of proliferation and terrorism had increased and needed to be addressed. There was real optimism that the time was now right for disarmament.

[22] Johnson, *British Perspectives on the Future of Nuclear Weapons*, p7
[23] Cimbala, *The Past and Future of Nuclear Deterrence*, p30

PRESENT NUCLEAR WEAPON POLICY

14. Since the end of the Cold War, British nuclear weapon policy has, at least in the public domain, little changed. It remains centred on deterrence and, although not publicly articulated, is focused at providing the minimum force necessary to cope with the perceived threat of recidivist Russian nuclear forces, including the maintenance of a second strike capability. However, two key factors have shaped the current policy:

a. Re-evaluation of minimum deterrence and the reduction of forces to reflect that review.

b. Concern over WMD proliferation and the potential threat should such weapons fall into the hands of terrorists or a rogue state.

15. Both these issues were covered in the 1997 Labour Party Manifesto[24]:

"The post-Cold War world faces a range of security challenges - proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the growth of ethnic nationalism and extremism, international terrorism, and crime and drug trafficking. A new Labour government will build a strong defence against these threats".

"A new Labour government will retain Trident. We will press for multilateral negotiations towards mutual balanced and verifiable reductions in nuclear weapons. Once satisfied with verified progress towards our goal of the global elimination of nuclear weapons, we will ensure that British nuclear weapons are included in multilateral negotiations".

[24] *Labour Party Manifesto*, M/029/97. IIH Associates, Cheam 1997, p38

16. The Labour Manifesto also promised a *strategic defence review to reassess our essential security interests and defence needs.*[25] New Labour on arriving in office in May 1997 took early steps to lower the profile of NW within British defence policy. It withdrew the WE177 bomb from the RAF (completed by March 1998) and put in place a study, as part of the SDR, on deterrence, arms control and proliferation. The SDR reported in July 1998, the main NW conclusions were[26]:

a. Progress on arms control was an essential element of foreign and defence policy. However, while large nuclear arsenals and the risk of proliferation remained, minimum deterrence continued to be a necessary element of security.

b. Further reductions from post-Cold War levels of NW could be made whilst maintaining minimum deterrence. This was identified as a reduction to a stockpile of less than 200 operationally available warheads.[27]

c. A move to increased transparency on nuclear weapon holdings.

d. Identification of the need for a limited strike, to maintain the credibility of deterrence, and therefore a requirement for the use of Trident in the sub-strategic role.

e. UK deterrence was based solely on the Trident system and continuous at sea deterrent patrols would be maintained *to avoid any*

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[25] *Ibid*, p 38

[26] *The Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999, The Stationary Office, London, July 1998, pp17-20

[27] *ibid*,p18. This reduction to 200 warheads represented a 70 percent reduction from the potential explosive power of the deterrent at the end of the Cold War. This was possible due to the decommissioning of the Lance nuclear missiles, the giving up of the artillery roles (undertaken with US weapons) and the withdrawal of both the maritime tactical weapons from the Royal Navy and all air launched weapons.

misunderstanding or escalation if a Trident submarine were sailed during a period of crisis.[28]

f. That it would be premature to acquire a ballistic missile defence system.[29]

17. The 1999 Defence White Paper[30] has only four lines on nuclear forces, which summarises the SDR statements, and nuclear disarmament receives one line. This appears to reflect the Labour Party's continuing sensitivity on nuclear matters and a desire to keep this controversial issue out of the public eye; despite deterrence being the primary pillar of British defence policy.

18. Two understated factors in current British nuclear weapon policy are:

a. The status that responsible ownership of NW gives and the associated argument that this adds weight to Britain's permanent seat on the UN Security Council.[31] This manifests itself in Britain's continuing desire to 'punch above her weight' and be seen as *leader among a community of nations*[32].

b. Trident was procured in the Cold War to meet the specific requirement of deterrence of the Soviet Union. The total acquisition cost of Trident was £12.52B, a sunk cost. The operating costs of the Trident force are in the order of £280M pa plus a tentative figure of £114M pa for

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[28] *ibid*, p19. A submarine at sea was seen as the most stable configuration: the least provocative and the least vulnerable. The submarines are now routinely at several days' notice to fire rather the few minutes of the Cold War era.

[29] See *Hansard*, Column 11, 10 May 1999. This statement was clarified further by the then Secretary of State for Defence, George Robertson, in reply to a question in the House of Commons on 10 May 1999, when he stated that "We are not in favour of developing ballistic missile defence systems. We are in favour of the anti-ballistic missile treaty....."

[30] *Defence White Paper1999*, London, The Stationary Office, December 1999, p27

[31] See I. Martin and J Garnett, *British Foreign Policy -- Challenges and Choices for the 21st Century*, London, Casell, 1997

[32] Tony Blair, 'New Britain: My Vision of a Young Country', *New Statesman*, London, 1996.

the warhead programme (believed to be declining).[33] These are relatively small and act to delay the considerable costs of decommissioning both the nuclear propulsion plant and weapons. Continuing with Trident is therefore a relatively easy economic decision for the government given the international political benefits, comparatively low costs and continuing benign public opinion.

19. Thus, Britain has actively pursued limited unilateral nuclear disarmament to the minimum level perceived necessary to cope with the worst conceivable threat; establishing herself at the forefront of the nuclear powers on progress to disarmament. Trident, with its continuous at-sea-patrols, remains a capable, well-trained and maintained deterrent capability. Britain under New Labour has shown itself to be surprisingly hawkish, particularly in Kosovo, giving political credibility to the deterrent force. The use of Trident in the sub-strategic role does provide some practical options on an escalation ladder. NFU has not been debated and has only been considered in response to non-nuclear states where the policy appears deliberately vague on the subject of response to chemical or biological weapons.

