

# Trident: The Deal Isn't Done

## Serious Questions Remain Unanswered

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Bradford Disarmament Research Centre  
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## **About this briefing**

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## **About the author**

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*December 2007*

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## 1. Constructing the debate

**The Trident programme is “unacceptably expensive, economically wasteful and militarily unsound”**

*Gordon Brown MP, 1984<sup>1</sup>*

In December 2006 the Labour Government presented its decision to replace the current Trident nuclear weapon system when it reaches the end of its service life in a White Paper on “The Future of the United Kingdom’s Nuclear Deterrent”, effectively opting to retain nuclear weapons well into the 2050s.<sup>2</sup> In March 2007 Parliament voted in favour of this decision. The system, which is Britain’s only nuclear weapon system, comprises nuclear warheads carried by Trident II (D5) ballistic missiles aboard Vanguard-class nuclear powered ballistic missile submarines. The warheads and submarines are British built but with substantial design assistance from America. The Trident missiles are American designed and built. The UK has purchased 58 missiles for its four Vanguard submarines from a common fleet maintained in America.

A decision was said to be needed in 2007 because the submarines carrying the missiles are aging and need to be replaced if Britain was to continue to deploy the Trident missile over the long-term. The Government’s timeline has been disputed.<sup>3</sup> The issue sparked a fresh debate in Britain on the utility of nuclear weapons, the relevance of nuclear deterrence to British security, and the future of nuclear arms control and disarmament initiatives. The Government sought to address these issues in its December 2006 White Paper and subsequent statements that set out the case for retaining nuclear weapons and building a new fleet of submarines.

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**The decision taken by Parliament in March 2007 was the first significant step on the path towards replacing Trident, but it was not the final word**

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The decision to replace Trident has been informed by a number of political issues that form a complex picture rather than one overriding central issue. Key parts of the picture include:

- Conceptions of future strategic nuclear threats.
- The continuing relevance of the logic of *nuclear* deterrence and its application.
- Britain’s military-political relationship with America.
- British nuclear weapons and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
- Nuclear weapons and the political identity of the Labour Party.
- The cost of replacing the Trident system.
- The French nuclear arsenal and conceptions of European security requirements.
- Industrial pressures and incentives to replace Trident.
- Nuclear weapons and Britain’s perception of its role in international politics.

This last part of the picture covers the crucial issues of nuclear weapons and their role in underpinning Britain’s ‘liberal interventionist’ military doctrine and nuclear weapons and historical perceptions of Britain’s international status and prestige.

The Government has constructed a particular case to justify replacing the current Vanguard submarines and effectively retain nuclear weapons into the 2050s. This case privileges certain understandings and assumptions about the role of British nuclear weapons and dismisses others. It

<sup>1</sup> Official Report (Hansard), June 19, 1984, column 188.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Defence (MOD) and Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) *The Future of the United Kingdom’s Nuclear Deterrent*, Command 6994, The Stationary Office: London, December 2006.

<sup>3</sup> See in particular evidence to the House of Commons Defence Committee inquiry on *The Future of UK’s Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: The White Paper* submitted by Richard Garwin, Ted Postol, Philip Coyle and Frank von Hippel that argued that the service life of the submarines could be extended to from 25-30 to 40-45 years. *The Future of the UK’s Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: The White Paper*, The Stationary Office, London, February 2007, p. Ev 92.

presents a number of important assertions and assumptions as facts and focuses on a few parts of the complex picture to the exclusion of others.

It focuses in particular on potential future strategic nuclear threats and the 'logic' of nuclear deterrence whilst saying little about the US-UK nuclear relationship, Labour Party politics, industrial pressures and ideas of international status. These issues are highly relevant but politically sensitive and difficult to incorporate into the 'rational' cost-benefit analysis of nuclear threats, nuclear deterrence, and nuclear delivery platforms presented publicly by the Government.

**An independent, critical analysis of these issues and questions is therefore required. The rationales presented by the Government need to be unpicked and the legitimacy of its assertions and understandings critically examined. The issues excluded by the Government need to be brought into the mainstream debate and the wider implications of the decision require a full and balanced analysis.**

Without such a critical analysis it will be difficult to hold the Government's decisions, actions and statements to account. The Bradford Disarmament Research Centre at the Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford, is currently undertaking such an analysis.

In addition to an independent and critical analysis, there are a number of important questions that must be asked of the Government following the parliamentary debate and vote on Trident replacement in March 2007. These questions respond in part to that debate and Government statements and in part to fundamental issues that the Government has not adequately explained or has dismissed as irrelevant. This briefing paper identifies five such questions:

1. What *specific new actions* does the Government plan to undertake to meet the UK's disarmament responsibilities under the NPT?
2. Why has the Government not explored *non-nuclear or 'nearly nuclear'* strategic defence options and what might these look like??
3. Why does *Britain*, specifically, need nuclear weapons and how can their indefinite retention be reconciled with the NPT?
4. What *use* will British nuclear weapons be in addressing future strategic security threats?
5. Are nuclear weapons *essential* to Britain's identity as a major power and a 'force for good' in the world?

