

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
MINUTES OF EVIDENCE  
TAKEN BEFORE  
DEFENCE COMMITTEE

**THE FUTURE OF THE UK'S STRATEGIC NUCLEAR DETERRENT:  
THE WHITE PAPER**

TUESDAY 16 JANUARY 2007

MS SIAN JONES, MR BRUCE KENT, MS DI McDONALD and MR JOHN AINSLIE

Evidence heard in Public

Questions 1 - 134

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## Oral Evidence

Taken before the Defence Committee

on Tuesday 16 January 2007

### Members present

Mr James Arbuthnot, in the Chair  
Mr David S Borrow  
Mr David Crausby  
Linda Gilroy  
Mr Mike Hancock  
Mr Dai Havard  
Mr Adam Holloway  
Mr Bernard Jenkin  
Mr Brian Jenkins  
Mr Kevan Jones  
Robert Key  
Willie Rennie  
John Smith

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### **Memoranda submitted by Aldermaston Women's Peace Campaign, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament**

#### **Examination of Witnesses**

Witnesses: **Ms Sian Jones**, Aldermaston Women's Peace Campaign, **Mr Kent Bruce**, Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, **Ms Di McDonald**, Executive Director, Nuclear Information Service, and **Mr John Ainslie**, Co-ordinator, Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, gave evidence.

**Q1 Chairman:** Good morning. Could I begin by welcoming you to this evidence session. It is about the future of the UK strategic nuclear deterrent and it is focusing on the White Paper. Welcome to our witnesses as well as to those in the public gallery. This is the third inquiry in our series of inquiries into the future of the deterrent. I should emphasise that this is a parliamentary inquiry; it is not a government consultation exercise on the White Paper. We intend to publish our findings before the House of Commons discusses and votes on the White Paper in March or whenever that happens. I will ask you individually to introduce



yourselves and then we will come on to some substantive questions about the White Paper.

Mr Ainslie, would you like to begin.

**Mr Ainslie:** I am employed as the Co-ordinator of the Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. In that capacity I have done quite a lot of research work into British nuclear weapons systems, particularly Trident. I have a bit of an academic background from a long time ago in that area.

**Ms McDonald:** I work for the Nuclear Information Service, which gathers information and shares it particularly about Aldermaston and the nuclear warhead convoys.

**Mr Kent:** I am Bruce Kent. I have been secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (in the 1980s) and then chair. I have been associated with that for a long time. I am also much engaged as a vice-president with the Catholic peace movement Pax Christi, and I am an active member of the United Nations Association.

**Ms Jones:** I am Sian Jones. I am a member of Aldermaston Women's Peace Campaign. We are based around a peace camp that meets outside the fence of AWE Aldermaston once a month, from where we observe what is going on at AWE Aldermaston and protest against it.

**Q2 Chairman:** Thank you. This is a rather egocentric beginning but a question which I asked when the White Paper was first announced in the House of Commons was related to the fact that this appeared to be a decision that was to be made not about Trident missiles, which would remain roughly the same, but about the platform on which those Trident missiles were deployed. Would you care to comment about that?

**Mr Ainslie:** I was looking at the 1980 decision and the way that was done and the relationship between the announcement in Parliament and the exchange of letters. In a sense, the exchange of letters between Tony Blair and George Bush three days after the decision was announced may be an interesting area. The key thing that was in that exchange of letters was participation in the missile life extension programme. That is one of the key things that is

driving the time scale, in a sense. I am not certain that is right, but it is a possible explanation as to why it has been done at this point.

**Q3 Chairman:** Most of the focus, would you not agree, of the Government's White Paper is aimed at the building of submarines and the expense of submarines and whether it is worthwhile doing that and not at that life extension programme.

**Mr Ainslie:** Yes, I think that is right. Basically, when you replace the submarine, the American Trident system is only around until 2040 and therefore you have to look even beyond Trident to the new missile system beyond it.

**Q4 Chairman:** Thank you. Do any of the rest of you have any comments about it?

**Ms Jones:** The focus of the White Paper is very much on the delivery platform and tends to be less specific on the missiles and presumably less specific on the warheads. Chapter 7 suggests that a decision on the exact nature of the warhead will be made "in the next Parliament" and the evidence that we will present in written form to the Committee and have in the past suggests, in effect, that the building work at Aldermaston is evidence that to a certain extent very much of that decision has actually been made, so we would suggest that the White Paper is not transparent about decisions that are being made at this very time about the warhead itself.

**Q5 Chairman:** Ms McDonald, you would agree.

**Ms McDonald:** Yes.

**Q6 Mr Hancock:** As somebody who watches Aldermaston, when they gave evidence here they told us that the buildings there, many of which are now nearly 50 years old, needed major works carried out on them. A lot of the work going on at Aldermaston was not about the future of another form of warhead but was simply to enable the maintenance to continue



of the existing warhead programme and because many of the buildings there were now in such a bad state that they had to spend substantial sums of money on them. Do you share that view? If you are there already, you must have contact with people there. The union representative who represents the people there bore witness to that fact and did not dissent from that line at all. I am interested that you think the contrary to that.

**Ms Jones:** It is true that a large number of buildings have been demolished and that there are buildings being refurbished. Some 59 buildings have been demolished across the whole site at Aldermaston since, say, 2003. It is about keeping the place up to standards which comply with NII and Health and Safety Standards – which we know there were questions raised about. But the majority of the work, in terms of capital investment in the number of contracts issued and in the scale of the work itself, has been taking place, for example, on the Orion laser facility, and the construction of various other buildings, on which previous committees will have heard evidence from John Ainslie, from Greenpeace and from various other organisations, are all integral to the design, development and construction of a new system. So the two things are happening: bringing it up to current standards but also a considerable amount of investment, and we detailed that in our previous submission. I was at Aldermaston this weekend. The laser building is now rising to about four metres and additional pieces of infrastructure were being delivered over the weekend. They are working very hard there at the moment on the laser building.

**Mr Ainslie:** There may be a parallel position with the 1970s, when there was a lot of concern about safety. A report was drawn up which said there were various safety issues at Aldermaston which resulted in a construction programme. That was also parallel to the decision to build Trident. They have a history of operating for decades with facilities that were really not very safe. It seems that, when they are thinking of a new system, that is the time when they rebuild everything.