20. The risk, arising from proliferation, is recognised within the SDR; the supporting essay sets negative security assurances (NSA)[34] significantly stating that:

> *"Britain has repeatedly made it clear that we will not use nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear state not in breach of its non-proliferation obligations, unless it attacks us, our Allies, or a state to which we have a security commitment, in association or alliance with a nuclear weapon state".*

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[33] Supporting Essay 5 to SDR pp5.6-5.8

[34] 'Supporting Essay Five - Deterrence, Arms Control and Proliferation,' *The Strategic Defence Review*, London, The Stationary Office, 1998, 5.11

21. However, on the subject of chemical and biological weapons the study gives no indication of how such a threat would be tackled stating *there is no silver bullet which will provide a complete answer.*[35] Thus, neither ruling in or out the use of NW to counter such a chemical or biological threat.

22. Having defined the key issues behind nuclear deterrence, considered briefly the past and present British NW policy, the paper will now identity the key factors which shape that policy and consider what the future may hold. Is the Labour manifesto pledge of disarmament, when the conditions are right, credible in the next 15 years?

FACTORS INFLUENCING BRITISH NUCLEAR WEAPON POLICY

23. **Primary Factors**. The primary drivers influencing British nuclear policy have been identified[36] as threat perceptions and factors that alter the balance of power. These break down into:

a. Strategic relationships, between legal NWS, recognised within the Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the *de facto* NWS (India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea). It is these relationships that are crucial to build confidence or feed the traditional concerns over military threats and political mistrust.

b. Proliferation of WMD which leads to a potentially less stable and less predictable world.

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[35] *ibid*, p5.15

[36] E Bailey, D Howlett, T Ogilvie-White, J Simpson, *Nuclear Futures Project Report*, The Mountbatten Centre for International Studies, Department of Politics, University of Southampton. October 1999, p5. This paper is the culmination of a series of 22 papers, aimed at considering a range of nuclear futures that may emerge in the next decades. The Project reports have been validated by MoD via a series of meetings.

c. Military and technological developments that have the potential to destabilise current strategic relationships and undermine deterrence.

24. **Secondary Factors.** The key second order drivers have been identified as domestic political and economic factors.[37]

25. **Formative events of the last decade.** Before considering these key drivers briefly in turn, it is important to note that there have been four critical events that have shaped how these factors are viewed and their relative importance over the last decade:

a. The growth in NATO membership from former Soviet Bloc states.

b. Iraq acquiring WMD technology and the subsequent invasion of Kuwait.

c. Both India and Pakistan conducting successful underground nuclear tests: overtly becoming possessors of NW.

d. The US's continuing development of National Missile Defence (NMD).

PRIMARY FACTORS

26. **Strategic Relationships.** The end of the Cold War brought real gains in the early 1990s on disarmament with progress on START and the realisation by the newly formed states of the former Soviet Union that NW were an impediment to their futures. Belarus, Kazakhstan, Ukraine all denuclearised. Much of this early momentum in disarmament has now been lost, and it is the relationship

[37] *ibid, p16*

between the US and Russia that is central to understanding this slow down and the consequent limited change in British nuclear weapon posture.

27. Post-Cold War, the nuclear roles between Russia and the West have essentially reversed; it is Russia lacking the conventional forces that now needs to maintain the more overt nuclear posture. This was well summed up in 1994 by the then US deputy Secretary of Defense John Deutch:

> *"Russia has little prospect of returning to the kind of conventional force structure that they had at the height of the Cold War due to the collapse of their economy and the change in their political situation. It is a less expensive and less demanding matter for them to return to a much more aggressive nuclear posture. If something goes wrong in Russia it is likely that it is in the nuclear force area that we will face the first challenge".*[38]

28. America views Russia as the most significant state in the strategic calculus because of its continued deployment of nuclear forces that can target the US mainland. The stability of Russian democracy remains a cause concern and Tertrais argues that NATO policy will increasingly border on *strategic schizophrenia*[39] by trying to develop co-operative relationships with Russia based on trust, whilst at the same time ensuring a continued deterrent against Moscow. The prospect of improved co-operative relations has been further undermined, from the Russia perspective, by what they see as NATO expansionist policy with the addition of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to NATO. Additionally, NATO intervention in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), US policy towards Iraq, the Senate's failure to ratify CTBT and NATO's adoption of a new

[38] J Deutch, Deputy Secretary of Defense, comments made at a news conference, news release by the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defence for Public Affairs, 22 September 1994, p7
[39] Tertrais, *Nuclear Policies in Europe*, p35

strategic concept in April 1999 further deepen the distrust. [40] The Washington Summit communiqué refers to a "transformed NATO" which Russia sees as evidence of the transformation of NATO from a defensive to an offensive coalition, as shown by the action against FRY.

29. From the US perspective, progress towards improved relationships is undermined by: the Russian invasion of Chechnya, the anti US/NATO tone of the new Russian Military Doctrine, and the continuing development and possible deployment of tactical NW.[41] The election of Putin as Russian President heralds a new opportunity for improved relationships with the US and NATO. There are already clear signals of a lowering of the nuclear profile by the ratification of both START2 and the Conventional Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) by the Duma which could auger well for improvement in relationships, subject to the US's position on National Missile Defense (NMD).[42] Here, it appears that Russia may be about to take advantage from the US's discomfort, caused by the Senate's failure to ratify the CTBT, and from the question of whether NMD is within the spirit of the Anti Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM). Russia is likely to seek a further reduction in START targets, as she will fall below START II levels by 2005 due to NW obsolescence. Not able to afford new NW or her own NMD programme, needing to be focused on economic and social reform, Russia will thus use US NMD to seek a further reduction in US warhead numbers. Thus, the more aggressive nuclear stance of the new Russian Military Doctrine is seen as rhetoric; to paper

[40] C J Dick, 'Russia's new doctrine takes dark world view', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol 12 No 1 Jan 2000, pp14–19 Provides a useful summary of the new Russian Military Doctrine including the following quotations "The military balance has moved decisively against Russia. NATO has expanded eastwards despite Moscow's objections....this contravenes an understanding made by Western governments that this would not happen if Soviet forces were withdrawn." And "Russia sees itself as being under threatened or actual information attack almost to the same extent as its friend Serbia."