This briefing paper is the first in a series that will examine these issues. It argues that replacing Trident and modernising Britain's nuclear weapons capability will be a lengthy process contingent on a range of fiscal, technological, domestic and international political issues. It sets out the nature of the decision made by Parliament in March 2007, future decisions that need to be made by the Government and debated by Parliament, and examines these five unanswered questions.

The briefing argues that the decision taken by Parliament in March 2007 was the first significant step on the path towards replacing Trident, but it was not the final word. The deal has not been done on Trident and Parliament will have a major opportunity to revisit the decision when the Government plans to let the contracts for building new submarines in around five years – the so-called 'main gate' decision.<sup>4</sup> The period until that decision represents a critical opportunity to examine in detail the rationales presented by the Government and its supporters for retaining nuclear weapons, the issues excluded by the Government that are central to the debate, and alternative steps the Government can take to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons and work towards nuclear disarmament that build on steps it has already taken.

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<sup>4</sup> The 2007 edition of MOD's *UK Defence Statistics* describes six phases for its 'smart procurement' process: concept (phase 1); assessment (phase 2 following 'initial gate' project initiation approval); demonstration (phase 3 following 'main gate' major project approval); manufacture (phase 4); in-service (phase 5); and disposal (phase 6). Collectively these six phases are known as the CADMID cycle. *UK Defence Statistics*, Ministry of Defence, London, chapter 1, table 1.17.

## 2. The nature of the decision taken by Parliament

The Government's motion put before Parliament in March 2007 had two key components:

1. To take a decision *in principle* on whether to replace Trident and therefore begin a process to design, build and commission replacement submarines to carry the Trident missiles. This was presented as a decision in principle to authorise 'concept and assessment' research and design work for a replacement submarine in order to keep open the option of replacing the submarines until a 'main gate' procurement decision is needed in 2012-2014.
2. To take further steps towards meeting the UK's disarmament responsibilities under Article VI of the NPT. An important incentive offered by the Government was a commitment to a 20 per cent reduction in warheads if the motion was carried.

A decision in principle to replace Trident would not only authorise initiation of the research and design phase for a fleet of replacement submarines but also participation in the US Navy's Trident II (D5) life extension (D5LE) programme to extend the service life of the Trident missile fleet to 2040. This was not part of the Government's motion but was set out in its December 2006 White Paper and formalised in an exchange of letters between London and Washington two days after the release of the White Paper. The D5LE programme was initiated by America in 2002. The US Navy awarded a procurement contract to Lockheed Martin in April 2007.<sup>5</sup> Production will begin in 2008 with initial deployment in 2011. The UK had to make a decision on whether to participate by 2007.<sup>6</sup> The Government clearly decided this was not a decision that required Parliamentary consent.

During the debate in Parliament preceding the vote the Government made three important assurances:

1. That there will be renewed efforts to secure measures pursuant to nuclear disarmament under Article VI of the NPT, in particular to bring about negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) to end production of fissile materials for use in nuclear weapons.
2. That the replacement system will not involve any upgrading or expansion of current nuclear capability.
3. That the decision in principle to replace Trident by authorising research and design on a new fleet of submarines will not bind a future government or parliament to that decision and that there will be opportunities in the future for Parliament to revisit the decision, particularly around the 'main gate' procurement decision.

In presenting the motion to Parliament Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett stated that "Some Members have sought assurances on whether this is only a provisional decision, dependent on further decisions down the line. Today's decision does not mean that we are committing ourselves irreversibly to maintaining a nuclear deterrent for the next 50 years...That would be absurd, unnecessary and, indeed, incompatible with the nuclear proliferation treaty".<sup>7</sup>

During Prime Minister's Questions on the day of the Trident vote Tony Blair stated that "we need to take the decision today if we want to get parliamentary approval for the work that has to begin now on the concept and design phase – of course, the actual contracts for the design and construction are to be left for a later time. If we want to get proper parliamentary authorisation, this decision has to be taken now"... "we have to take the decision now if we want parliamentary approval for the concept and design phase".<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Lockheed Martin Receives \$135-million Contract Modification from the Navy for Trident II D5 Missile Life Extension", Lockheed Martin, Press Release, April 9, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Op cit., *The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Official Report (Hansard), March 14, 2007 column 309.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, columns 278 and 280.

