

11 May 2004 : Column 215W

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on current and future research and development projects to be undertaken by the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston, Berkshire. [170210]

Mr. Ingram: The research and development activities undertaken at AWE are designed to ensure the safe stewardship of the UK's stockpile of **Trident** warheads and our ability to maintain the capability necessary to meet the policy described in the 1998 Strategic Defence Review. As indicated in Paragraph 3.11 of the Defence White Paper of December 2003 (Cm 6041-1), this includes the need to take appropriate steps to ensure that the range of options for maintaining a nuclear deterrent capability is kept open until decisions are required on whether to replace **Trident**. This policy is consistent with our international treaty obligations. Research and development activities fall under four principal headings: computer simulation; hydrodynamics; high energy density plasma physics; and materials ageing. The precise nature and scope in the future of such programmes will depend on the outcome of the processes referred to in the December 2003 Defence White Paper.

6 May –

Trident Nuclear Warhead

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the (a) life of the current design of the **Trident** missile and (b) maximum life of the **Trident** missile system is; and if he will make a statement. [170350]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 11 February 2004, *Official Report*, column 1458W to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Julian Lewis).

5 May –

Trident Nuclear Warhead

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the latest safe in-service date for the British **Trident** nuclear warhead is; and if he will make a statement. [170331]

Mr. Hoon: The Strategic Defence Review noted the need to ensure that **Trident** could remain an effective deterrent for up to 30 years. The Ministry of Defence sponsors a comprehensive science and technology programme at the Atomic Weapons Establishment to ensure that the **Trident** warhead remains both safe and reliable throughout its service life

Defence Committee 31 March

Q180 Mike Gapes: May I ask you about strategic deterrence, **Trident** and missile defence? First of all a point of clarification. The wording of the strategic defence review says that our aim is a safer world in which there is no place for nuclear weapons. But the wording of the White Paper in paragraph 3.11 says that our aim is a safer world in which there is no requirement for nuclear weapons.

Is there a difference between those two? Is there a reason why the wording has changed?

Mr Hoon: I have not thought of one.

Q181 Mike Gapes: It just struck me that the wording had changed. If there is no reason, then perhaps you can reassure me in writing.

Mr Hoon: I cannot think of any underlying policy difference we were intending to make.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: The conditions for complete and general global nuclear disarmament are not yet met. That is what the Secretary of State usually gets me to say.

Q182 Mike Gapes: We have in-service **Tridents** from 1998 and we have an understanding that it is intended to remain an effective deterrent for up to 30 years. The White Paper says that decisions on **Trident's** replacement are not needed this Parliament, but are likely to be required in the next one and that a "range of options" is being kept open until that decision point. Could you say something about what those options are and when the decision is likely to be taken on which of those options, if any?

Mr Hoon: No.

Q183 Mike Gapes: You do not know what the options are?

Mr Hoon: Yes, I do.

Q184 Mike Gapes: You do know what the options are. At this point is there anything you would like to say about what those options are?

Mr Hoon: No.

Q185 Mike Gapes: We are not going to get very far on that, are we? May I ask whether you have any indication as to whether this might be an international option or a European option rather than a national option?

Mr Hoon: I do not think that we need discuss anything other than a national option.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I was just reflecting to myself that there are obligations which would preclude technology transfer of that kind anyway.

Q186 Mike Gapes: Do you mean the agreement with the United States?

Mr Hoon: The non-proliferation treaty.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: The non-proliferation treaty.

Q187 Chairman: I hope the cameras are picking up your extreme discomfort over the last few minutes. They certainly ought to reflect it.

Mr Hoon: I am trying to decide whether the European Convention on Human Rights applies to people who have been here for two hours and fifty minutes.

10 May-

Nuclear Weapons

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on research and development of **low yield** nuclear weapons in the UK. [170211]

Mr. Ingram: No such research or development is being undertaken.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated cost is of (a) designing and (b) manufacturing a new nuclear warhead; and if he will make a statement. [170337]

Mr. Hoon: The December 2003 Defence White Paper clearly stated the Government's position that decisions on whether to replace Trident are likely to be required in the next Parliament. The costs of the design and manufacture of any nuclear warhead would depend on a range of factors, and these will be considered as part of any such decision.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the age profile is of the staff of (a) his Department's Chief Scientific Advisor and (b) the maintenance contractor SERCO who possess the qualifications necessary to (i) maintain the design intent of the current nuclear warheads and (ii) design the next generation of warheads; and if he will make a statement. [170338]

Mr. Ingram: There are several staff working in the Chief Scientific Adviser's area in support of, and providing advice on the nuclear weapons programme, a number of whom have previously worked at AWE. However, with the exception of one AWE secondee, they are not "qualified" to conduct nuclear warhead design work, since only AWE plc, the design authority under the contract, can "qualify" people to undertake such work.

MOD's contract for the management and operation of AWE sites is with AWE Management Limited (AWE ML), a consortium of three equal partners, including SERCO. Responsibility for the day-to-day management of AWE sites is delegated to a separate company, AWE plc, which is owned by AWE ML.

It is not possible to categorise the capabilities of qualified AWE plc personnel in the way requested. However, the following table provides data on those AWE plc employees engaged in maintaining the relevant research and development capabilities who are formally qualified to degree level and above.

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Age range	Percentage age of total formally qualified and employed in R and D	Numbers employed in R and D who are qualified to degree level and above
20 to 30	26	212

31 to 40	34	282
41 to 50	23	194
51 to 60	15	121
60 plus	2	21
Total	100	830

Nuclear Deterrence

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the importance of nuclear deterrence as a military strategy in the war against terrorism. [170212]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 30 January 2004, *Official Report*, column 577W, to the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson).

30 Jan –

Trident Programme

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances the Government would (a) deploy Trident nuclear weapons and (b) deploy Trident nuclear missiles on a first strike basis. [151597]

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Mr. Hoon: As the Government have made clear on many occasions, we would be prepared to use nuclear weapons only in extreme circumstances of self-defence. As our overall strategy is to ensure uncertainty in the mind of any aggressor about the exact nature of our response, and thus to maintain effective deterrence, we do not define the exact circumstances under which we would be prepared to use nuclear weapons.

We would not use our weapons, whether conventional or nuclear, contrary to international law.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which threats the UK's Trident nuclear weapons are (a) intended to deter and (b) targeted against. [151598]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to paragraph 3.11 of the Defence White Paper published in December 2003 (Cm 6041). The UK's nuclear weapons are not targeted at any country.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the role of the Trident programme is in combating international terrorism. [151599]

Mr. Hoon: As the Government have made clear on many occasions, we would be prepared to use nuclear weapons only in extreme circumstances of self-defence. I also refer the hon. Member to paragraph 21 of the SDR New Chapter, published in July 2002 (Cm 5566 vol. 1), where we stated that:

'The UK's nuclear weapons have a continuing use as a means of deterring major strategic military threats, and they have a continuing role in guaranteeing the ultimate security of the UK. But we also want it to be clear,

particularly to the leaders of states of concern and terrorist organisations, that all our forces play a part in deterrence, and that we have a broad range of responses available.'

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the UK's Trident nuclear weapons system is due to come to the end of its service period; when a decision is due on whether to commission a new UK nuclear weapons system to replace the Trident programme when it comes to the end of its service period; and what consultation will be undertaken in advance of a decision on replacement. [151702]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to paragraph 3.11 of the Defence White Paper published in December 2003 (Cm 6041). Any decision on the UK's future nuclear deterrent capability will be open to scrutiny and debate in the normal way.