[41] S Blank, 'Russia rises to perceived threats', *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol 12 No 2 Feb 2000, pp31 36. Highlights that Russian rhetoric has relapsed to the pre-Gorbachev era and that Russia has revised her threat assessments; naming NATO and the USA as the greatest growing threats, expanding parameters for strike usage of NW and uplifting defence spending.

[42] Discussions between Presidents Putin and Clinton at the Moscow summit 3 June 2000 highlight that, whilst progress can be made on some arms control issues, NMD will continue to be a stumbling block. See also "Clinton's Star Wars gift to Russia 'threatens Britain's defence.' " *Sunday Telegraph*, 4 June 2000

over long term conventional weakness and not as a real change in threat.[43] This situation could change very quickly; the Russian Federation is not in any sense a mature democracy and has a long path to travel before NATO is likely to accept that it no longer represents a potential nuclear threat. However, a future sustained quiescent Russia could create real pressure for further cuts in NATO's nuclear arsenal.

30. As for China, whilst there is distrust of what she sees as American hegemony and NMD, only Taiwan appears to have the potential to destabilise relationships between China and the US. However, both sides seem acutely aware of the sensitivities of the issue and direct conflict appears to be unlikely in the foreseeable future. China has no desire to enter into an arms race and remains focused on economic growth.

31. Therefore, there is no legitimate NWS[44] that currently or in the near future appears likely to pose a direct threat to Britain or its NATO partners.

32. **Proliferation**. It could be argued that the NPT has been successful in limiting the spread of NW. Only Indian and Pakistan have demonstrated that they have both the capability and the will to defy the CTBT. Israel and North Korea are now believed to be the only other two nuclear capable states outside the five legitimate recognised NWS. Thus the direct nuclear threat to Britain and Europe is at present limited or non-existent. However, this apparent success of diplomacy and arms control, is undermined by the proliferation of other WMD, which is seen as a growing challenge to nuclear deterrence. Post-Cold War developments, such as the supposed co-operation between China and North Korea and various Middle Eastern and Mediterranean Basin countries on ballistic missile technology, are of

[43] According to Interfax News Agency Report 29 May 2000, Security Council Chairman Sergey Ivanov stated that "Use of nuclear weapons would only be considered if all other measures had failed and the fate of Russia was at risk. Nuclear Weapons were created not to be used but to serve as a deterrent. The new military doctrine embodies the paradox of deterrent." Source BBC World Service Monitoring.

[44] Legitimate NWS, refers to those NWS recognised as able to possess NW within the NPT.

growing concern.[45] At least 20 states are reported to have a chemical and/or biological weapons programme.[46] Both Iraq and North Korea have shown how difficult it is to curb a NW programme undertaken by a determined leader. This concern is further heightened by the inevitable prospect of both technical information and fissile material leakage.[47] particularly from countries of the former Soviet Union.[48]

33. WMD are attractive because they are seen as cost-effective strategic tools, as instruments of political power and as equalising conventional force disadvantage. They have been described as the poor man's RMA (Revolution in Military Affairs), and have the potential to become the preferred weapon for deterrence or compellence of the militarily weak against the strong. Non-western nations believe that they have a right to deploy whatever weapons they think necessary for their security. This position was stated perhaps best by the Indian defence minister when asked what lessons he had learnt from the Gulf War: "Don't fight the United States unless you have nuclear weapons".[49]

The danger of proliferation and the prospect that NW will fall into the wrong hands is well-summarised by Payne:

> *"Assuming that deterrence will "work" because the opponent will behave sensibly is bound to be the basis for a future surprise. I do not know whether our expectations of a generically sensible opponent will be dashed by a so called rogue state, such as North Korea, or by another challenger. That they will be dashed, however, is near certain. As we move*

[45] An example of this is the purchase by Syria of 300 Scud-D missiles and 26 launchers reported in the *Daily Telegraph*, 30 May 2000, p16

[46] Tertrais, *Nuclear Policies in Europe*, p33

[47] B Brodie, *The Absolute Weapon*, p52 As was recognised from the outset by Brodie, NW cannot be un-invented and technology will inevitably proliferate.

[48] See A W M Gerrits, "Russia, The West and Loose Nukes Syndrome", International Relations, Vol XIV No 6, December 1999 for a thorough description of the scale of the potential problem of leakage of fissile material and knowledge from the former Soviet Union.

[49] S Huntingdon, *The Clash of Civilisations*. Foreign Affairs, Summer 1993

to the second nuclear age and confront opponents with whom we are relatively unfamiliar, assumptions of a generically sensible foe almost certainly will ensure surprises".[50]

34. However, the issue of response to the two separate issues of WMD in the hands of rogue state[51] and WMD in the hands of terrorists, who may be state sponsored, needs to be further debated and subdivided into nuclear and chemical/biological.

a. **Response to a Rogue State - Nuclear** Of the known *defacto* nuclear states, only North Korea appears to represent any future threat to NATO. Pakistan and India have both obtained nuclear weapons in order to strengthen their position in their on-going regional dispute. Israel's nuclear capability remains deliberately uncertain although it is accepted as being for deterrence against WMD attacks from hostile nations in the Middle East. However, North Korea's nuclear programme appears to have no other credible purpose than an attempt to destabilise the regional balance of power, provide status and highlight the issue of reunification.[52] This potential destabilisation in Asia has been fully recognised and the US continues to play an active role in trying to bring the North Korea's programme to a negotiated end.[53] However, the bottom line is that nuclear deterrence will remain relevant against such a threat, although negotiating skills will be at a premium.[54]

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[50] K Payne , *Deterrence in the Second Nuclear Age*, Lexington, University Press of Kentucky, 1996, pp57-58

[51] US Secretary of State, Madeline Albright, redefined rogue state on 18 June 2000. Iraq, Iran, Libya and North Korea were to be described as "States of Concern" henceforth by the US State Department. However, for the purpose of this paper, the term will continue to be used.