**Q7 Mr Jones:** All conspiracy theories have a kernel of truth in them but one of the issues that was put by both the unions and management when they came before us was not just what Mr Hancock said in terms of buildings but was in terms of the age profile of the workforce: that it was getting old. Ms Jones, you say that you think the decision has already been taken but they were saying that if we wanted to take that decision in the future we would not have the personnel there if that investment did not take place now. What do you say to those arguments?

**Ms Jones:** With due respect, the evidence that we present is not alleging that there is a conspiracy theory, we are just giving information.

**Q8 Mr Jones:** You are, because you are saying that the decision has already been taken.

**Ms Jones:** I am going to read something out that would suggest that but I am not presenting a conspiracy theory. We are just presenting you with information that is available in the public domain and asking you to add that up. We have discovered that when AWEML took over the contract in April 2000, Dr John Rae, the chief executive, as part of the preparation to working at Aldermaston, met with the local Liaison Committee, which consists of representatives of trade unions, various other organisations and local persons. I am quoting from the minutes of a meeting of March 2000. In 2000 the Government's position was: "Having decided to make the UK deterrent smaller, the MoD expects a lower cost. Therefore the funding from MoD will come down to a level which allows the programme to be delivered. As a rough guide, there will be a one-third reduction in staff, and funding will be reduced on a similar basis." The situation by the time the site development strategy plan was published in July 2002 and made public in August 2002, was very different. That is the time that coincides with the extension of AWEML's contract to 25 years which was announced in early 2003. That would suggest that sometime in that two-year period a decision was made to have substantial investment in Aldermaston.



**Q9 Mr Jones:** I do not disagree with that. That is fact but the point that both the unions and management were making was that, if we were to take the decision in future to have the open debate about whether we should have a new generation of warheads, you could not do that without investment in not only, as Mr Hancock has said, the buildings, for safety reasons, but also in personnel, on the basis that the average age of the workforce there was getting near to the retirement age. That investment is needed, if in the future we are going to take the open debate rather than get a situation whereby we could not extend the life or have a new generation because we would not have the people there to do it.

**Ms Jones:** Yes, but I would suggest that there is a difference between maintaining the scientific, intellectual and other capacity to be able to develop nuclear weapons and a decision that we will develop nuclear weapons.

**Q10 Mr Jones:** That has not been taken yet but I am saying that if you do not have the scientists and the people with the intellectual know-how to do it in the future, you cannot take the decision to extend the life or create a new generation. You do not have the people there if they have all retired.

**Ms Jones:** I think we are probably going to be at cross-purposes here, but I would refer you to one of the recommendations previously made by this Committee in the last report, that said you were not convinced that the building work on the Orion laser and various other things should have gone ahead before a parliamentary decision was made.

**Mr Jones:** That is a bit of selective quoting, I think.

**Q11 Chairman:** Do you agree that the decision in 2000 to reduce the number of workers that you referred to is not, of itself, incompatible with the need to change the age profile that the Government has talked about in recent months?

**Ms Jones:** Yes.

**Q12 Chairman:** Thank you. Mr Kent?

**Mr Kent:** I would just like to say that the reason I am silent about this is I would like an opportunity to challenge some of the fundamental assumptions.

**Q13 Chairman:** Yes, you will get the opportunity.

**Mr Kent:** I not just concerned about the nuts and bolts. Indeed in section 6.3 it talks about building the submarines abroad as a possibility, if the submarines want the warheads. Missiles we already buy. So there are wider issues in the nuts and bolts than perhaps come out about what is or is not happening at Aldermaston.

**Q14 Chairman:** You will have that opportunity. We do not worry about witnesses being silent because they will usually get opportunities later during the course of the evidence session. Let us give it to you now. I will give each of you the opportunity to do this, but perhaps we could start with you, Mr Kent. I wonder if you could briefly summarise your reaction to the White Paper, please.

**Mr Kent:** I think it is very disappointing. I think it is unimaginative. I do not think it faces the threats that this country and the world face in the next century in any evaluative way. It assumes things which it fails to prove. It constantly talks about deterrents: who is being deterred, how they are being deterred and with what they are being deterred. It slips in somewhere the old reference to "nuclear first-use" which is not nuclear deterrence, it is nuclear war fighting but that has just sort of slipped through without comment. It uses terms like "recognised" in a praiseworthy or commendable sense: "we are a **recognised** nuclear power". That is a sleight of hand because we are only recognised in the sense that when the NPT was signed there were five countries with nuclear weapons. It was simply a matter of fact. It was stated. It gave no approval to those. In fact it required those to negotiate in good faith to get rid of them. So there are a number of problems and there is also a complete



misrepresentation. I am not a lawyer and I believe you will be seeing lawyers but there is a complete misrepresentation about what the International Court of Justice said about nuclear weapons. It said that in only one particular circumstance they could not make up their minds: in the extreme circumstances of self-defence in which the very survival of the state would be at stake. Only in those circumstances were they unable to make up their minds. Everything else, they said, including the survival of the state, had to conform to humanitarian law, but here in the White Paper there is a statement that the ICJ had rejected the idea that nuclear weapons had been illegal. It did not reject. It did not make a decision on that point. That is really rather important. Most of all, I think it is the insurance argument and the sense that somehow Britain just sits and watches – says Blair: “in the absence of an agreement to disarm multilaterally”. It is our obligation to promote such activities and we are not doing that. The bit of the ICJ that was not quoted in the White Paper is the second section in 96: “There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control.” In good faith. We do not believe that to continue with British nuclear weapons, while not negotiating, can possibly be construed as being in good faith. We think there are other much more important threats to our security than the remote possibility that somebody sufficiently irrational to use nuclear weapons but sufficiently rational to be deterred by our possession of them might at some stage appear on the future world map affecting us. In the context of a world of nine countries with, there are 182 countries that do not have nuclear weapons, which are not living in terror and fear that they are about to be attacked by somebody. I think we should listen to Dr Blix and listen to Kofi Annan. For us to pursue nuclear security is a green light to other countries to take the same road. I hope that was brief enough. Thank you for giving me the chance to speak.