The Prime Minister went on to state that “It is absolutely right that this Parliament cannot bind the decisions of a future Parliament and it is always open to us to come back and look at these issues. He is right to suggest that when we get to the gateway stage – between 2012 and 2014 – when we let the main contracts for design and construction, it will always be open to Parliament to take a decision. However, I believe that the reason why we have to take the decision today is that if we do not start the process now, we will not be in the position in 2012 or 2014 to continue with the nuclear deterrent should we wish to do so. The real dilemma is that we decided rightly or wrongly – but I think rightly – that we should seek parliamentary approval even for the design and concept stage”.<sup>9</sup>

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**Although a decision was taken in principle to replace Trident, that decision is not binding**

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Secretary of State for Defence Des Browne went on to quote the Prime Minister’s statement above and add “This happened when the previous generation of submarines was built [parliamentary approval being sought at the main gate stage], and it would be surprising if it did not happen again...the fundamental point is that we need to take a decision now to start the process”.<sup>10</sup> This formulation was repeated to foreign government representatives by Ambassador John Duncan at the 2007 NPT Preparatory Committee meeting. “I should make clear what we have decided”, he stated, “The UK has decided to begin concept and design work required to make possible a replacement for our current ballistic missile submarine fleets; and to maintain the option of using the D5 missile beyond its current life expectancy”.<sup>11</sup>

**The Government’s formal position was that it was seeking parliamentary authorisation to initiate research and design work on a new generation of ballistic missile submarines so that a decision can be made by the government and parliament of the day at the time of the main gate decision on whether or not to replace the current Vanguard submarine fleet.**

At the same time statements by government ministers contradicted this formal position by arguing that the vote in March 2007 was *the* vote on Trident replacement. Des Browne, for example, stated that “we are asking the House not just to keep our options open but to take the big decision – the decision in principle”.<sup>12</sup> This reflected the view of the Conservative Opposition, which argued that the Government was misleading Parliament by implying that the decision could be revisited around the time of the main gate decision. They argued that a decision in principle, as the Government put it, to all intents and purposes would mean an agreement to retain nuclear weapons into the 2050s barring “fundamental and utterly unexpected change in world affairs”.<sup>13</sup> The Government’s motion represented *the* decision to retain nuclear weapons for another generation. The Liberal Democrat view was that “the appropriate moment for the House to take the decision in principle should be at the main gate decision”.<sup>14</sup>

**Parliament should hold the Government to its formal position. The parliamentary vote in March 2007 should not be interpreted as *the* decision on replacing Trident with no further substantive debate until a ‘successor to the successor’ in another 25 years.**

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, column 284.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, column 397.

<sup>11</sup> Ambassador John Duncan, “Statement by Ambassador John Duncan, Head of the UK Delegation to the First Preparatory Committee for the Eight Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty”, Vienna, April 30, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Official Report (Hansard), March 14, 2007, column 397.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, column 311.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, column 323.

### 3. Future decisions for parliamentary debate and authorisation

The Labour Government has now set a precedent in seeking parliamentary authorisation for successive stages in procuring the key components of a nuclear weapons system to replace the current Trident system over the next 20-30 years, including decisions on replacement submarines, warheads and ballistic missiles. It has also set a precedent in the degree of openness about its deliberations on the future of British nuclear weapons set out in the 2006 White Paper, evidence to the House of Commons Defence Committee's hearings on Trident replacement in 2006 and 2007 and statements by senior members of the Government. This stands in marked contrast to the relative secrecy surrounding previous nuclear weapon decisions and is a welcome development. This level of transparency should be commended but most importantly expanded.

**The decision set out by the Government in the 2006 White Paper and endorsed by Parliament in March 2007 is the first of a series of decisions needed to replace the composite Trident system. Although a decision was taken in principle to replace Trident, that decision is not binding.**

**The Government's formal position strongly suggests that the deal on Trident replacement is not done and that Parliament will have a major opportunity to reassess UK nuclear weapons policy and requirements around the 2012-2014 main gate decision.**

The decision to proceed with the concept and design phase for a new fleet of submarines has resulted in the allocation of R&D funding for 2008-2011 in the Government's October 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). The CSR settlement gave MOD an extra £7.7 billion over three years representing a 1.5 per cent average annual real terms increase.<sup>15</sup> Part of this increase is to pay for work on Trident replacement.<sup>16</sup>

MOD's Defence Equipment and Support (DES) department has also established a *Future Submarines Integrated Project Team* (FSM-IPT). The IPT office was formally opened in October 2007 and will work for the next two years to develop a concept design for a new ballistic missile submarine. It is led by an MOD official with deputy leadership provided by BAE Systems, whose shipyard at Barrow will build any new submarines. Key people with responsibility for the process are Rear Admiral Andrew Mathews (Director General Submarines, DES), General Sir Kevin O'Donoghue (Chief of Defence Materiel) and Baroness Ann Taylor (Minister of State for Defence Equipment and Support). Other key personnel in MOD are Tom McKane (Director General Strategic Requirements) and Nick Bennet (Director General Strategic Technology).<sup>17</sup>

Having taken the decision to initiate concept and assessment R&D work a long-term Trident replacement programme faces the following decisions:

- **Main gate:** MOD "expects to place a contract for the detailed design of the submarines in the period 2012-2014". This will be the main gate decision.<sup>18</sup> A contract to actually build the first submarine can be expected around 2016. A key design issue to be resolved at this stage is the number of launch tubes the new submarines will have and therefore the number of missiles they can accommodate.