[52] See R Latter, *Preventing Nuclear Proliferation*, Wilton Park Paper No 112, January 1996

[53] According to KBS Radio Seoul, the latest round of talks between North Korea and US were held in Rome on 24-27 May 2000. US continued to push for transparency on North Korea's NW programme. North Korea stressed that US should provide light water reactors and 500,000 tonnes of crude oil law agreement signed in 1994. Source BBC World Service Monitoring

[54] North Korea rhetoric highlights the problems faced by negotiators, a recent report by the North Korean news agency KCNA, 24 May 2000 stated that "the US goal is to ignite nuclear, biological and chemical wars on the Korean peninsula with Japan and South Korea as the shock troops. Source BBC World Service Monitoring.

b. **Response to a Rogue State – Chemical or Biological.** In the 1992 Gulf War, Britain and America informed Iraq that any use of chemical and biological weapons would be met with a measured response. John Major writes in his autobiography:

> *"We made it clear that we would not tolerate any Iraqi use of chemical or biological weapons, whether against our troops or as a weapon of terror against unprotected civilian populations. So did the US. In private, Saddam received an unmistakable warning about the immediate and catastrophic consequences for Iraq of any such attack".*[55]

Whilst it cannot be claimed categorically that deterrence succeeded, the fact that Saddam Hussein chose not to deploy WMD, even though he had been prepared to use such weapons against his own people, may indicate that the veiled threat of NW use had some influence. Lawrence Freedman sums up the current Western approach by stating that:

> *"It is hard to see how Western countries can make explicit nuclear threats to deter chemical or biological use. Apart from legal obligations not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states, it would be difficult to make retaliation automatic, given that such an attack might turn out to be poorly targeted and to have limited results. Nonetheless, at the same time it be would be unwise for any would-be perpetrator to assume that an attack which caused immense suffering would not generate such anger that nuclear use would become a real possibility".*[56 & 57]

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[55] J Major, *John Major The Autobiography*, London, Harper Collins, 1999, p223

[56] Lawrence Freedman, *The Revolution in Strategic Affairs*, Adelphi Paper 318, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998

[57] See also Quinlan, *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons*, p19 - Quinlan goes further arguing *that a nuclear state is one that no-one can afford to make desperate*, and while attack by NW is one way of making a nuclear state desperate there are clearly a number of other forms of attack that could render the same result.

With Britain's recent history of intervention around the globe, the continuing vagueness over Britain's NW policy against such threats appears entirely sensible. The option is neither ruled in or out. There is a need for caution and Cimbala argues that the concept of limited nuclear war is for the desperate policy maker.[58] The unpredictability of today's and the future multi-polar world means that great caution is needed in dealing with any state armed with WMD. Few have had the benefits of the Cold War experience to hone their negotiating and war avoidance skills, the true aim of deterrence, may not be at the forefront of their minds. Perhaps the best advice is that of Thomas L Friedman: *My Daddy always said to me: "Son, never go into a thermo-nuclear war to protect a country you can't find on the map".*[59]

a. **Response to WMD Terrorists.** WMD terrorism will continue to remain a concern. Whilst, deterrence may work even against a rogue state, a terrorist organisation is much more difficult to deter; less rational and without necessarily a civilian population of its own to balance the deterrence equation. Additionally, it is important to have an understanding of what is, and what is not, a true threat. Some analysts have argued that nuclear terrorism is a credible threat, however these arguments are relatively straightforward to dismiss.[60] Whilst the technology and even fissile material can be obtained relatively easily, producing weapon grade material and actually manufacturing a weapon are far more difficult. This was clearly demonstrated by Iraq who invested considerable resource and expertise in its failed NW programme. Therefore, the question reduces to whether NW can deter a terrorist organisation armed with a biological agent or chemical weapon? That the US has chosen to use this terrorist

[58] Cimbala, *The Past and Future of Nuclear Deterrence*, pp195-196 – provides a useful set of conclusions on the dangers of proliferation and the need in a multipolar nuclear world for the consideration of war termination.
[59] T L Friedman, 'Porgy and Bess and NATO', *New York Times*, 9 April 1995, p E15
[60] K H Kamp, 'Nuclear Terrorism Is Not the Core Problem', *Survival*, Vol 40, No4, 1998, pp168-169– provides a strong case for why use of nuclear weapons are unlikely to be used by terrorists

threat as one of the prime justification for its limited development of NMD highlights that, at least in US eyes, a nuclear arsenal is not believed to be sufficient to deter terrorist WMD attack. Britain's rejection of NMD partially reflects a belief that the threat is so diverse in its potential delivery system and form that the only real defence is a proactive intelligence service capable of providing early warning; hinting at the real impotence of nuclear deterrence against the terrorist threat. Deterrence can only work if the source of potential attack is known, this may well not be the case with a terrorist attack which relies on the unknown to add a further dimension of terror. Thus, terrorism is close to whittling away the underpinning deterrence arguments both of credibility of use (by reducing the probability of nuclear reply to attack) and NW as a political weapon (if NW do not deter then an aggressor cannot be forced to the negotiating table). Therefore, it is important that, if Britain is to maintain a nuclear capability, the terrorist threat is not overstated as an attempt to justify retention. Deterrence, and if necessary coercion, of terrorists can be better and more safely achieved by the West's information warfare capability and overwhelming conventional superiority, with the benefit of only targeting the terrorist and not the civilian population. Thus, whilst NWS may continue to be able to create some valuable uncertainty in the mind of a WMD terrorist, the reality is that NW serve little utility against such threats.

