

[For *RUSI Defence Systems*, Autumn 2005 – Contention Section]

Sold a Pup

*Commander Robert Green RN (Ret'd) responds to the question
"Nuclear Deterrence Tomorrow: Value for Money?"*

As the first ex-RN Commander with nuclear weapon experience to have spoken out against them, I have discovered that the myths spun around nuclear deterrence amount to a massive swindle.

For British and French leaders, the traumas of Suez and their crumbling empires drove them to clutch at nuclear deterrence to sustain their great power status and influence. In 1958 the British government, having decided that it could no longer afford the French approach of an indigenous "bomb" programme, signed a Faustian bargain with the US called the *Anglo-American Agreement for Co-operation on the Uses of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defence Purposes*. Thereby it opted for dependence on the US for submarine and warhead designs, missiles, nuclear testing, satellite targeting and intelligence. (The UK is the only recognised nuclear weapon state not to have a space launch programme.) The pay-back involved supporting US demands which undermined British independence in foreign policy, such as eviction of British citizens from Diego Garcia, allowing US interception of British communications at Menwith Hill, and being accomplices in the illegal and counterproductive invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003.

In 2002 the Bush administration confirmed it had accepted that nuclear deterrence would not work against extremists in a statement from the new US National Security Strategy: "We know from history that deterrence can fail; and we know from experience that some enemies cannot be deterred." However, the pro-nuclear advocates' strongest claim, that nuclear deterrence prevents major war, was then turned on its head by the Bush administration's response: deliberate, pre-emptive war backed by ballistic missile defence.

Adoption of CONPLAN 8022-02 has exacerbated the contradiction. This US contingency war plan for dealing with "imminent" threats from "rogue" regimes such as North Korea or Iran includes an option to use nuclear weapons as "bunker-busters" in an attempt to destroy weapons of mass destruction or command centres buried too deep for conventional munitions. The implications are dire, as the vested interest of an unrestrained US military-industrial complex threatens to override huge risks

associated with indiscriminate “overkill” and long-term effects from radioactive fallout, including contamination of occupation forces.

The 1996 Advisory Opinion on the legal status of the threat or use of nuclear weapons by the International Court of Justice constituted a historic breakthrough by implicitly confirming that nuclear deterrence is unlawful. The implications of this legal challenge impinge on those involved in planning and deploying nuclear forces, because – unlike hired killers or terrorists – military professionals need to be seen to act within the law.

The Western alliance professes to uphold democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Yet nuclear deterrence is about threatening the most indiscriminate violence possible, unrestrained by morality or the law. It is therefore a policy of gross irresponsibility, and the antithesis of democracy. By contrast, over fifteen years after the end of the Cold War, the overwhelming majority of states understand that nuclear disarmament is a security-building process, where nuclear weapons are a liability and a security problem.

In the so-called ‘war on terror’, the UK Trident system not only fails to deter terrorists. Nuclear deterrence is in fact an intention to commit state-sponsored nuclear terrorism. The effect, therefore, is to provide another pretext for terror attacks, especially with the UK such an unquestioning US ally. Thus UK Trident achieves the opposite of what is claimed for it by undermining, not enhancing, the security of the British people.

With nuclear deterrence dogma in disarray, the alternatives are far more credible since these are based on the realisation that *any other security strategy must be safer and more effective*. The most pressing priority is to denuclearise the security strategies of the Western allies, who are strong enough in political, economic and conventional military terms to make the crucial shift and stop the non-proliferation regime unravelling further. This will enable nuclear forces to be verifiably stood down (and conventional forces strengthened), and Russia and China to be sufficiently reassured for negotiations to begin on an enforceable global treaty providing a plan to go to zero nuclear weapons.

However, probably no significant progress will be made unless one of the recognised nuclear weapon states breaks out. The US is the main obstacle; but easily the best-placed candidate for this world leadership role is the UK. Tony Blair, who must be pondering how he will go down in history, has the opportunity to heal the wounds over Iraq, make his country safer, and end British nuclear dependence on the US by standing down the UK Trident system.

[750 words]