**Q15 Chairman:** It was a great pleasure. Ms McDonald.

**Ms McDonald:** Right from the beginning I find the White Paper confusing. I think the title should be “The Future of Nuclear Weapons in the United Kingdom”. I cannot cope with this idea of the words “deterrence” and “weapon” being interchangeable because they are not. Deterrence is not a weapon, it is an unproven theory. It is a past doctrine that has many elements. I think it is essentially flawed and to keep promoting it as an idea – 170 times the word “deterrence” is used in the White Paper – is to confuse people and to make assumptions that cannot really be made. A useful analogy perhaps might be capital punishment. We used to have capital punishment as a deterrent, as I understand it – and shall I say that it was before my time – but when it was abolished there was not a rush of murders on the street. It had been theory, its time had come and it was abandoned as a way of running our affairs. And so it is the same with this idea about nuclear weapons. It cannot be proved that they are a deterrent. We do not expect that we would have been attacked if we did not have them. There is no proof that we would have been. The other thing in the White Paper concerns the offer, it seems, to reduce nuclear weapons from the current number of about 200 or below 200 to 160. I do not see that that is any offer at all because the number of warheads going into Aldermaston, coming back from Scotland for servicing, and the number of warheads being serviced and going back to Scotland do not match. I think it is about 120 warheads have come back from Scotland since 2000 over a six-year period, and in the same period 88 warheads have gone up. These figures obviously are not guesses; they are estimates on evidence that is taken by Nukewatch, which monitors the warhead delivery up and down the country. It is certainly clear from their data that the warheads have already been reduced and probably for logistical, operational or manufacturing reasons, but, in common with other MoD announcements, any announcement is always made long after the event and so I think that is the case here.

**Q16 Chairman:** Mr Ainslie.



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**Q16 Chairman:** Mr Ainslie.



**Mr Ainslie:** I think, basically, the White Paper is an attempt to try to get Parliament and the public to agree to this proposal, which is to spend £75 billion on weapons of mass destruction that no civilised country would ever use. I am particularly concerned from a Scottish perspective that it will result in continuing to have these dreadful weapons in Scotland for the next 50 years. The second thing, from my point of view, is that, in trying to sell that particular point, which it is very difficult to do, it is patchy and not very coherent in terms of how it is presenting its arguments. One key issue is the whole question of the extent to which these are weapons under NATO, independent or - which I think is what it is really about - bilateral Anglo-American use. There are references to NATO but not put very strongly. In the exchange of letters, Bush's letter only refers to it being assigned to NATO. Tony Blair's letter has the standard proviso: in extreme circumstances used in defence of our own vital interests. If this is about NATO, then it should be saying what NATO's nuclear policy is. NATO nuclear policy has always been rather incoherent because it is perched between different views either side of the Atlantic. It is particularly problematical at the moment. It is not really saying, "Here is what NATO believes and here is how we fit into this" which Rifkind's statement in 1993 did start with. That is about the last policy document we have. When Malcolm Rifkind was speaking in November 1993 he did start off with saying, "NATO has this view and here is how we fit in with it." This does not do that. My own feeling, basically, is that NATO use has a fundamental problem, because you need agreement in the consultation process. That agreement, in most circumstances, is unlikely to be there, so the allies are unlikely to agree in the NATO consultation process to authorise nuclear use. I have real problems with any concept in independence, partly in trying to see how they work politically, but the other side is that I have done a lot of work on the software and the software is a critical vulnerability. The operational independence is potentially undermined by reliance on the American software. That is not to say that it definitely is, but it potentially is. If use

under NATO is not very likely and independent use is not very likely, where you can see this system working is in a bilateral Anglo-American operation. Then it will work quite well. But this is not saying that and it is not presenting the case for that.

**Q17 Chairman:** Sian Jones.

**Ms Jones:** My colleagues have made most of the remarks, so I will keep my comments very brief. It is very interesting that the White Paper was published before the Prime Minister announced that he wanted a further debate on whether we are a war-fighting or peace-keeping country because surely the possession and deployment of nuclear weapons is actually crucial to that debate as to what sort of country we are. The White Paper itself is really looking back to a time that we lived through and a time where we worked towards what is now enshrined in the 1997 INF Treaty, the ridding of US cruise missiles from British soil. It is that whole Cold War argument and the outmoded concept of deterrence that is repeatedly referred to throughout the White Paper. The security agenda has changed. There is some admission of that but there is a failure in the White Paper to explore the real security needs that are being increasingly defined by people from outside of the nuclear weapons' countries. That is a security agenda which is based on the need for food, for shelter, for water, for the right to education, for the right to adequate hospital treatment, the sort of agenda that is coming from the peoples of the global south and the sort of agenda that is not even mentioned in the White Paper. We believe that the White Paper should have been extended to discuss what we mean by security without making a decision. The only other point I would make is that the possibility of other options really are dismissed within the White Paper itself. In particular, the option to not replace Trident is not even mentioned. On the point that was made about legality, I would just add that the White Paper continuously refers to the need for nuclear weapons to safeguard our vital interests. It does not once mention "to be used in self-defence", which, as we have heard, is the only point on which the ICJ were unable to



reach a unanimous decision as to whether the use of nuclear weapons would be unlawful. Therefore, this whole paper is without the commitment made by the UK to the NPT. Finally, on the question about warheads I would refer you to Tony Blair's speech, that the apparent cut in the number of warheads is not really an example of the commitment to a peaceful, fairer and safer world, it is a matter of expediency. In Tony Blair's speech he refers to it as a measure of efficiency.

**Q18 Chairman:** Thank you. Mr Kent, do you want to add something?

**Mr Kent:** I would like to add to what I previously said. First of all, technically there is nothing in the document which raises the question that submarines might become vulnerable within the next 40 years. I do not think it is at all inconceivable that the seabed will be sufficiently monitored to know where people are. That is a possibility. Secondly, there is nothing in the document that really would inspire anybody to think treaties have the slightest effect in getting rid of weapons. We have a bacteriological convention; we have a chemical convention. They are not perfect at all. They need to be hardened up in all sorts of ways. There is no reference to the fact that there is a draft treaty on the table at the UN, lodged by Costa Rica, with an enormous amount of technical expertise in it which covers inspection, verification, criminality, satellite observation and all the things that will be required. None of that is there at all. It is just: "We are here in this world. There is no disarmament – too bad – so we are going to have Trident." I think that is a pretty weak sort of way of dealing with such a serious issue.