35. **Military and Technological Developments.** Deterrence could be undermined by a military technological development that changes the nuclear balance of power; providing a NWS with a unilateral weapon advantage or the ability to degrade an opponent's NW capability. The impact of the RMA and the US's continuing commitment to the development of NMD could have the potential to destabilise the deterrence balance, reduce the role of NW and weaken the incentive to maintain expensive nuclear programmes.[61] Alternatively, NMD

[61] Bailey, Howlett, Ogilvie-White, Simpson, *Nuclear Futures Project Report*, p10

could lead to pressures to develop a new range of both NW, and associated delivery systems, as well as encourage greater interest in chemical and biological weapons. The outcome will probably fall between these two extremes and be partially dependent on the individual state's ability to afford such programmes. The poorer state relying on WMD, whilst some states, with the technological and financial capability, developing programmes to exploit RMA. Development of advanced conventional capability, such as stealth or supersonic cruise missiles, hint at a move from nuclear to conventional deterrence and have growing weight in the US. Whereas, China, France and the UK have been more sceptical about the impact of RMA, seeing nuclear deterrence as the most cost-effective approach. The 1994 French White Paper described theories of conventional deterrence as "a dangerous mistake".[62] However, in the US NMD, by its limited scale, is seen as supplementing, rather than replacing, nuclear deterrence.

36. Thus, America appears likely to persist with NMD.[63] Whilst there have been problems with the technology, a potential solution could be close at hand. China and Russia have argued that NMD will destabilise the nuclear balance of power and lead to arms racing.[64 & 65] However, the US appears to be relying on the fact that neither Russia nor China seem to have the appetite, and in Russia's case the economic strength, to become involved in such a race.[66]

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[62] *ibid*, p11

[63] The decision on whether to proceed with NMD is due to made in July 2000 and is intended to be based on an assessment of whether the project is technically viable and operationally effective. However, it is possible that given this is a presidential election year and that there have been technical problems with the project, that this decision may be deferred until 2001.

[64] Bailey, Howlett, Ogilvie-White,Simpson, *Nuclear Futures Project Report*, pp 12-13 Provides a useful analysis of ballistic missile defence and its ability to undermine a state's deterrence capability, additionally highlighting that China has expressed concern over the potential for US NMD or Tactical Missile Defence (TMD) assistance to Taiwan

[65] According to Xinhau News Agency Bejing, 5 June 2000, in an article headed "NMD system hinders nuke disarmament", which reports the views of Sha Zukang, director general of China's Department of Arm's control and Disarmament, NMD would be tantamount to a nuclear arms build up and would severely damage the integrity and vitality of the ABM treaty. Source BBC World Service Monitoring

[66] Other potential areas of technological development include tactical missile defence and the development of the next generation of nuclear cruise missiles, which could provide a relatively cheap and cheerful alternative for deterrence. For existing powers such options may be attractive to replace their current systems as they reach the end of effective life. With the limited range, relative slow speed (unless a supersonic variant is developed) and therefore vulnerability, they appear to represent a considerable loss of capability.

37. **First Order Drivers – Conclusions.** Whilst speculating about future events is always dangerous, current analysis, in terms of first order drivers, shows that: there is no legitimate *or de facto* NWS[67] that appear likely to pose a direct NW threat to Britain or NATO, that NW are of limited deterrence value against chemical or biological attack (whether by rogue state or terrorist) and that NMD is viewed as unlikely to destabilise the current nuclear balance of power. The case for retention of an independent British nuclear deterrent appears to revolve around an argument of 'just in case'. Events that have major political and military significance can happen quickly and with little prior warning, retention of NW thus provides an insurance policy against the unexpected. For as long as there appears to be no direct threat to UK, and the argument for the use of NW to deter WMD terrorists appears weak, the influence of first order drivers will fade and the influence of second order drivers will start to dominate. The next section considers the influence of public opinion and economics on domestic politics.

SECONDARY FACTORS

38. Public opinion on NW has undoubtedly influenced political strategy. Labour fought both the 1983 and 1987 general elections on policies advocating nuclear disarmament. Whilst there were a great many factors as to why Labour lost both elections heavily, there is little doubt that the view within the party is that the defeat was much to do with the unilateral disarmament policy. This was not necessarily to do with the rights and wrongs of nuclear disarmament, but more to do with what the public perception was of a party which promoted such a policy. Johnson suggests that:

[67] Legitimate NWS, refers to those NWS recognised as able to possess NW within the NPT. *De facto* refers to those NWS not recognised by the NPT.

"Partly myth and partly history, this linking of nuclear disarmament to electoral defeat continues to act a straitjacket on nuclear policy debates in the Labour Party".[68]

39. At present, there is little public debate on NW, no large-scale public opposition to nuclear weapon policy and the present government appears to have adopted a policy of *benign neglect.*[69] A Gallup poll released to coincide with the defence debate at the 1997 Labour Conference showed that 87 percent of those questioned were in favour of Britain participating in a treaty to prohibit and eliminate NW. Additionally 59 percent believed that it would be better for British security if Britain did not have NW against 36 percent who preferred to keep the bomb as long as others did.[70] A similar view exists in the USA[71]. This position could quickly change if a weapon accident was to occur or the government was to miscalculate on the use of deterrence and undermine its credibility. Additionally, public opposition to excessive defence spending in the US, France and Britain appears to have been taken seriously by government. The Strategic Defence Review (SDR), for example, encouraged public contributions, promising the *widest possible shared vision about Britain's security needs*[72] and indicates that post-Cold War Western governments are willing to listen to public concerns over nuclear issues and make concessions.

40. Labour's sensitisation to public opinion on NW leads directly to concern over media presentation of NW policy. With the nuclear disarmament debate

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[68] Johnson, *British Perspectives on the Future of Nuclear Weapons*, p13

[69] Tertrais, *Nuclear Policies in Europe*, p25

[70] Gallup Survey commissioned by the Nuclear free Local Authorities, released 2 October 1997

[71] See Bailey, Howlett, Ogilvie-White,Simpson, *Nuclear Futures Project Report*, p16. A national public opinion poll in the US conducted on behalf of the Henry L. Stimson Center showed that although the majority of Americans supported the long-term goal of elimination of NW, under certain circumstances they believed that the US should preserve or even enhance its nuclear capabilities. This opinion shows a strong alignment between the views of the general public and those of the Clinton administration and explains the absence of a strong anti-nuclear lobby within the US.