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<sup>15</sup> Lord Drayson, House of Lords debate, July 25, 2007.

<sup>16</sup> In the first quarter after the Trident vote in Parliament MOD spent £900,000 on the Trident replacement programme. Official Report (Hansard), July 19 2007, column 476W.

<sup>17</sup> "Future Submarines Integrated Team Office Officially Opens", BAE Systems, News Release, October 12, 2007.

<sup>18</sup> *The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the Manufacturing and Skills Base: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2006-07*, The Stationary Office, London, p. 10.



- **Three or four submarines:** A decision on whether to procure a fourth submarine will be needed around 2020-22. There will be a debate on whether three or four are needed to fulfil the requirements of current British nuclear posture.<sup>19</sup>
- **The warhead:** Decisions on whether to refurbish or replace the current warhead are likely to be needed in the next parliament.<sup>20</sup> Any decision to modify the warhead's current capability or participate in the America's proposed Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) programme could be controversial. The first US RRW design has already been signed off by the US Government's Nuclear Weapons Council.<sup>21</sup> This RRW-1 is to replace a significant portion of the W-76 warheads that equip much of the US Trident II (D5) fleet. The UK's Trident warhead is based on the W-76 design.<sup>22</sup> MOD is currently looking at replacement warhead options "to ensure we have a firm basis on which to make our decisions", and it has been reported that the UK is working on a "High Surety Warhead" programme similar to the RRW.<sup>23</sup>
- **A new missile:** Decisions will be needed on a successor to the current Trident II (D5) missile in the early- to mid-2030s. The US Navy plans to commission a new ballistic missile submarine into service in 2029 together with a new submarine-launched ballistic missile. R&D on the new missile will likely begin in the mid-2010s. The Government has sought assurances from the US that the missile it builds to replace Trident will be compatible with the new submarines the UK plans to build, but this is not guaranteed.
- **Tritium supply:** A decision will be required on whether a new supply of tritium gas is needed for the current and next generation of Trident nuclear warheads.<sup>24</sup> Most nuclear weapons use tritium gas to 'boost' their yield. Tritium is a radioactive isotope of hydrogen and it needs to be periodically replenished since it decays with a half-life of 12.5 years.
- **Submarine nuclear reactors:** Decisions will be required on whether a new facility is needed to manufacture reactor cores for the nuclear reactors that will power the new submarines and whether a new reactor design is necessary.<sup>25</sup> The reactors and reactor fuel cores are designed and manufactured by Rolls Royce at their Raynesway plant in Derbyshire.
- **An HEU manufacturing facility:** A decision will be required on a new facility to manufacture highly enriched uranium (HEU) components for Trident nuclear warheads. When asked in June 2006 what plans there were for the construction of a new facility defence secretary Des Browne replied that "the capability to manufacture highly enriched uranium is required in order to maintain the existing Trident warheads throughout its intended in-service life and to provide material for naval propulsion".<sup>26</sup>
- **A new dry dock:** A decision may be needed on whether to build a new dry dock at the Clyde submarine base to service new ballistic missile submarines. This would be subject to Scottish planning regulations.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The youngest Vanguard submarine, HMS Vengeance, is likely to be retired in 2028 if its service life is extended by five years as currently planned.

<sup>20</sup> "Memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Defence", House of Commons Defence Committee hearing on *The Future of UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: The Strategic Context*, March 14, 2006. Appendix B: The Expected Life the Trident System.

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Medalia, "The Reliable Replacement Warhead Program: Background and Current Developments", *CRS Report for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, Washington D.C., June 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Hans Kristensen states that the British Trident warhead is similar enough to the US W-76 to form an integral part of the US Department of Energy's "W76 Needs" schedule, according to a document declassified and released under the US Freedom of Information Act. Hans Kristensen, "Britain's Next Nuclear Era", *Strategic Security Blog*, Federation of American Scientists, December 6, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Des Browne, oral evidence taken before the House of Commons Defence Committee hearing on *The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: The White Paper*, February 6, 2007. Ian Bruce, "Britain in top-secret work on new atomic warhead", *The Herald*, September 4, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> See Official Report (Hansard) December 19, 2006, column 1902W.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Official Report (Hansard), June 26, 2006, column 159W.

<sup>27</sup> Rob Edwards, "Environment fears could block Trident expansion", *Sunday Herald*, October 14, 2007.

## 4. Crucial questions that remain unanswered

Following the 2006 White Paper, Government statements and the parliamentary debate and vote on Trident replacement in March 2007 a number of important questions can be identified that the Government has not answered, not explained or has dismissed as irrelevant to the debate. This briefing paper identifies five such questions that require Government attention rather than dismissal.

