

Notes for Defence Committee meeting on Tues 16 Jan

What is your overall reaction to the White Paper ?

It touches on some of the key issues, but doesn't deal with them in a satisfactory way and lacks coherence. The arguments about deterrence in Section 3 are not convincing. There is no clear attempt to show how the guidelines in Section 4 relate to the three scenarios spelt out in Section 3. And so it ends up being a not-very-convincing sales prospectus.

What do you think of the decision making process, should there be a decision at this time ?

Key item is exchange of letters – on 7 Dec. Already passed. May already have been implemented in contracts placed by US Navy.

With regard to a new submarine – The life of a submarine depends how it is used. Trafalgar class currently have an expected life of 28 years. Current US policy, and the experience with Polaris suggests that SSBN can operate much longer than SSN, because of their operating regime. (US SSBN 30 – 45; SSN 30 – 33)

(With regard to missile life extension – this was the main action item in the exchange of letters between George Bush and Tony Blair on 7 December. The US Navy placed three large contracts which included US Trident life extension in late December and early January – it is possible that some of the money has already been spent, but I can't yet confirm whether or not this is the case.)

Aside from general opposition are there specific aspects that you object to ?

The White Paper does not deal adequately about how Trident relates to NATO and the United States. There are three ways Trident could be used – under NATO, independently, or in a bilateral Anglo-American operation. In the exchange of letters between Bush and Blair it is clear that Trident is first and foremost assigned to NATO, with a marginal possibility of independent use. The arguments in the White Paper don't reflect this. The British and American Trident systems are joined at the hip and I don't consider that independent use is either politically or technically credible. The recent invasion of Iraq shows that Britain may join the US in an ad-hoc alliance rather than work formally through NATO. With regard to the British Trident force it is technically well-suited to being used in an Anglo-American operation. This is far more likely than use through NATO or independently – but yet this prospect is ignored in the White Paper.

What do you think of the political rationale for replacement ?

The White Paper exaggerates the effectiveness of deterrence – this is based on the repetition over 50 years of the same ideas – to the extent that they have become an unquestionable creed. We retain a degree of mystery around deterrence to maintain its magical power.

Would it work ? It assumes that both sides are operating in the same rational mindset. Where two governments are each threatening to take an action that would be madness – then the government which is least rational is at an advantage. This logic led American nuclear planners ten years ago to conclude that, in order to make deterrence work, the United States should present itself as being irrational and vindictive. Do we want to go down this road ?

If our response to a nuclear attack from Al Qaeda was to fire Trident missiles at Pakistan, or another Islamic country – would that not just be doing exactly what Osama Bin Laden would want – and so the threat to do this is not credible.

With regard to "Emerging Nuclear States" the White Paper talks about avoiding nuclear blackmail. But there is only a thin line between nuclear blackmail and nuclear deterrence. Five years ago India accused Pakistan of engaging in nuclear blackmail, Islamabad

*There's
ambiguity
but ->
no
with
Tactical
you're
not
Sarkis*

responded by talking about their nuclear deterrent. Both blackmail and deterrence involve threatening to use nuclear weapons to get your own way when vital interests are at stake.

The first scenario listed is that Russia in future might have both the capability and the intention to use military force against Europe. But for Britain to go it alone and launch a nuclear response would be suicidal.

The White Paper exaggerates the extent that there is any utility in nuclear weapons – and this carries with it a great danger – because it makes what we fear most more likely. This is true in general, but also with specific regard to Russia – maintaining nuclear-armed submarines at sea for the next 50 years will not encourage Russia to make progress towards disarmament.

Do you accept that conventional weapons can't have the same security capability ? If not why not ?

In most situations only conventional forces are relevant and nuclear weapons are completely irrelevant. In April 1999 when NATO was preparing to act in Kosovo President Yeltsin engaged in some nuclear sabre rattling – he talked openly about world war and he was reported as saying that Russian missiles would be retargeted. These threats were completely ignored. In contrast in June 1999 when a few Russian armoured personnel carriers appeared on an airfield it had a significant impact. Threatening to use nuclear weapons is far more likely to be seen as a bluff – than threatening to use conventional forces.

Threatening to use conventional weapons is more effective because it is possible to see that conventional weapons could have some military utility.

When the White Paper says (3-4) that “the UK’s nuclear weapons are not designed for military use during conflict” – they are pulling the rug away from underneath the concept of deterrence. If it can never make military sense to use nuclear weapons – then any use of nuclear weapons would be irrational – and any threat to use them a bluff.

Do nuclear weapons have any role ?

But nuclear weapons cannot have a role in our society, because to use them would be to operate outside the bounds of civilised behaviour. This is a moral argument – but it is an argument that has an impact on the utility of nuclear weapons. It is because any use of nuclear weapons would be clearly immoral, that any threats to use them would lack credibility.