[72] George Robertson, Secretary of State for Defence, *Britain's Defence: Securing Our Future Together*, MoD Press Release, London, 28 May 1997

occasionally producing headlines such as *Nuclear abolition pact signed*[73], the media, with their traditionally short term view, are in danger of fuelling an expectation of progress on nuclear disarmament which demands a favourable outcome before the tough conditions required have been met. Whilst, the perceived threat remains low this demand could grow, leading to greater pressure for disarmament.

41. The current Labour policy on NW is little different to that of the Conservative opposition and NW are unlikely to be a political issue for the next general election. However, the decision on whether to replace Trident, and if so with what, is looming for the 2006/7 election. Trident went into service in 1992. The submarine platform has a planned life of 25 years, however, whilst there may be some possibility of life extension, of around 5 years, previous experience with ageing nuclear submarines has indicated that this is an expensive and inefficient option.[74] Although no date has been set for opening the debate on successor systems,[75] it is anticipated that the procurement decision for a new system would need to be taken by 2008, if it is to be submarine launched. Even if it is concluded that it is not to be submarine launched, the analysis has to be completed to prior to 2008 to avoid the SSBN option being ruled out by default. Therefore, Trident replacement could become a political issue at the 2006/7 election, particularly, if the Left Wing of the Labour Party, which contains several members of CND, anticipates that the time is right to push for a return to a unilateral disarmament policy. This could cause conflict within the party, raising memories of the 1983

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[73] 'Nuclear abolition pact signed,' *Times*, London, 22 May 2000, p13 - An article reporting the signing of an agreement by the 5 legitimate NWS to eventually dispose of their nuclear arsenal. This in fact is little progress on the previous wording of the Article VI of the NPT. This committed the NWS "to pursue negotiations in good faith relating to the cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict international control."

[74] Following costly refits, the previous generation of Resolution Class SSBNs achieved low availability in their final commissions and were paid off after relatively short periods of operation.

[75] George Robertson, Secretary of State for Defence, Hansard, 10 May 1999, Column 11, In response to question from Mr Chris Mullin MP, stated that "I have had no discussion about a successor system to Trident. We concluded in the SDR that no decision was required for several years."

and 1987 electoral defeat. Because of the potentially significant costs involved, this debate will be an order of magnitude more difficult for the party than the issue of the 1997 manifesto of retaining Trident. A possible solution might be to offer a referendum to allow the general public to decide. This would be a highly unusual step, allowing a vote on a national security issue, but having promised to conduct referenda on equally difficult issues such as joining the European Monetary Union, this would not be outside the realms of possibility. Labour could appear neutral on the issue and promise to abide by public opinion. Other solutions open to both parties would be to promise a strategic review of a range of options including disarmament and to take public opinion into consideration, using a similar approach to the panel debate used by the SDR. Options for successor systems could be: to continue with a new independently operated American system, a collaborative procurement with France (See Annex A), a move to a tactical system of some form (submarine launched cruise missile, or air launched weapon), a fade out of deterrence by continuing with the Trident system until the end of economic life or a decision to disarm and decommission Trident by a set date. All factors would need to be considered, including the legality of NW ownership and use. Currently, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) has offered only an advisory opinion on the legality of threat or use of NW. This stated that:

> *"In view of the current state of international law, and of the elements of fact at its disposal, the Court could not conclude definitively whether the threat or use nuclear weapons would be lawful or unlawful in an extreme circumstances of self defence, in which the very survival of a State would be at stake".*[76]

42. This non-binding opinion was offered with a seven to seven vote by the judges of the ICJ. If at a later date this case was reopened by the ICJ and a ruling requested, the outcome of the debate is by no means certain. A ruling that use,

[76] International Court of Justice Press Release, *ICJ issues advisory opinion on legality and threat or use of nuclear weapons*, ICJ/546, 8 July 1996

even in extreme circumstances, is illegal would place Britain, with its reputation of maintaining the moral high ground, in a difficult position both in terms of foreign policy and public opinion. However, no such ruling is anticipated, although circumstances could change if the NW profile was raised by an event such as attempted coercion with NW by one of the five legitimate NWS.[77]

43. If the threat to the UK from potential WMD attack continues to remain very low, then the cost of any replacement system will be of significant interest to the public.[78] Replacing Trident by either a new US system[79] or a collaborative system with France, whilst the only options likely to deliver a similar capability to Trident, and thus offer an equally credible minimum deterrence system, will be expensive. The unilateral disarmament campaigners could portray these costs in terms of the impact that this additional spending would have on emotive issues such as education and health. With the support of the media, perceived military experts and ex-service chiefs[80] this could give a disarmament campaign, or a campaign not to replace Trident at end of life, a great deal of public, and therefore political, influence. Such expenditure will be difficult to justify to those uninitiated in the nuclear debate on the grounds of 'just in case', without a concerted public relations campaign. Other cheaper systems, such as cruise, may be more vulnerable to defensive systems, lowering their deterrence value and thus the nuclear threshold by encouraging miscalculation by a potential aggressor.

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[77] *Contrary to Article2, paragraph 4 of the United Nations Charter*

[78] See Bailey, Howlett, Ogilvie-White,Simpsor, *Nuclear Futures Project Report*, p19. Each nuclear power will have to consider whether such programmes can both be justified and funded in the prevailing military and economic climate. For example, threat perceptions in Southern Asia have been very high and both nations went ahead with nuclear testing, despite the risk of international sanctions and cost. Prior to the test, an Indian government sponsored study concluded if the test were to go ahead, then India's economic development could be set back by 10 to 15 years.

[79] This of course assumes that the US will develop a Trident replacement system. Some analysts have suggested that this may be put on hold whilst waiting for the outcome of the NMD debate. This view is dismissed, as it is unlikely that any limited NMD system can provide the necessary protection to provide the necessary assurance against a large-scale nuclear attack.

[80] See Eric J Grove, *Vanguard to Trident British Naval Policy since World War Two*, London, Bodely Head, 1987, pp347-354, - Margaret Thatcher reportedly pushed through the decision to procure Trident, despite opposition from Service Chiefs. Admiral Sir Henry Leach dismissed Trident as a 'cuckoo in the nest' such was the distortion of the additional costs within the Navy programme.