### 1. What *specific new actions* does the Government plan to undertake to meet the UK's disarmament responsibilities under the NPT?

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The motion put to the House in March 2007 had two parts: a decision to begin concept and assessment R&D for a new fleet of submarines for the Trident missile and a commitment to take further steps towards nuclear disarmament under the NPT. This is a continuation of the Labour Government's dual-track approach of maintaining a 'minimum deterrent' whilst working towards multilateral nuclear arms control agreements that was first set out in its 1998 Strategic Defence Review.<sup>28</sup>

The concept and assessment R&D phase for the new submarines will be subject to rigorous planning, resourcing and implementation. But the Government has said little about the scope and objectives of the second part of the motion on further steps towards nuclear disarmament under the NPT, other than then-Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett's speech to the Carnegie International Nonproliferation Conference in June 2007.<sup>29</sup>

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**The Government has said little about the scope and objectives of the second part of the motion on further steps towards nuclear disarmament**

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The UK has made significant progress towards meeting its NPT obligations for which it should be applauded. The Government has also stepped up its important work on the technical verification of nuclear disarmament and warhead dismantlement at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Aldermaston initiated in the late 1990s and more recently in collaboration with the Norwegian Government.<sup>30</sup>

It now needs to set out how it intends to fulfil the second part of the motion with new initiatives, particularly in the run up to the 2010 NPT Review Conference and looking over the longer-term to the 2015 Review Conference.

**Question:** *Will the Government commit new financial and human resources to examining and implementing new technical and diplomatic initiatives, given that millions have been committed to Trident replacement studies for the next three years?*

**Question:** *Is the Government planning to formulate fresh proposals based on the government-funded study of steps towards nuclear disarmament currently being conducted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies?<sup>31</sup>*

**Question:** *Margaret Beckett stated before the Commons that "the next step that we hope to take is to bring forward negotiations on the fissile material cut-off treaty".<sup>32</sup> Negotiations on such a treaty have been stalled for years.*

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<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review*, Command 3999, 1998, The Stationary Office, London, chapter four.

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Beckett, "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons?", Carnegie International Nonproliferation Conference, Keynote Address, June 25, 2007.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Dr. Kim Howells, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, stated that "we are supporting an independent International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) in-depth study to help determine the requirements for the eventual elimination of all nuclear weapons. In particular, we are working with IISS on holding a workshop to focus on some of the crucial technical questions in this area". Official Report (Hansard), July 18, 2007, column 409W.

<sup>32</sup> Official Report (Hansard), March 14, 2007, column 301.

*What new initiatives does the Government propose to undertake to work towards the opening of negotiations?*

**Question:** *What does the Government aim to achieve through the Norwegian 7 Country Initiative to foster fresh thinking on meeting NPT non-proliferation, disarmament and peaceful use of nuclear technology commitments?*<sup>33</sup>

Continued rhetorical support for existing nuclear arms control and disarmament agreements and proposals is commendable and important, but fresh proposals sponsored by the UK would have a significant impact on wider efforts to galvanise movement towards nuclear arms control and disarmament.

## **2. Why has the Government not explored *non-nuclear or 'nearly nuclear'* strategic defence options and what might these look like?**

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A number of studies have examined options and steps the nuclear weapon states can take to make progress towards disarmament – many of which the UK has already done.<sup>34</sup> The UK has:

- Ended nuclear testing and ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).
- Ended production of fissile materials for use in nuclear weapons.
- Published accounts of its holdings and history of fissile material production to increase transparency of the UK nuclear weapons programme.
- Withdrawn all tactical nuclear weapons from service.
- Reduced the number of Trident nuclear warheads to the lowest level so far.
- Reduced the operational status of Trident so that the single Trident submarine on patrol is at several days notice to fire.<sup>35</sup>
- Undertaken a major body of research on the technical verification of nuclear disarmament.

Now is not the time to stop. The UK should continue on this trajectory of 'minimum deterrence' and technical studies on steps towards nuclear disarmament by commissioning detailed analysis on:

- Steps that could be taken to further reduce its nuclear missile and warhead arsenal.
- How training and simulation operations and procedures could reduce reliance on a continuous-at-sea deterrence (CASD) posture that requires four submarines and at least one on patrol at any time and reduce the current tempo of operations.
- How such steps would affect understandings of the credibility of the UK's nuclear deterrent threat.
- The steps involved in further de-alerting the nuclear arsenal by de-mating some or all warheads from their missiles and storing them at a separate location or locations.
- How the UK could move to a non-deployed 'responsive' nuclear force and how a 'minimum' nuclear force might be redeployed if a major strategic nuclear threat emerged over months and years.
- How the de-mating of warheads and/or non-deployment of the nuclear force could be verified under a future arms control agreement.
- The role that non-nuclear strategic global strike weapons technology could play in deterrence missions.
- The role that a limited cruise/ballistic missile defence system could play in 'point defence' to protect a responsive non-deployed nuclear force from missile attack.
- What a formal nuclear no-first use agreement would entail and how it could be negotiated.

