

**John Ainslie**

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To: ian.bruce@theherald.co.uk

**19 Nov 2007**

**Nick Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings have taken place between UK and US officials on the research and development of new nuclear weapons, with particular reference to the reliable replacement warhead. [163044]

**Des Browne:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Davies) on 12 September 2007, *Official Report*, column 2074W. This explained that there is no programme to develop a new UK nuclear warhead but referred to the work currently being undertaken to inform decisions, likely to be taken in the next Parliament, on whether and how we may need to refurbish or replace our current warhead. Some of this work is being undertaken with the United States under the 1958 UK-US Agreement for Co-operation on the Uses of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defence purposes and includes reference to the proposed US Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW). The UK remains committed to the principle that any future warhead developments are undertaken on a national basis. The RRW remains a US-only programme.

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To: YORKE, Claire  
Subject: Replacement for Trident missile

Claire,

Thanks for the PQ on the replacement missile.

**Nick Harvey:** *To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings have taken place between UK and US officials on concept studies for the development of a new missile system to replace Trident with particular reference to the underwater launched missile system in the last three years. [168881]*

**Des Browne:** *Since the vote in this House on the future of the UK nuclear deterrent on 14 March 2007, there have been three meetings of the Joint Steering Task Group that oversees the execution of the Polaris sales agreement. Concept studies for the development of a new underwater launched missile system have been discussed by officials at those meetings.*

The dimensions of the new missile (ULMS) could be a major problem for the team designing the new British submarine.

George Bush said in his letter to Tony Blair on 7 December 2006 -

"any successor to the D5 system should be compatible with, or be capable of being made compatible with, the launch system for the D5 missile".

A new contract document from the US Navy contradicts this. They are planning to build a test bed for ULMS and the specifications for the testbed show that they have not ruled out a larger missile. The documents includes the phrase "concepts for future submarines may have missile tubes larger than 87 inches in diameter." The test bed should also be capable of testing a 200,000 lb missile, which is far more than Trident D5, 135,000 lbs.

(<http://www2.fbo.gov/spg/DON/SSP/SSP/N00030%2D08%2DI%2D0201/SynopsisP.html>)

This will be a major problem for the designers of the new British submarine.

If ULMS is wider than Trident D5 this would affect not just the missile tubes but also the submarine dimensions. The UK would have to design the new submarine for the larger of the two missiles. But the US Navy may not make a decision on the dimensions of ULMS until the design of the new British submarine is far advanced.

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