**Q19 Linda Gilroy:** I would like to follow through on a couple of points from the statements that have been made. First of all, to Mr Ainslie. The statement you made about the software, you have also made in one of the papers you have submitted to us, that reliance on American software for all aspects of targeting undermines nuclear independence. Can you tell us a bit

more about what your research has shown and the sort of questions you think we ought to be putting to the industry people and academics when we question them about that?

**Mr Ainslie:** There are two sides of the software system. There is the shore-based bit of the software and the submarine end. At the submarine end it is clearly entirely American. At the shore-based end some of the key components come from the United States. In some of the American contracts is an insight into the process. The Americans produce software models for their own Trident system. Those models include information which is classified to such a level that it cannot be given to Britain, so those bits are then taken out and that reduced version is given to Britain as the software models. These are then assessed in the software facility that Britain has to see if they will work and there are other things added. My point is that, although there is access to the process, because the gaps are there, for reasons of security, I do not believe they can then assess it to the extent of being certain that that software has not been crippled in such a way that would reduce restricted use in particular circumstances. The background to this is that the software is extremely complex. In order to get the accuracy that Trident requires, there is a very large software infrastructure in America that supports this. We have not duplicated that. You have talked about what we build and what we do not build. We have some ability to check the software; we have not duplicated it. We do not have our own experts who can do all these tasks.

**Q20 Linda Gilroy:** Is the point you are making that somewhere in that software is the capacity to stop in fairly short order the ability of the United Kingdom to target and operate missiles?

**Mr Ainslie:** There is a number of ways, if the intention was there, that from the United States end they could do it. The system can almost certainly distinguish between a plan which is produced only within the British system or a plan which is produced within the American



system. There are all sorts of levels going in, so they can probably distinguish between those two.

**Q21 Linda Gilroy:** Those are assertions and statements. Can you source those for us in some further note?

**Mr Ainslie:** Yes. I have written something on this recently, so I can give you a copy of that.

**Q22 Chairman:** You say the potential exists for that to happen rather than your having any evidence.

**Mr Ainslie:** Precisely. It is a potential vulnerability. Clearly, at levels of classification involved in this it would be very difficult to verify.

**Q23 Mr Hancock:** Have you read the previous evidence we have had at the Committee?

**Mr Ainslie:** Yes.

**Mr Hancock:** We were assured that the guidance and targeting mechanisms were wholly British and were unstoppable if a British Prime Minister gave authorisation for their use – their independent use. When the questions were put to the panel on that day, a number of members seriously questioned whether that was an accurate interpretation. The answer came back that, irrefutably, there was no possibility whatsoever, once the command to fire a missile from a British submarine was given, that firing could in any way be impeded by a source outside of the summary or outside of the chain of command in the United Kingdom. I am a little surprised, to say the least, that you believe there is evidence – not just the possibility but the evidence – to suggest that is a possibility. We were given a cast-iron assurance. It was the only thing that determined whether or not we had an independent deterrent.

**Chairman:** I think you said there was not evidence that it was possible but that it was a potential.

**Q24 Mr Hancock:** We were told it was not possible. That is different from potential.

When somebody says, sitting where you are, that it is impossible to do that, then we have to either prove them wrong by saying this is how it can be done or we have to accept that. I am thinking that there is a real difference between possible and potential.

**Mr Ainslie:** If I could explain in terms of <sup>the</sup> authorisation process. In terms of a decision being made by the Prime Minister, all the way down to some form of instruction reaching a missile technician in front of his computer, I would quite happily believe that is an entirely British process that cannot be interfered with. Through the missile technician or electronically or however it goes, once the authorisation message goes into the fire control system computer, it is then running. There is no doubt about this: there is no end of contracts. The fire control system software is purchased from the United States and the shore-end stuff that processes the target data is also reliant on American computer models. I have no doubt about that at all. Whether there is the potential for them to change it is a more complex issue. I have no doubt about that at all.

**Q25 Linda Gilroy:** I am interested in whether you think built into the ownership and operation of the software by the United Kingdom is the capacity in short order to interfere in a short space of time, rather than years, with the ability of the Prime Minister to issue an order to fire a missile and for that to happen.

**Mr Ainslie:** There are ways of doing it. One is in terms of the difference between a Co-ordinated plan or a uniquely British plan. The second, certainly in terms of the Russian scenario, is dependent on 12-hourly weather data from the United States and whether that 12-hourly weather data could be used as an on/off switch. In order to get the accuracy, they have to have the weather over the target area and that is transmitted every 12 hours from America.



**Q26 Mr Jones:** Do you have any evidence that this is the case? I am a very simple soul myself: I tend to go on facts and things put in front of me rather than suppositions. You say you have a paper. In that, is there some evidence?

**Mr Ainslie:** It is a vulnerability. The thing that flagged this up to me was the Audit Office report in 1998. The UK should have the ability to produce targeting and effectiveness ~~to set~~ the software. They were having difficulties doing that. I basically have been told from America, from the analysts, that the British expertise was negligible. The official MoD line is: "No, we have sorted those problems and brought in contractors." It was being flagged up at those early stages in the giant process that this is maybe a key probability.

*TRIDENT*

**Q27 Mr Jones:** There is a big jump from what you have just said to then saying that somehow America has a technological veto or electronic veto over the independence.

**Mr Ainslie:** I am saying: Why is it considered essential for the United Kingdom to have that independent targeting capability? Why was that considered essential in the 1980s? Because we do not have it.

**Chairman:** I think we have taken this as far as we can. Do any of your further questions arise under later aspects?

**Linda Gilroy:** I will come back to them at the end. They possibly do, about the impact of the non proliferation treaty.

**Q28 Chairman:** That certainly does come back at the end. I have a quick question – with I hope a quick answer – about openness and the openness of the decision-making process that we are currently going through. The Prime Minister says that it has never been as open a process as this: everything in the past has been conducted behind closed doors and perhaps not even getting as far as the Cabinet. What would your comment be on this?

**Mr Kent:** My comment would be that I could understand that the technical details may have to be discussed behind closed doors but I can see absolutely no reason why the major principles of the issue should not be discussed as widely as possible in a democracy. Is this the right way to proceed for our security? It is not a closed-door issue. It should be an open-door issue.