Are there any weaknesses in the argument that the nuclear deterrent is an insurance policy ?

Every nation in the world could use the same argument. The logical conclusion is that everyone should have the bomb. This is an insurance policy that makes it more likely that something will go wrong.

NATO’s strategic concept 1999 says that the circumstances in which the Alliance might have to use nuclear weapons are extremely remote.

The White Paper is based on a worst-case approach. This is not only wrong but dangerous. The invasion of Iraq shows the dangers of readily believing the worst. The history of the nuclear arms race gives further ground for caution. The US several times overreacted to exaggerated concerns that there were falling behind Russia and that there was a bomber gap or missile gap. This overreaction helped to fuel the arms race. Believing that the worst that can happen will happen is often not the safest option. The forces that are deployed can help to make our worst nightmares come true.

It assumes that we can judge how the opponent will respond.

Will the public buy into the insurance policy argument ?

An opinion poll in Scotland in 2005 showed that 78 % of those questioned were opposed to spending £20 billion on replacing Trident. A YouGov poll in November found 61% of Scots want the Scottish Parliament to be able to get rid of Trident. Only 25% didn't want this power. I don't think the Scottish public will accept the "insurance policy". The proposal in the White Paper will damage relations between Edinburgh and London.

How do you balance the benefits and risks over 40 years of maintaining nuclear weapons ?

Risk & benefit

Risk of being bound to US foreign policy for the next 50 years and not able to act independently.
Risk of a nuclear accident – always there, made greater by current terrorist threat.
Risk of nuclear weapons being used by miscalculation or by accident
Main risk – reducing the effectiveness of the nuclear taboo.

If Britain gave up its nuclear weapons what effect will that have ?

It will be a visible rejection of the utility of nuclear weapons. It would enhance the nuclear taboo. There is one less reason for other nations to argue that they need to keep the bomb, just in case they are subject to nuclear blackmail from Britain.

Given the situation with Iran and North Korea why should the UK give up ? Would it have any effect on what Iran and North Korea decide ?

The response of the whole international community to the dangers of nuclear proliferation in Iran and North Korea does have some effect. If Britain does not renew Trident this will strengthen that international effort.

If the UK gave up to what extent would this enhance non-proliferation ? Is it enough for the UK to give up ?

*All issues are not fully defined by the state that has nuclear
The are people guys that you expect - a few - we can stretch be
and - 23 and cover
big ones*

What do you think of the steps that the Government has made towards disarmament, such as the reduction in warheads ?

Following the Strategic Defence Review 12 warheads were removed from each of the armed submarines, a total of 36 warheads were put into storage, but they were not scrapped. They have remained available for operations. The White Paper indicates that the number of operational warheads will be reduced by around 40, but it does not signal any change in the number deployed on submarines. So it would appear that what will happen is that the extra 36 warheads, plus a few more, will not be decommissioned. There has only been one real reduction – but the Government are claiming the credit for it twice.

The earlier moves towards disarmament are also exaggerated. The White Paper claims that the new total will be almost half of the previously declared maximum. This is a reference to the old ceiling of 300 warheads. But Aldermaston never built 300 warheads – the reason they never built this many is because the new A90 plant was 10 years late entering service, and they could only build the warheads at half of the intended rate in the old A45 facility.

There are still many more warheads deployed today than there were in 1994 with Polaris. And while the Polaris fleet could hit 48 separate targets, the Trident fleet can hit a total of 144, at longer range and with much more accuracy.

The effectiveness of Trident was enhanced when the targeting hardware and software was replaced in 2002. This means that the system can be rapidly retargeted and the computer in the submarine can hold data for a much larger number of targets.

Trident will be made more flexible when there is a further upgrade of the targeting system in a few years time. The US is currently upgrading their warheads to increase their effectiveness – and before long Britain can be expected to follow suite.

The explosive power may be less, the warhead numbers might even come down – but the performance and effectiveness will increase.

How does this compare with others ?

South Africa, Libya, Ukraine, Kazakstan and Belarus have given up their entire nuclear weapon capability. These are the examples we should follow.

Do you accept that this is a minimum deterrent ?

The old nuclear force was sized for an attack on Russia. This remains the case.

only 1 threat - not Iran + Russia but in on Russia
In the 1950s Lord Home said that what mattered was "what the American's will think" – Britain needed enough nuclear weapons to persuade the United States that we were doing our bit. This probably remains the case.

What do you think of the deterrent options ?

Show focus is on Russia. Main problem is disconnection between Sect 3 and Sect 4. The relationships are not clear.

→ *Swedish*

Is this a comprehensive study, are their other options missing ?

Non-nuclear option.

M Option of submarine force which is not kept on patrol

Do you accept the figures in the White Paper ?