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<sup>33</sup> The seven countries are Australia, Chile, Indonesia, Norway, Romania, South Africa and the UK. See "Norwegian Initiative to Strengthen International Co-Operation on Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation", February 13, 2006 at <http://www.norway.org.au/policy/organizations/norwegianinitiative.htm>.

<sup>34</sup> See for example the recommendations of the *Canberra Commission on the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons*, Australian Government, August 1996.

<sup>35</sup> This is a political rather than technical process that could be overridden in a crisis. See *The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: The Strategic Context*, House of Commons Defence Committee, The Stationary Office: London, p. 12.

- How the use of HEU in the naval nuclear fuel cycle could be effectively verified under a future FMCT, relating in Britain's case to its nuclear powered submarine fleet.

Currently it is clear that the UK has not examined non-nuclear or 'virtual' nuclear solutions to the general threat of future nuclear blackmail. The Government's current nuclear strategy is 'business as usual' for the next 40 years. It will retain four (perhaps three) submarines with one submarine on patrol with a complement of 48 warheads. It remains wedded to a continuous-at-sea deterrence posture to provide a permanently survivable nuclear force, despite that fact that the prospect of a disarming surprise nuclear strike on the UK is so low as to be zero.

The reduction to 160 warheads announced by the Government is a welcome but small reduction given that the UK is judged to have been operating at around 180 warheads.<sup>36</sup> A reduction of 20-30 warheads over the lifetime of Trident's successor does not constitute progress towards nuclear disarmament.

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**The Government's  
current nuclear strategy  
is 'business as usual'  
for the next 40 years**

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In June 2007 Margaret Beckett articulated a vision of the UK as a 'disarmament laboratory'.<sup>37</sup> The Government should take steps to realise that vision by seriously investigating these options and the challenges surrounding them with respect to its own nuclear arsenal. It should consider exploring alternative conceptions of 'minimum deterrence' to enable it to move beyond the present status quo. It could easily do this whilst keeping options open to procure any new submarines in 2012-2014.

This would build on the Government's record and make a significant contribution to progress towards nuclear disarmament. It would demonstrate how steps towards significantly reducing the salience of nuclear weapons could be undertaken and identify challenges for further examination.

### **3. Why does *Britain*, specifically, need nuclear weapons and how can their indefinite retention be reconciled with the NPT?**

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This is a crucial question that has not been adequately addressed by the Government. The decision to replace Trident and the rationales presented to support it reveal a commitment by the Government to what it considers an inescapable and fundamental logic: nuclear weapons are an essential capability in an increasingly uncertain world. Declarations of retaining only a 'minimum deterrent', of not targeting nuclear weapons at any particular state and of only using them in extreme situations of national survival are overshadowed by this logic.

This makes it very difficult for the Government to fully support efforts to reduce the spread of nuclear weapons and support a universal norm against nuclear proliferation and nuclear use whilst insisting that it needs these weapons for its own security for the foreseeable future, particularly when Britain faces no strategic nuclear threats.

This is a real and troubling contradiction that leads inexorably to an uncomfortable question: what prevents any other state appropriating the Government's 'strategic' logic that stresses how important nuclear weapons are to British security, particularly if these states face more serious strategic threats than the UK?

The answer is very little. Any other country can adopt this logic which Britain and the other nuclear weapon states continue to legitimise and re-legitimise through their nuclear weapons policies and actions. States can adopt this logic and remain outside the confines of the NPT or, if they have signed the NPT as a non-nuclear weapon state, they can leave the treaty by citing "extraordinary

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<sup>36</sup> Hans Kristensen, "Britain's Next Nuclear Era", Federation of American Scientists, Strategic Security Blog, December 7, 2006. Available at [http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2006/12/britains\\_next\\_nuclear\\_era\\_1.php](http://www.fas.org/blog/ssp/2006/12/britains_next_nuclear_era_1.php).

<sup>37</sup> Op cit., Beckett, "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons?"

events” that have jeopardised their “supreme interests” and giving three months notice.