**Q29 Chairman:** That is what we are doing now.

**Ms Jones:** That is exactly what is going on now.

**Q30 Chairman:** Ms McDonald.

**Ms McDonald:** As I understand it, in the White Paper it says the Government decision to replace Trident has been taken. All the supporting views that they give are to saying that this is what we want to do. That is their position. In the White Paper there is no mention of consultation. Although it says the Prime Minister said in a parliamentary answer on 28 June that there would be an announcement of the means of consultation when the White Paper was published, we are still awaiting those means, and there is no consultation as far as I understand it in the normal sense and the understood meaning of the word.

**Linda Gilroy:** The White Paper sets out the Government's position on it.

**Q31 Chairman:** Sian Jones.

**Ms Jones:** You opened that by saying we are discussing it, but we are discussing this in a separate process which began before the publication of the White Paper. This was an initiative of the Defence Select Committee. We know that the Government decided at the beginning of that process not to engage in it and issued a statement and then said that they would not be attending to produce evidence. Our questions would be very much around the failure of the Government to be transparent and to come before you and inform you – and



I am speaking, as always, about Aldermaston, because it is the only area in which I have any expertise – of the measures they have taken to date that take us down the road towards the fact – in our understanding and belief – that very many aspects of that decision are being made and that what is going to be put before Parliament is the end of a process of decision-making that has resulted in the preparation of the options that are included in the White Paper. One of the other things I would add is that, because our colleagues in the US have far more freedom of information under their Freedom of Information Act, they are able to find out details of the US and UK collaboration and various other processes involved under mutual defence agreements between the US and the UK. In a way the evidence that John has cited in some respects and that we cite in our submission does not come from transparency and openness by our Government; it comes from a process with the American Freedom of Information Act that allows people to find out what is going on at Los Alamos, Livermore, Sandia and the other laboratories with which Aldermaston works.

**Mr Jones:** Will you give any credit to the Government, who are going to have a vote for the first time on this in Parliament?

**Mr Jenkin:** That is not quite correct. There was a vote in 1982.

**Q32 Mr Jones:** Is it not a major step forward? The supposition is that Parliament is going to vote for this. What happens if we vote against it? If you are to give politicians options or people options to do something, surely you have to do the preparation beforehand – which is what is happening at Aldermaston.

**Mr Kent:** It is an advance on 1947, undoubtedly, where the decision was taken secretly and announced about two years later. It is an advance but it is still not what is needed in a democracy.

**Q33 Mr Jones:** In the Bruce Kent world, what would be the perfect way of dealing with this?

**Mr Kent:** I think to open some of the issues which are simply missing in the paper: to discuss the things that we are all concerned about – and not just us but Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and the rest of them – on the threats that face our planet. That discussion is not being conducted. The assumption is: deterrence works, full stop, and we do not have to do anything else except rely on it.

**Q34 Mr Hancock:** The Prime Minister, probably going back in his own short memory to the time when he supported the campaign you were leading, said that he fully accepted that people had a different view from the one he now holds about this issue, but he also stated quite clearly in the White Paper that those who hold that view and who question the decision, need to explain why disarmament in itself by the UK would help our security. I think that is a question he would pose to all of us who would believe that replacement of the submarines is not in the best defence interests of the country. I would be interested to know your views on that. The Prime Minister invited us to give our views and today we are giving you the opportunity.

**Mr Kent:** If I may speak on this, I think disarmament by ourselves alone would put us into the position of Sweden or New Zealand or other countries who are not at immediate threat of some awful enemy with nuclear weapons. Disarmament on its own would be a positive step, but it is not disarmament on its own we are calling for. We are calling for multilateral negotiations aimed at the elimination of nuclear weapons from the world surface and that requires a completely different kind of political and security structure and an awful lot of new thinking which is completely absent. Mr Blair has changed his mind; many people have. That is up to them. They have to face the issues of today and to answer the kind of questions we are asking.



**Q35 Mr Hancock:** Does your response to my question not beg the question: Over how long would you say that process takes? In the meantime, do you secure your own security by maintaining what you have until the climate is right for multilateral disarmament?

**Mr Kent:** First of all, there is no process. Despite the fact that there is a clear legal obligation, the 2005 NPT review conference ended in complete failure. The 2000 conference produced some sensible proposals which have not been operated on. There are no meetings in the Geneva Committee on disarmament. There is no proposal anywhere. Despite Blix's call for a world summit on nuclear disarmament, no response from this Government. I cannot say there is an indefinite long process because the process has not started. It could be quite quick, like a landmines treaty, if we wanted to make it quick, but we have not wanted to make it quick. The assumption behind your question is that nuclear weapons do defend us interim while this is going on. I do not believe they do any more.

**Q36 Mr Hancock:** The Prime Minister's question, Mr Kent, was quite specific. He said in the foreword in the White Paper: "Those who question this decision need to explain why disarmament by the UK would help our security." By that, he means the argument over yes or no to the replacement of his submarines. It is not about global disarmament; he is talking about the United Kingdom. That is the question that a lot of people out there would like to have answered.

**Mr Kent:** We do not believe it gives us security, it is an illusion of security, but it helps our security because, if we signal up that in 20 years we will not have them, there is the chance of serious negotiations with other countries that might start to take a different road, including, of course, the existing nuclear powers. It is not a tomorrow security but it is a process that has to begin.

**Q37 Chairman:** Would any of you like to add anything to that.

**Ms McDonald:** Yes, we would be safer to give up nuclear weapons because we would then not be a potential threat for starting a nuclear war. That is what other countries see Britain as, and that would be something to undo if we are serious about building a world that meets everyone's real security needs.

**Q38 Mr Hancock:** Do you seriously believe, Ms McDonald, that there are countries which believe the United Kingdom would start a nuclear war?

**Ms McDonald:** We do not have a policy of no first-use, so we must be prepared to start one.

**Q39 Mr Crausby:** The CND's alternative White Paper: *Safer Britain, Safer World* effectively argues that there is no current nuclear threat faced by the United Kingdom. In fact it opens up with the fact that the most pressing threat currently in the UK is that of international terrorism. The Government's White Paper tries to counter that in the sense that it says some companies might seek in future to sponsor nuclear terrorism from their soil. It goes on to say, "We can only deter such threats through the continued possession of nuclear weapons." It effectively says that conventional capabilities cannot have the same deterrent effect. How do you answer that argument, that there really is a terrorist-linked nuclear threat that can only be countered by a nuclear deterrent of our own?