There are a number of major omissions: No total cost for procuring and operating the new system. No total cost for the Aldermaston development programme.

There are specific gaps: tritium supply, fuel rod fabrication facility; comparative cost of warhead refurbishment or replacement.

Questionable numbers - Life extension, US total is £6,175m, UK £250m, ie only 4%; and replacement missile system £1.5 bn as equivalent to Trident missile. This is not including any cost for new hardware on the submarine. When Trident was built this cost more than the missiles themselves. (1994 missile £1.3m, SWS equipment £1.4 m)

The White Paper fails to provide a clear overall cost, but it is possible to estimate it. The capital and running costs of Trident, including AWE, this year is around £2 billion. When the new system is in service the running costs will be around or over £2 billion. The annual costs are likely to peak between 2010 and 2024, with the AWE costs and new submarines costs. So each year from now until 2055 the cost will be around or over £2 billion. This gives a total cost of around £100 billion. Probably £25 billion for existing system and £75 billion for the new system.

What do you think of the estimate that the running costs will be between 5 and 6 % of the Defence Budget ?

Doesn't appear to include the cost of conventional forces protecting Trident. In 1998 the cost of operating conventional forces committed to Trident was £125 million. To this should be added a proportion of procurement cost for these conventional forces.

The costs from 2024 to 2055 are not just running costs but the substantial cost of the new missile system and probably the new warhead.

Is affordability alone sufficient grounds to reject the proposal ? If it was cheaper would it be any more palatable ?

Not for CND, but for some people. Opinion polls suggest that it is a key issue. This is why the full figures have not been revealed.

Do you think the proposal in the White Paper would comply with international law ?

The White Paper could say that Britain would only threaten or use nuclear weapons "in the extreme circumstance when survival of the state was at risk". This is the narrow area about which the ICJ judges could not agree in 1996. They said clearly that in any other situation the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be contrary to international law. Instead the White Paper uses the far broader term "when Britain's vital interests are at risk". This causes two problems:

- (1) Part of British nuclear policy is preparing to break international law
- (2) This serves to undermine the force of this law – which is crucial to reducing the spread of nuclear weapons and dealing with nuclear proliferation.

Why would renewing Trident be a breach of the NPT ?

In 1970 the Non Proliferation Treaty came into force. The Treaty is a bargain. Nations that did not have nuclear weapons promised they would not develop them. In exchange five nuclear weapons states, including Britain, all promised they would negotiate in good faith to achieve disarmament. Replacing Trident will send a signal to the rest of the world that we have no intention of keeping our side of the bargain – so why should they keep theirs ? We would be encouraging them to follow our example and build the bomb.

What would be the implications for the NPT if Britain did not replace Trident ?

U. Takitt POK.

The White Paper estimate of 2024 running costs drew on: projections based on the actual and planned future maintenance and operating costs of the current system, including manpower costs; assessments of in-service costs of system components; studies of potential infrastructure and disposal costs; projected costs of the Atomic Weapons Establishment; and an assessment of the impact of risk.

The Strategic Defence Review lists the following as conventional forces committed to Trident, (figures in brackets are contingent): 2 (+1) attack submarines, 1 (+2) destroyers or frigates, 1 (+3) minewarfare vessels, 0.5 of a Royal Marine Commando, 1 Royal Fleet Auxiliary, 4 (+8) Maritime Reconnaissance Aircraft. To this list should be added anti-submarine helicopters from RAF Culdrose.

(We are not able to convince an opponent that the British force is independent – but only to suggest that it might be.)

(In 1961 Sir Alex Douglas Home said that the Chinese should be persuaded that if they tried to sieze Hong Kong there would be a nuclear response. From a British perspective we could call this deterrence. But from a Chinese view Hong Kong was Chinese territory seized from them in the Opium wars and we were using nuclear blackmail to hold on to it.)

(The letters exchanged between Bush and Blair make it clear that Trident and its successor are primarily assigned to NATO. In 2002 NATO carried out a table top exercise in which they considered using nuclear weapons against Iraq. The member countries of the alliance could not reach agreement on whether or not to give the authority for nuclear release. If we require the agreement of all our NATO allies – then the likelihood that we will is much reduced.)

"I told NATO, the Americans, the Germans: Don't push us towards military action. Otherwise, there will be a European war for sure and possibly world war," Yeltsin said in a meeting with regional leaders. Yeltsin April 1999

The Russian news agency Interfax quoted Russia's parliamentary speaker, Gennady Seleznyov, as saying that the president had given an order to point Russia's strategic missiles at Nato countries involved in the bombing campaign in Yugoslavia.

The key concern in the white paper is that we could be subjected to blackmail from a nuclear-armed state – and that we could threaten to use nuclear weapons to avoid capitulation. This would require – that the opponents threat was credible; that our threat to respond was credible – and that our opponent acted rationally in the way expected.