

# **Submission to the Defence Committee inquiry into the White Paper on the future of the UK's nuclear deterrent**

## **From Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament**

### **Section 1: Maintaining our deterrent**

1-3. If the decision is delayed then in 16 years time there might, in the worst case, be some weeks when there wasn't a Trident submarine at sea on patrol. The fixation with Continuous at Sea Deterrence should not be allowed to dictate the timetable for making a decision.

1-4. The US Navy has extended the life of their SSBN for much longer than their SSN because of their different operating routines. The experience with Churchill and Resolution class submarines suggests that British SSBN might also have a longer service life than SSN built at the same time.

1-9. Documents describing the procedure for the Trident agreement in 1980 suggest that the timeline for the announcement to Parliament on 4 December and the exchange of letters on 7 December may have been agreed with Washington some time ago. On 8<sup>th</sup> January the US Navy placed large contracts with Lockheed Martin and BAe. Both include work on Trident Life Extension.

### **Section 2: The Policy Context**

2-3. The practical step made towards disarmament at the time of the Strategic Defence Review in July 1998 was the removal of 36 warheads from submarines. These were not scrapped but placed in storage. The White Paper does not propose any reduction in the number of warheads deployed at sea. So the reduction will be achieved by scrapping warheads that are currently held in reserve, but operationally available. This means that the Government can make one reduction but claim the credit for it twice.

Box 2-1. In 1990 there were 96 Chevaline warheads on submarines, today there are 144 Trident warheads on submarines. In 1990 the warheads could be used against 48 targets, today they can be used against 144 targets.

2-10. The replacement of Trident is not consistent with the spirit of Article VI of the NPT. The arguments presented in Section 3 are ones that could be used in future decades. This implies that the UK has no intention of seriously moving towards disarmament. This attitude is contrary to the pact made at the NPT conference.

2-11. The ICJ opinion only failed to agree about the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons "when the very survival of the state would be at risk". The White Paper repeatedly refers to the possible use of nuclear weapons in defence of Britain's vital interests. This is a far broader term than the narrow area in the ICJ opinion. The ICJ did not say that it would be legal in these circumstances, only that the judges could not reach a common agreement. By failing to keep within this ICJ opinion the wording in the White Paper undermines the strength of international law in restricting nuclear weapons.

### **Section 3: Nuclear Deterrence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

3-3. "nuclear weapons pose a unique terrible threat". The MoD employs a number of specialists to calculate the precise effects of nuclear weapons in particular scenarios. Yet they have not asked one of their analysts to assist in the drafting of the White Paper by giving an example of the effect of these weapons. A report by Scottish CND in 1999 calculated that an attack with the 48 warheads on one submarine against command bunkers around Moscow would result in 3 million civilian deaths within 12 weeks.

A second omission from the White Paper is any consideration of the morality of the use of nuclear weapons. The document is presented as a subject for public and parliamentary debate, yet it does not even try to identify and tackle the fundamental issue of whether it could ever be acceptable for this country to use a single weapon that would kill tens of thousands of civilians.

The Moderator of the Church of Scotland, Rt Rev Alan McDonald, and the leader of the Scottish Catholic Church, Cardinal Keith O'Brien, have taken a strong united stand against the replacement of Trident on the grounds that it is morally and theologically wrong. They have been effective in encouraging churches in England and Wales to adopt a similar position. One of the leaders of Scotland's Islamic Community has echoed this stance.

3-3. This paragraph goes on to say that, because they present such a terrible threat, nuclear weapons "have a capability to deter acts of aggression that is of a completely different scale to any other form of deterrence". In fact the weapons are so destructive that they are self-detering and obviously so. Their ability to influence how other governments behave is not greater than any other military forces, but less.

3-4. This makes a virtue of ambiguity, but is only an attempt to obscure the fact that any threat to use nuclear weapons in an independent nuclear attack would be a bluff and would be seen as such.

The role of nuclear forces in NATO today is by no means clear. Numerically the main component is the 480 US B61 bombs scattered across Europe. These are on an alert state measured in months. There is pressure from within the US military to withdraw these bombs to America as they have no obvious function and present a target to terrorists.

The Cold War argument that, as a second centre of decision-making, Britain might order a nuclear attack if the United States showed restraint was always a weak one. In future scenarios this argument becomes so tenuous as to be meaningless. A credible independent deterrent would require not only real independence but also that those who might be deterred perceive the British force as independent. The nations that might be presented as potential future adversaries currently consider Britain as little more than a puppet of the United States. Faced with the ambiguities promoted by current policy, they would conclude that British forces could not be used without American permission.

3-5f. In addressing the potential dangers of the future there is a need to move beyond the perspective of Britain alone, or an as ally of the United States, to that of Britain as a responsible member of the international community. Every nation in the world could use the arguments presented here to show why they needed the bomb. But if each country only considers itself then nuclear proliferation will accelerate. Rather than willing on this apocalyptic future we should be working with others to prevent it.