**Mr Kent:** I think they are scratching around to try to find a way of justifying the threat of nuclear weapons against a territorial entity. Since they clearly cannot do that against the terrorists, they try to find a state that is harbouring terrorists to do that to. Not many terrorists are going to have a flag up in a state saying, "We are now harboured by X country or Y country" so it is a bit tenuous as a reason. Why we cannot deal with countries that are supporting terrorism, let alone nuclear, in other ways that are non nuclear, I do not know. Economic, political, even military pressure or conventional military pressure are all ways in which we can deal with such states.



**Q40 Mr Crausby:** You go on in your White Paper to say that the money could be spent on conventional defence. Do you really take that position? To be fair, you mention that it should be spent on other things as well, but does CND take the view that there is a real alternative on conventional defence and that this £70-odd million that you calculate should be spent on conventional defence?

**Mr Kent:** CND is a broad church. It includes pacifists and it includes people who are highly just war and ex military. There is an air commodore member of CND who would certainly take the position that we should be spending more money on conventional military defence. There would be Quaker members of CND who would say, "No, not at all." It is a wide open field, really, in that respect. It is certainly not excluded.

**Q41 Mr Crausby:** I accept there are different views, but I am asking for yours. What do the witnesses feel about that? Do they see that as a real argument, that the money should be spent on conventional defence or is it a throwaway remark?

**Mr Kent:** My own view is that I am a citizen of a country which believes in military defence and I feel I have to conform to the situation we are in and I would not want to see young British troops, or old British troops, being sent anywhere not properly equipped. That is my position, even though I do not believe in warfare and I believe we should be looking for non violent solutions to problems. In the interim, the people who are engaged in this sort of thing on our behalf should be properly protected. That is my position and I am sure many within CND would agree with it.

**Q42 Mr Crausby:** What about other witnesses, do they believe that the money would be better spent on conventional defence?

**Mr Kent:** Then they would have no argument with my air commodore. I cannot nail down everybody in CND to a particular point of view on this. There are different views.

**Mr Ainslie:** Representing the Scottish CND, it is the same. There is a range of views and they would keep that in as an option. Personally, I am a conscientious objector, so I am not in favour of military expenditure. But that is a personal view. I am just stating what my personal position is.

**Q43 Mr Crausby:** I was trying to establish whether that is a serious argument, that we should not spend the money on a replacement for the Trident platform but we should spend the money and replace that by conventional defence. Or is it just a command that is inserted in the alternative White Paper to strengthen the argument. Does anybody think that we should not spend the money on a Trident replacement but spend all of the money or part of the money on conventional defence?

**Mr Kent:** Some people in the country certainly think that.

**Q44 Mr Crausby:** Do any of the witnesses believe that?

**Ms Jones:** That is the sort of discussion that we would have if we were to have a meaningful debate – as suggested by Tony Blair, I do not know how meaningful that debate would be – about whether we want to be a war-fighting or a peace-keeping country and then that would be integral to it. It would be one of the issues that was discussed. It is not really being put forward to us as an option and the Government have not put it forward as an option in the White Paper. It is something that could be discussed, whatever our personal or political situation is on the use of armed force. It is something that should be discussed and people should be given the opportunity to make decisions about that with all the information available to them about what the amounts of money would buy in terms of nuclear defence, conventional defence or other things that we might think it would be more worthwhile to spend that money on.



**Q45 Mr Crausby:** It is reasonable to argue for a debate, but, as leading members of the peace movement, how would you plead that debate? Would you argue that the money should be spent on conventional defence rather than on nuclear defence or would you simply argue that we should not spend the money?

**Ms Jones:** I personally would argue that that money would be invested in working out how we can resolve conflict internationally without drawing on recourse to violence. £76 billion worth of investment on how to keep the peace would be a wonderful way to spend that money.

**Q46 Mr Crausby:** That is a perfectly reasonable position. I just want to know whether members of the peace movement are arguing not to spend the money on nuclear but to spend the money on conventional, or whether they are arguing in general not to spend the money on either nuclear or conventional.

**Mr Kent:** I am just saying to you that there are differences of opinion. Some would be for spending it on conventional weapons, some would be for spending it on non violent security measures. I think we are entitled to have a difference of opinion on the expenditure.

**Q47 Mr Crausby:** I am asking these witnesses. Do any of these witnesses believe that this money, as opposed to being spent on the Trident replacement, should be spent on conventional defence?

**Mr Kent:** Certainly there are. I mentioned an air commodore – and I am not going to give his name. There are a number of people in CND who would certainly take that position, and in the wider peace movement. CND is not the only part of the peace movement. You refer to the “peace movement”. There are Generals for Peace – God knows, there are all sorts of different organisations included under the “peace movement”.

**Ms Jones:** I think we need a far more rigorous analysis of what our security needs are and then to develop strategies that are appropriate to addressing the particular security needs of the United Kingdom but also the more general security needs of the community of which we are a part.

**Q48 Mr Hancock:** Surely the White Paper and the Prime Minister's statement have attempted to divorce the two issues. It is not even the latest debate that is initiated. The deterrent is taken out of that debate. You would agree with that.

**Ms Jones:** It is extremely surprising that you can talk about Trident without actually talking about it in the context of security more generally. It seems really strange that there should be two separate discussions going on about whether we want nuclear weapons and whether we want to be war-fighting or peace-keeping. For me, they are all part of the same thing.

**Mr Hancock:** We are a war-fighting country and the debate, I am sure, will end up coming to that conclusion. But there is also this debate about whether or not a nuclear deterrent in fact secures you from a nuclear attack. The Prime Minister is of the opinion that that is still a legitimate threat to the United Kingdom.