The Government does not refute this contradiction but attempts to escape it by insisting that Britain is legally entitled to possess nuclear weapons indefinitely under the terms of the NPT – an interpretation that is strongly at odds with the understandings of most of the 185 non-nuclear weapon state signatories of the treaty.<sup>38</sup> This is supported by a powerful sense of ‘nuclear exceptionalism’ – the idea that the UK is major power, that it has an important and stabilising role to play and international affairs, that major powers are nuclear powers, and therefore the UK must retain its nuclear capability indefinitely.<sup>39</sup>

The NPT established a crucial international norm of not developing and deploying nuclear weapons and of working towards nuclear disarmament as an equitable solution to the problem of nuclear weapons and the threat they pose.<sup>40</sup> This norm *can only be undermined* by Britain’s decision to replace Trident, the conflation of ‘major power’ and ‘nuclear power’ and the enduring sense of nuclear exceptionalism, despite the Government’s legal argument and statements to the contrary. As then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan stated in 2006, “All of the NPT nuclear-weapon States are modernizing their nuclear arsenals or their delivery systems. They should not imagine that this will be accepted as compatible with the NPT. Everyone will see it for what it is: a euphemism for nuclear re-armament.”<sup>41</sup>

**Question:** *How can the Government accept the logic of ‘realpolitik’ that demands retention of nuclear weapons in an uncertain world but deny that logic to other states and insist they accept an alternative logic of cooperative security enshrined in the NPT?*

**Question:** *How sustainable is this approach over the long term? Is it not realistic to expect other states to seek an alternative form of nuclear equity through nuclear proliferation if the nuclear weapon states, including the UK, continue to articulate a very clear need for nuclear weapons?*

#### **4. What *use* will British nuclear threats be in addressing complex strategic security threats of the future?**

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The Government argues that the primary benefit from its nuclear weapons is protection against nuclear blackmail and coercion by a major nuclear power, a nuclear-armed ‘rogue’ state, or their terrorist allies.

There are serious problems with this argument. First, there are few, if any, *realistic* scenarios in which the UK would explicitly threaten and be prepared to use its nuclear weapons against a major nuclear power, specifically Russia or China. The Government acknowledges that it faces no such

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<sup>38</sup> Tony Blair said in February 2007 that the NPT “makes it absolutely clear that Britain has the right to possess nuclear weapons” (Official Report (Hansard), 21 February 2007, column 260), that “it is clear that those who are the major nuclear powers can remain nuclear powers, fully consistent with the non-proliferation treaty...it is recognised, and it is at the heart of the non-proliferation treaty, that Britain, along with those other countries [the other four recognised nuclear weapons states], should be able to be a nuclear power” (Hansard, 4 December 2006, column 34); that “at the heart of the non-proliferation treaty is the recognition that there will be major nuclear power states, of which Britain is one” (Official Report (Hansard), 4 December 2006, column 36). In September 2004 Denis MacShane, then Minister for Europe, stated that “Under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), five states—the United Kingdom, the United States, France, Russia and China—are legally entitled to possess nuclear weapons” (Official Report (Hansard), 1, September 2004, column 689W). This position is derived solely from the UK being recognised as a nuclear weapon State under the NPT. Margaret Beckett stated in her speech in Parliament in March 2007 that “The NPT created two distinct categories of states. Those that had already conducted nuclear tests – ourselves, the US, the Soviet Union, China and France – were designated nuclear weapons states and could legally possess nuclear weapons. All other states-signatory were designated non-nuclear weapons states” (Official Report (Hansard), March 14, 2007, column 300).

<sup>39</sup> John Gittings, “After Trident: Proliferation or Peace?”, *International Relations*, vol. 21 no. 4 (December 2007), p. 390.

<sup>40</sup> George Perkovich, *Universal Compliance: A Strategy for Nuclear Security – 2007 Report Card on Progress*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007, Washington, D.C., p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> Kofi Annan, lecture at Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, November 28, 2006.

strategic nuclear threats today and hasn't for at least ten years (the 1998 Strategic Defence Review said the same).<sup>42</sup> Nuclear weapons may have performed an important deterrent function in the Cold War to deter and contain an expansionist and ideologically adversarial Soviet Union, but those conditions no longer apply and have not done for many years. There is little prospect of a resurgent nuclear-armed Russia threatening to build a new empire at the expense of British, European or international security.

Second, the Government has not explained how nuclear deterrence will function against 'rogue' states and their potential terrorist allies. The principles of nuclear deterrence may remain the same, as the Government argues, but the international strategic context in which it is applied has changed dramatically. It is not realistic, credible or proportionate to threaten to destroy a 'rogue' state through use of a handful or more 100 kiloton Trident nuclear warheads in retaliation for a 'rogue' state or terrorist WMD attack. As former US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated, this would in, effect, mean the deaths of thousands or tens of thousands of people who are in many ways the victims, or hostages, of the 'rogue' government.<sup>43</sup> Nuclear weapons also have no conceivable role to play in addressing terrorist threats which remain "outside the bounds of a deterrent strategy".<sup>44</sup> In fact Tony Blair stated in October 2005 that "I do not think that anyone pretends that the independent nuclear deterrent is a defence against terrorism".<sup>45</sup>

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**The application of *nuclear* deterrence is uncertain and criteria for what will deter a particular adversary now and in the future are essentially arbitrary**

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The proposed benefit from nuclear weapons stems from an ability to deter nuclear blackmail and coercion and to provide an assurance that any future crises will not escalate beyond UK control through our own nuclear deterrent threat.<sup>46</sup> The Government portrays this ability to deter with nuclear weapons and the assurance they provide as an irrefutable fact, or an 'iron law', and an assured solution to the potential problem of future nuclear blackmail from a range of belligerents.