However, they would offer visible proof of Britain's commitment to disarmament by a further staged reduction in her nuclear arsenal. The least cost option of Britain staying an NWS is to 'do nothing': plan for extension of Trident to the maximum achievable life of the Vanguard submarine platform and argue that a replacement system, if not submarine based can be relatively quickly be developed if required. This could defer any procurement decision to around 2015.

44. It is therefore possible that given a continuing low threat to UK, the potential defining moment for the future of British NW could be the 2006/7 general election. Should the debate over the issue of whether to replace Trident become a factor in the election campaign, then public opinion, influenced by the cost of potential replacement systems, might be the deciding factor in the outcome of the debate.

THE CASE FOR RETENTION

45. The paper has argued that NW are for deterrence, that they are political tools requiring to be credible in terms of capability and that the resolve to use them must be apparent to any would be aggressor. Uncertainty in policy and a range of options (sub-strategic strike) strengthen deterrence. Britain now believes that its current submarine based nuclear force represents the minimum deterrence force necessary to ensure a second strike capability against a sizeable nuclear arsenal. Much change has quietly been achieved in terms of unilateral reductions, transparency and contribution to disarmament treaties, although these are not likely to impact on the Trident force and its *modus operandi*. The fundamental underlying strategy of minimum deterrence, inherited from the previous government remains unchanged.[81] Labour's formula, outlined in its manifesto *could allow Britain to do nothing for a very long time*.[82]

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[81] For a detailed analysis of the past and current Conservative Party nuclear policy see Johnson, *British Perspectives on the Future of Nuclear Weapons*, pp9-12

[82] Johnson, *British Perspectives on the Future of Nuclear Weapons*, p29. Provides a good discussion on the careful wording of the Labour party manifesto

46 Britain therefore has little room for manoeuvre left at the nuclear arms control table. The options appear to be to maintain the *status quo* apart from some tinkering with areas such as readiness, which are notoriously difficult to verify, or giving up the entire capability. This is of course why the Labour manifesto chose its words so carefully:

> *"Once satisfied with **verified** progress towards our goal of the global elimination of nuclear weapons, we will ensure that British nuclear weapons are included in multilateral negotiations".*

47. Quinlan argues that, whilst such statements have considerable presentational attraction, no coherent indication is ever given as to what the content of a sensible arms control negotiation might be.[83] The loss of an equivalent number of warheads from the Russian arsenal would have little impact on the strategic balance. However, when there is little if any WMD direct threat to the UK and no sign of a serious future threat developing, then the public expectation becomes one of progress on disarmament. This will become particularly apparent when the debate on the successor system to Trident begins in earnest. So against this background what will the arguments be to justify such a system:

a. Firstly the "just in case" argument, the need for an insurance policy against the unexpected.

b. Secondly the difficulties that verification of further arms reduction brings and the potential for cheating. Iraq has demonstrated that, even given a relatively small and unsophisticated WMD programme, an obstructive government can quickly fatigue the best intents of the international community to enforce arms inspection and verification regimes. Highlighting that the political difficulties in carrying out effective

[83] Quinlan, *Thinking About Nuclear Weapons*, p46

and unimpeded verification may be even greater than the technical challenges of arms control. Additionally, a number of measures promised by proponents of disarmament are simply unverifiable or lead to the potential for arms racing to recover from them.[84] Demating is a good example of this, where a nation could relatively easily steal the march on its opponents. This again highlights the carefully wording of the Labour Party manifesto seeking *verified progress* before taking any action to introduce British NW into multilateral negotiations.

c. Status and prestige are still perceived to be given by NW and the British desire to be seen to be punching above her weight is likely to persist. The Prime Minister recently set out his vision for Britain:

> *"To use our strengths of history to build our future not as a superpower but as a pivotal power that is at the crux of alliance and international politics that shape the world and its future".*[85]

Thus Britain shows no sign of stepping down from its interventionist policy and part of this "world policeman image" is undoubtedly enhanced by the diplomatic status that nuclear weapon ownership brings and, in particular, the association with permanent membership of the Security Council.[86] The independence of the nuclear deterrent brings much flexibility and influence to Britain as well as providing a prime example of burden sharing to the US.

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[84] See Paul Schulte, "Britain and Nuclear Disarmament: Record, Realities and Opportunities", keynote speech to Catholic Bishops' Conference on Nuclear Weapons, 4 April 2000. Argues that a great deal is made of arms control by declaration, but there is often little substance behind such promises. Additionally there is a great deal of evidence that such pledges have been mere deceptions in the past, and therefore provide little to support trust in the future.

[85] Speech by the Prime Minister Tony Blair at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, Guildhall, London, 22 Nov 1999

[86] See Cimbala, *The Past and Future of Nuclear Deterrence*, p212 for a detailed analysis of the great power status associated with nuclear weapon ownership

d. Not only do NW give status and prestige, but they also provide confidence to both the government and the armed forces; both encouraging intervention and limiting options for opposition forces. Indeed Berridge argues that the necessity to demonstrate nuclear credibility makes NWS more ruthless in the application of conventional force in foreign policy.[87]

e. Coupled to this argument is that the continued retention of a limited and transparent nuclear arsenal in the hands of a few internationally-ratified possessors helps to seal off any possibility of armed conflict amongst advanced states. It reduces the incentives to any clandestine acquirer, since it diminishes whatever leverage that they might have hoped to seize, and it offers an overshadowing in-reserve discouragement to intolerable state behaviour of other extreme kinds.

f. That a decision to disarm will be difficult to reverse. Expertise and knowledge will quickly fade. To reinstate a nuclear weapons programme, should it ever be required, would be very expensive and take considerable time, particularly in the modern civil-regulated and licensed regime, now required in UK. Thus, maintenance of a limited NW programme may be seen as a strategic investment and closely linked to the "just in case" argument.