**Chairman:** I would like to move on to Robert Key on that issue.

**Q49 Robert Key:** Could I reassure Sian Jones that all of the members of this Committee have for many years been looking at all aspects of security. I was a member of the Defence Committee ten years ago that produced a report on the southern flank of NATO when we were saying that issues such as economic migration, the use of water, of food, and security issues were integral to the security of our nation. I think it is wrong of you, if I may say so, to assume that we are only interested in nuclear, but this inquiry is into a very particular, very narrow aspect of our defence. Could I broaden the questioning now to inquire of your views on the insurance policy aspect here, that the nuclear deterrent is seen as an insurance policy as



part of our defence system. Do you think that maintaining a deterrent is in fact a useful insurance policy?

**Mr Kent:** I think it is an insurance policy that ensures greater danger for this country because you do not take out an insurance policy against house subsidence that contributes to the subsidence of your house. It would be a bit peculiar if you did. I think possessing and continuing nuclear weapons into the middle of this century is a recipe for further danger and threat from other countries who take the same position about us, about security. I think it is not an insurance policy that is valid.

**Q50 Robert Key:** Who is going to change their aggressive stance towards us and the international community if we do not renew Trident? Will al-Qaeda be impressed and change their ways if we do not replace Trident?

**Ms McDonald:** I do have the view that nuclear weapons are irrelevant to terrorists. The nuclear weapons based in the UK are the easiest target and pose the real risk of terrorist attack involving nuclear weapons. That should be eliminated as a risk if we are serious about the security of citizens in the UK. On the question of the insurance policy, I agree with what Bruce says, that it is a simile that falls as soon as you look at it, but there is an insurance policy that we could take up – that we are already signed up to and other countries are too – and that is the non proliferation treaty. But of course it only works if you read the small print and comply with it. That is what we need to be doing.

**Q51 Robert Key:** Which of course the Government says it is. I do not think there is any question that the Government says the non proliferation treaty is extremely important and they are moving towards that. But you contest that.

**Ms McDonald:** I do.

**Mr Kent:** You must ask the Government where they are doing their negotiating.

**Q52 Robert Key:** What do you think public opinion says about their insurance policy argument? I think most people would say that the British public believes there is value in having a nuclear deterrent. Do you think the British public is wrong?

**Mr Kent:** Yes. I think public opinion is in two minds. If you put to public opinion, as we have done: "Should you spend £75 billion or £25 billion and not spend it on the Post Office or National Health or whatever?" then overwhelmingly they say we should spend it on social needs. If you say: "Should we be the only country to get rid of nuclear weapons while others still have them and therefore be under threat?" then, indeed, public opinion will go in the other direction. But public opinion has to rely on what it gets in terms of information. When you get documents like this, which assume 110 per cent the validity of nuclear deterrence, the public are going to believe it, and I do not believe it to be true.

**Q53 Robert Key:** Chairman, for 30 years Bruce Kent and I have been arguing about these things. I am afraid I still think of you as a parish priest in Camden. When I was fighting Frank Dobson for his seat there in the 1979 elections, we used to meet in your parish church kitchen, I recall, from time to time.

**Mr Kent:** I was of great political advantage to you, really! I assisted you in your career.

**Q54 Robert Key:** Thank you very much. I believe you did, sir. But I still think of you, if I may say so, as a parish priest, as a Christian, and I am very interested in this Christian point of view and I think it is very important. I would like to ask you this: I think I am right in saying that Pax Christi takes the view that nuclear weapons are morally and theologically wrong and it is a very simple issue, therefore, if you take that on board. I, of course, as a member of the Church of England, have a rather more difficult problem because the Archbishop of Canterbury says, "Yes, they are wrong" but on *Thought for the Day* on the *Today* programme the other day the Bishop of Liverpool said that the genie cannot be put



back in the bottle and we have to live in the real world and we have nuclear weapons. Who is right? The Archbishop of Canterbury or the Bishop of Liverpool? Can you help me?

**Mr Kent:** Yes, I commend you to the Pope. It is time you raised your sights! You said at the beginning of this year that nuclear weapons were fallacious and nuclear policies were painful, and that is the strongest position from any Christian leader so far. John can say the entire Scotch hierarchy and the Church of Scotland are totally opposed to it, many Church of England bishops are opposed to it. I am sure you will be able to convert the Bishop of Liverpool in due course

**Mr Ainslie:** Certainly the Church of Scotland's position is very strong on this, that is it morally and theologically wrong. In addition, Colonel Ryan, the leader of the Scottish Catholic Church, his line, in slogan terms, is to replace Trident with projects that bring lives to the poor.

**Q55 Robert Key:** That is an aspiration to which I am sure we all live up. Can I pursue the Scottish dimension to this? In your evidence to the Committee the Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament made very interesting points about the Scottish dimension and pointed out that the Scottish National Party and Liberal Democrats in the Scottish Parliament were opposed to the replacement and that the Labour Party in the Scottish Parliament only won a motion by five votes, but, right at the end, you said this: "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", and, today of all days, commemorating the Act of Union, is an important point, I think, to pursue this for a little bit. It seems to me quite extraordinary that we are about, apparently, to have a Scottish Prime Minister, we have a United Kingdom Government with Scottish members of Parliament in extremely powerful positions in the Cabinet - John Reid, Alistair Darling,

Douglas Alexander and, indeed, others. Why do not the Scottish people trust Scottish MPs and a Scottish Prime Minister on this issue?

**Mr Ainslie:** The opinion polls show quite clearly that there is a stronger opposition to nuclear weapons in Scotland than south of the border by about ten per cent, so the anti-nuclear feeling is basically stronger. There is simply a difference between the two political processes, I think, between Westminster and the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Parliament is more varied and there you are going to work with coalitions.

**Q56 Robert Key:** That is not my question at all. You are side-stepping it. The question is: why do not the Scottish electors who would put Gordon Brown in the position of being the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom trust him and his judgment and the judgment of his fellow Scots elected MPs when it comes to this decision?

**Mr Ainslie:** An anonymous survey of all the Scottish MPs by the BBC found that 30 out of the 59 were saying that they were definitely opposed.

**Q57 Robert Key:** This is the Westminster MPs?

**Mr Ainslie:** The majority of the Westminster MPs. I am not totally convinced whether that will materialise when it come to the vote.

