



## NATO Parliamentary Assembly FORMERLY NORTH ATLANTIC ASSEMBLY

*“Strengthening the transatlantic link”*

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**1. Members of the Science and Technology Committee's Subcommittee on Proliferation of Military Technology visited London, UK, from 19-20 March 2007. The delegation of 23 legislators from member and associate countries, led by Committee Chairman Michael Mates (UK) and Subcommittee Vice Chairwoman Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale (UK), met with representatives of the Foreign and Defence Ministries and political scientists from Royal United Services Institute for Defence & Security Studies (RUSI) and International Institute for Security Studies (IISS). The delegation also received briefings from BAE Systems, the premier defence company in Europe.**

#### III. NUCLEAR WEAPON CAPABILITIES OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

24. Tom McKane, Director, General Strategic Requirements, Ministry of Defence, discussed the future of the UK's nuclear forces. He stressed that, since the Cold War, UK nuclear forces were subject to substantial reductions. The UK retains only a "minimum deterrent" capability, having moved exclusively to submarine-based NW. Currently, the country has 4 submarines, with only one being on patrol. The UK's stockpile of NW (up to 16 Trident missiles with 48 warheads) comprises less than 1% of the world's total. Missiles are detargeted. The UK is committed to refraining from conducting nuclear weapon tests and producing weapons-grade fissile material.

25. The ultimate goal for the UK is nuclear-free world, but this can only be achieved by multilateral action, and unilateral disarmament by the UK would not be instrumental. The ongoing proliferation of WMD and the potential risks from state-sponsored terrorists armed with NW are the factors that caused the British authorities to opt for maintaining and upgrading its nuclear deterrent. Critics of the decision to upgrade Trident missiles usually refer to the political/moral side of the issue as well as the cost of the programme (£15-20 billion). Mr. McKane, however, believed the decision was a right one, because defence of the country is state's main duty.

26. Mr. Nolin (Canada) questioned if Britain's modest NW capabilities actually contribute to its security. Canada, for example, does not feel insecure being non-NW state. At least one of the NW States could show wisdom by unilaterally disarming, and the UK could set such a precedent. Mr. McKane replied that the UK and Canada have different historical contexts. The UK's NW capability is inherited from the Cold War era. However, although the strategic situation has changed dramatically after the fall of the Berlin Wall, there are still too many uncertainties in today's world and too few positive developments to justify unilateral disarmament.