#### **Section 4: Ensuring Effective Deterrence**

4-2. Others nations can interpret the British submarine on patrol as a threat. If nuclear weapons are dismantled on-shore then other nations can verify that these warheads cannot be used at short notice. Whereas they will assume that the weapons in a submarine on patrol can be launched in minutes. This encourages them to keep their own forces at a dangerously high state of alert.

4-4. Britain does not currently have the capability to use Trident against targets anywhere in the world, or at least not with any accuracy.

4-6. The provisions detailed are not sufficient to constitute operational independence. The computers that draw up British nuclear attack plans rely heavily on US software. The fire control computers on the submarines run entirely on American software. While experts in the UK may check the programmes before they are deployed their task is

hampered by the fact that there are substantial gaps in the US software, where items have been removed because they are too highly classified. They cannot guarantee that US programmers have not crippled the software to prevent independent use.

The British Trident system is so substantially intertwined with the American system that it is hard to see how Britain could launch a nuclear attack if Washington was strongly against it.

4-9. A force of 144 nuclear warheads with 48 deployed on patrol is far more than a minimum. The statement that a lower yield warhead "can make our nuclear forces a more credible deterrent against a smaller nuclear threat" echoes US studies which argue that nuclear weapons should be more "useable". This is dangerous as it blurs the distinction between nuclear and conventional forces.

## **Section 5: Deterrent Options, Solutions and Costs**

5-9. The suggestion that the number of submarines will be limited to three is unlikely to be implemented.

5-11f. The figures given for the cost of replacing Trident are incomplete. The White Paper does not give a full estimate of the costs of redeveloping the Atomic Weapons Establishment or of operating the new system from 2024 to 2055. It does not reveal the total cost of the new system, nor does it give average annual costs of components or the entire programme.

A senior Whitehall source was reported as saying that "the most expensive bit of an independent British nuclear deterrent is maintaining the capability to manufacture our own warheads".<sup>1</sup> The projection that the annual costs of Aldermaston will rise to 3% of the Defence budget is consistent with this.

Following the publication of the White Paper a number of MPs from different political parties have asked questions in an attempt to fill in gaps. Ministers have referred them back to the wording in the White Paper and have not revealed the full costs. Either the Ministry of Defence has not calculated them, in which case they have not carried out a thorough review, or they are not disclosing them to Parliament. The failure to give detailed costs is in itself sufficient grounds to reject the White Paper.

## **Section 6: Industrial Aspects**

6-7f. Removal of the used fuel to Sellafield is mentioned here as if it were a short term measure. The only reference to long-term storage is of intermediate level waste. The White Paper does not provide an adequate and fully costed decommissioning plan.

## **Section 7: Future decisions**

7-4. There would be major financial savings if a decision were made now to close off the option of a replacement warhead. The potential life of the warheads is not unlike that of the submarines. Extending both for a small number of years may be an option. Keeping the existing warheads in service for 60 years is not a credible alternative.

7-6. The White Paper is presented as primarily a decision to build new submarines. But in due course the MoD are planning to acquire a new missile system. This is not the renewal of the Trident system, but its replacement.

There is no mention of how a new supply of tritium for warheads will be secured. The current reserve will be exhausted long before 2055. Nor is there any reference to how the fuel rods for new submarines will be manufactured. This will take place after the current RRA plant in Derby has been decommissioned.

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<sup>1</sup> Article by Edward Heathcoat-Amory, Daily Mail, 14/12/06

## **Scottish dimension**

The White Paper marks out a future in which Britain will continue to have nuclear weapons on submarines based in Scotland until 2055. It plans improvements to the Trident infrastructure at Faslane and makes no provision for basing the submarines elsewhere.

During 2006 there were three debates on Trident replacement in the Scottish Parliament. The latest occasion was an SNP motion on 21 December. The Scottish Liberal Democrats put down an amendment calling on the UK Government not to go ahead with the proposal in the White Paper at this time. This was defeated by only 5 votes. Several of the Labour MSPs who voted against this amendment have made it clear that they are opposed to Trident replacement.

During these debates only a small number of MSPs attempt to use the points made in the White Paper. The main argument that is used to justify the retention of Trident is that it will employ people at Faslane. Exaggerated claims are made about the number of jobs in Scotland which depend on Trident.

Throughout the 1980s Ministers argued that Trident would bring thousands of jobs to Scotland. Then the number of long-term jobs was halved when the refit contract was awarded to Devonport. There is considerable public scepticism about promises of employment.

The Scottish Trades Union Congress has recently sponsored a study into the potential for redeploying the workers who are employed on Trident at Faslane.

A YouGov opinion poll in November 2006 found that 61 % of those questioned felt that the Scottish Parliament should have the power to prevent the deployment of nuclear weapons in Scotland. On 8 January Michael Matheson MSP and John Mayer, Advocate, launched a proposal to introduce a Bill which would outlaw the threat or use of nuclear weapons in Scotland. Chris Ballance MSP is preparing to introduce a Bill that would outlaw the transportation of nuclear weapons on Scottish roads.

The plan to replace Trident and keep nuclear weapons in Scotland for 50 years will not improve the relationship between Edinburgh and London. It is likely to be a growing point of contention.

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