**Q58 Robert Key:** It would not be enough to change the mind of the Government, would it?

**Mr Ainslie:** No, but I think what is a real prospect is that the Scottish Parliament, at some point in the future, in the longer term, is going to turn round and say, "No, we are opposed to this." The current position is that the Scottish Parliament maybe does not have much power and is looking at ways it might do something about it, but is that then making life more difficult? I am sure Jack McConnell would far rather he did not have this situation and being put in the position of forcing one of his ministers to resign over this issue.



**Chairman:** I think we had better move on. I am relieved we have got off the theological basis for violence and nuclear weapons and everything. Let us move on. David Crausby.

**Q59 Mr Crausby:** Thank you, Chairman. Proliferation for me is the more serious threat, on the face of it. Given that countries like Iran and North Korea at least appear to be interested in developing nuclear weapons, some people would argue that this is completely the wrong time for us to reduce our commitment to nuclear defence. How would you respond to that?

**Mr Kent:** It is exactly the right time to start getting those countries round the table. How can we possibly lecture those countries about acquiring nuclear weapons while we are in the process of saying that we think they are essential for our security. I think it is exactly the right time to begin international negotiations involving those countries, because at the moment they are extremely cynical about our performance.

**Q60 Mr Crausby:** Do you really think that it would have any impact on Iran and North Korea whether we abandoned or not. Quite a small proportion of the world has nuclear weapons, and I should imagine that Iran and North Korea very much see that America is the major threat from their point of view, and they may well be justified in that. Do you really believe that our decision to abandon nuclear weapons would have any impact at all on their decisions?

**Mr Kent:** I repeat, our decision, I think, should be in the context of calling for global nuclear abolition negotiations. If someone like Henry Kissinger, not exactly a dove, starts saying now is the time to begin this, I think we should start listening and sitting up and taking notice. It is not just us, we should be promoting this globally while we are saying that in 20 years' time we will not have them.

**Q61 Mr Crausby:** Do other witnesses want to comment on that? It is quite an important issue, this beginning of non-proliferation.

**Mr Ainslie:** The way to deal with this proliferation problem is internationally via the global community. It is not Britain alone trying to say how we deal with this; we want to be doing what we can to strengthen the international moves. At the end of the day, the fundamental question is: why do people not use nuclear weapons? You make this argument about it being a deterrent, but I think the main reason people do not use nuclear weapons in any sort of military sense is because <sup>there is</sup> ~~they are~~ taboo against their use, it is generally considered not to be the done thing to do, and the important thing is to strengthen the extent to which it is unacceptable for any country to use nuclear weapons. That global general consensus and feeling we want to make stronger, and us using the arguments that are in the White Paper is undermining that.

**Ms Jones:** I would concur with what both Bruce and John have said about this being an opportunity for us to take a different road, and I would refer you to the International Crisis Group's summary of threats to the world that was published in December. They noted that the UK, in publishing the White Paper and in failing as a nuclear weapons state to take the opportunity to take a lead on disarmament at this particular time, was one of the things that they counted as a threat to world security. I would also add a very tangential remark. When we protest at Aldermaston we send press releases to local press and to news feeds, and we have this thing called Google Search which sends us little ticks when we appear in various publications, and it is very interesting, the number of publications in Iran which seem to be interested in the fact that people are demonstrating outside Aldermaston against the development of new nuclear weapons. This may be propaganda, I do not know what these newspapers are, but it is not that these people are unaware of the potential for developments here and it is time to start extending out, opening out and saying that there are people here



who are questioning the need for new weapons, as there are in countries throughout world, and there is a significant block within the non-nuclear weapons states who have been trying to push for some meaningful process to come out of the NPT.

**Q62 Chairman:** Ms McDonald.

**Ms McDonald:** Firstly, I think that the British Government is responsible for what Britain does. You mention what threats other countries may pose, such as the United States' stockpile of nuclear weapons. We are not responsible for those, so I do not think we can speak to that, but what we are responsible for is trying to influence our own Government, as you are, and it seems to me that nuclear disarmament is the only action that will remove the justification for countries to waste billions of their money, even if they can develop, produce and maintain such weapons. So, that is our responsibility and that is what we need to remove, the justification from the British point of view.

**Q63 Mr Crausby:** I want to know what effect this would have on governments, not the good people of Iran. I accept that the good people of Iran, just as the good people of this country, would be happy to see the elimination of nuclear weapons without the threat. Anyone right-minded would want to see a non-nuclear world, but what effect would our decision to abandon Trident have on the Government of Iran and, indeed, those countries sitting there waiting in the wings to see whether there is going to be any real proliferation?

**Mr Kent:** It entirely depends on what goes with that decision. We would perhaps invite a delegation from Iran to come and talk with us about non-nuclear progress on both sides. I think it would be very helpful. It is not just a question of us saying "No", it is a question of the political context into which it fits. Nobody expected a Landmines Treaty to come about, but it did come about. You say everyone wants a nuclear-free world. I am afraid that is really, up until quite recently, not true. A large number of people in America and this country

believe absolutely implicitly that nuclear weapons for ever and ever are the answer to our security, and now that is changing. So a nuclear-free world is not something that everyone has been about in different ways.

**Q64 Mr Crausby:** I think I said “all right-minded people would want a nuclear-free world”?

**Mr Kent:** Thank you. All right.

**Q65 Linda Gilroy:** It sounds to me very much as if Bruce Kent is taking a multilateral approach towards disarmament. Is that how you would characterise the statement you have just made?

**Mr Kent:** Absolutely. I think it is a wonderful opportunity to point out that in 1978 this country and the world at large, in the first special session, called on all countries to proceed to disarmament unilaterally, bilaterally, regionally and multilaterally, and that has been the CND’s position from the beginning. Nevertheless, it has been polarised by the media into, “We are only unilateral and you are only multilateral - “you” being anybody who is opposed to the CND - and that is nonsense.

**Q66 Linda Gilroy:** Can I pursue that a little further in terms of how long you would see this process taking. You have said we could say to people that we will not renew our deterrent in 20 years’ time, but if I can just take you back to the opening statement, or proposition, which the Chairman put where we are really talking about a submarine platform. I am sure you have read the evidence we took in our last inquiry and we have a very short window of time, according to the evidence we took and accepted, in terms of maintaining our ability to produce a submarine that will carry the deterrent. If you accept that, then surely you also would have to accept that we would have to make a unilateral commitment to disarmament,