g. That disarmament is not the real problem and should not be undertaken until a political transformation of global proportions has been achieved. Quirlan argues that "*disarmament is an irrelevant issue; the true issue being the organisation of the government of the world on a co-operative basis*". This debate is neatly summarised by Salvador de Madariaga:

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[87] G R Berridge, *International Politics - States Power and Conflicts since 1945*, Hemel Hempstead, Prentice, Hall, Harvester, Wheatsheaf, 1997, p107

"....nations do not arm willingly. Indeed, they are sometimes only too willing to disarm, as the British did to their sorrow in the Baldwin days. Nations don't distrust each other because they are armed; they are armed because they distrust each other. And therefore to want disarmament before a minimum of agreement on fundamentals is as absurd as to want people to go undressed in winter. Let the weather be warm and people will discard their clothes readily and without committees to tell them how they are to undress".[88]

48. These arguments whilst persuasive are difficult to articulate to the general public in a simple manner and as a coherent package. Thus, they are readily undermined by short-term arguments about cost and why Britain needs an independent deterrent when it is part of NATO and can rely on American nuclear forces, as do most of Europe. Britain could compensate by having stronger conventional forces, which are arguably more relevant to the expeditionary concept outlined in the SDR, yet still save money on the defence budget. It is for this reason that the present and previous governments have tried to keep the nuclear question out of the public eye. The case for retention of nuclear weapons is not presentationally strong and is thus politically damaging. Quinlan's argument, which has been supported elsewhere[89], that disarmament is absurd without a radical and lasting global political change, is so fundamental that it appears to sink any prospect of disarmament in the near term and thus achievement of the Labour Party manifesto pledge. However, this is where once again the words have been so carefully crafted, the pledge only states that Britain will seek *balanced and verifiable* ***reductions*** and, that when the time is right, will *ensure that British nuclear weapons are* ***included*** *in multilateral negotiations.* Neither of these statements are indications of anything more than arms reduction

[88] S de Madariaga, *Morning Without Noon*, London, pp 48-49

[89] See C L Glaser, 'The Flawed Case for Nuclear Disarmament,' *Survival*, Spring 1998, pp112-125 for a thorough analysis of the underlying problems of disarmament without a prospect of interstate trust and lasting peace

and not necessarily disarmament, despite the stated utopian goal of global elimination of nuclear weapons. Thus, there appears to be an acknowledgement that there is little likelihood of achieving any significant British arms reduction in the near future.

49. Therefore what will the policy be of a future government, of whatever political persuasion? Provided the threat perception continues at its current low level, then is likely that the policy of benign neglect will continue. The debate over Trident replacement will be avoided for as long as possible and, despite engineering, capability and efficiency arguments, the Vanguard class submarines will stretched, at least on paper, for as long as possible.

CONCLUSIONS

50. Global disarmament will remain a utopian aim; it will only be achieved if there is radical transformation in world politics and the creation of lasting trust. To paraphrase de Madariaga: nations are armed because they distrust each other, they will disarm when they trust each other. This is not to reject disarmament, but to recognise that not enough has changed post Cold War. The pace of disarmament cannot be forced and the question that has to be addressed is what does the world need to look like to create the climate for disarmament?

51. Nuclear deterrence, as an operating concept, remains as relevant today as it was in the Cold War. However, there is a danger that claims are being made about NWs' ability to deter new and less rational actors, particularly terrorists. There is little substance to these arguments and they do not justify retention of NW on their own.

52. With the likelihood of improving nuclear power relations, NW will be understood still less than they are today in terms of their deterrent value, since

there is little on the horizon to deter. They will be seen primarily as insurance against an unforeseeable deterioration in relations.

53. Britain, after steady progress on arms control, now has little left to contribute. Whilst there are a number of steps that can be taken in terms of commitment to treaties and transparency, her only remaining system, Trident, appears the minimum necessary to provide an effective deterrent force. Choices therefore reduce to all or nothing.

54. Even with a continuing low or non-existent threat assessment, Britain will not unilaterally disarm within the time-frame analysed in this paper (to 2015). Britain will continue to have NW because she has them. In other words, Britain has become used to the status and confidence that NW provide and enjoys the insurance and comfort that they give; just in case.

55. Trident replacement could be become the critical issue in deciding Britain's long term nuclear status. Governments, of whatever political persuasion, are likely to avoid any decision on this potential 'hot potato' for as long as possible. This will be achieved by extending the Vanguard class to the limit of submarine and reactor plant life.

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Anglo-French Nuclear Co-operation. The agenda for Anglo-French nuclear co-operation appears to have been driven by France. Whilst not wishing to replace the NATO deterrent, France would like it to have a European dimension; economic and political integration are making the security and well-being of European nations ever more dependent upon each other. The old French idea that the 'nuclear risk cannot be shared' is considered obsolete.[1] The French view NW as the key to Europe's strategic autonomy, without which Europe will be incomplete. According to President Chirac in 1996:

> *"Taking into account the difference in sensitivity that exists in Europe about nuclear weapons, we do not propose a ready made concept, but a gradual process, open to those partners who wish to join".*[2]

This implies that France will increasingly take the rest of Europe into account in nuclear policy decisions. The British view appears to be that what the French are suggesting already exists in NATO. Although more reluctant than France to pursue deeper European integration in general, Britain has been much more at ease in recognising common vital interests in Europe. However, Britain sits in a difficult position, reliant for the foreseeable future on US support for its Trident weapon system, placing tight restrictions on any transfer of technical information, whilst at the same time seeking closer nuclear links with France. In general, the British position on what the French have christened the *dissuasion concertée* is that it is welcomed as long as it has a double dimension; European and Atlantic.[3] The situation was neatly summed up by Chirac "Britain will have the same problem as joining the Euro – what are the conditions for nuclear convergence".

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[1] Tertrais, *Nuclear Policies in Europe*, p57 - Includes a detailed analysis of the dissuasion concertee

[2] Chirac, speech to the Institut des Hautes Etudes de Defense Nationale, Paris, 8 June 1996

[3] Tertrais, *Nuclear Policies in Europe*, p58