But the application of *nuclear* deterrence is uncertain and criteria for what will deter a particular adversary now and in the future are essentially arbitrary. This will become more so as strategic security threats and crises become more dissipated and complex. As former Senator Sam Nunn, former Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and George Shultz and former Secretary of Defense William Perry stated in January 2007, "Deterrence continues to be a relevant consideration for many states with regard to threats from other states. But reliance on nuclear weapons for this purpose is becoming increasingly hazardous and decreasingly effective."<sup>47</sup> Yet in this uncertain world the Government has decided to bet heavily on the certainty of the logic of nuclear deterrence and its application.

**Question:** *How can the Government be so confident that nuclear deterrence will operate with such certainty in such an uncertain future environment?*

**Question:** *How will British nuclear deterrent threats play a constructive role in addressing complex future crises and decisively alter the decision-making processes, perceptions and understandings of potential 'rogue' state and terrorist adversaries?*

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<sup>42</sup> Op cit., *The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent*, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> Rumsfeld argued that "Let's say that the al Qaeda had used a biological weapon... Can you imagine going in and saying to the President, I think it would be a terrific idea if we used a nuclear response to the fact in Afghanistan because the al Qaeda used a biological weapon or a chemical weapon against the United States. And you'd end up punishing people who in many respects were victims, they were hostages of the al Qaeda." See *Secretary Rumsfeld Interview with the National Journalists Roundtable, August 5, 2002*, U.S. Department of Defense, Washington, D.C. at [www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2002/t08072002\\_t0805sd.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2002/t08072002_t0805sd.html) and *CNN Interview with Secretary Rumsfeld, June 1, 2001*, U.S. Department of Defense, at [www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2001/t06042001\\_t0601cnn.html](http://www.defenselink.mil/transcripts/2001/t06042001_t0601cnn.html).

<sup>44</sup> Op cit. Nunn et al "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons".

<sup>45</sup> Official Report (Hansard), October 19, 2005, House of Commons, column 841.

<sup>46</sup> Op cit., *The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent*, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Nunn, S, Schultz, G, Kissinger, H and Perry, W, "A World Free of Nuclear Weapons", Wall Street Journal, January 7, 2007, p. A15.

A much stronger argument can be made that deterrence is far from the 100% guarantee portrayed and that possession of a nuclear arsenal only buys the UK potential protection from nuclear threats in a very limited number of conceivable circumstances at significant financial and political cost. As General George Lee Butler, former head of U.S. Strategic Command responsible America's nuclear forces, eloquently stated in 1998 nuclear “deterrence is a slippery conceptual slope. It is not stable, nor is it static, its wiles cannot be contained...it gives easy semantic cover to nuclear weapons, masking the horrors of employment with siren veils of infallibility”.<sup>48</sup>

The Government also argues that future instability generated by climate change, population growth, resource conflict, and the spread of military technology may lead to greater chance of inter-state conflict. The risk of such conflicts plus the potential for further nuclear proliferation means that the UK may face a greater chance of becoming involved (or getting itself involved) in conflicts with nuclear-armed states – therefore the UK must retain its nuclear arsenal.<sup>49</sup>

Yet it is extremely difficult to construct viable scenarios in which a conflict entered into for complex issues involving access to vital resources, humanitarian issues, terrorism and WMD proliferation would correspond to the extreme threat to *national survival* needed to legally justify resort to an explicit threat and even use of nuclear weapons in self-defence, as stipulated by the ruling of the International Court of Justice in 1996.<sup>50</sup>

Then there is the question of the ‘sub-strategic’ role of Trident. The Government has now expunged the term ‘sub-strategic’ from officialdom but the capability to deliver low-yield nuclear warheads still remains, together with a doctrine that still allows for the first use of nuclear weapons in a crisis.<sup>51</sup> This stands in contrast to the Government's insistence that British nuclear weapons are not for war-fighting. Greater transparency is needed about this capability and its envisaged purpose. As Michael Codner of the Royal United Services Institute argues, the Government needs to resolve this paradox between ‘sub-strategic’ and ‘not for war-fighting’.<sup>52</sup>

**Question:** *What is the capability of low-yield Trident warheads, what doctrine governs their employment and what broad roles does the Government see for them in the context of nuclear deterrence?*

## 5. Are nuclear weapons *essential* to Britain's identity as a major power and a ‘force for good’ in the world?

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Nuclear weapons are an important part of Britain's identity as a major power, a self-proclaimed ‘force for good’ in international security affairs and as the United States' principal political-military ally.

<sup>48</sup> General George Lee Butler, “The Risks of Nuclear Deterrence: From Superpowers to Rogue Leaders”, speech to the National Press Club, Washington, D.C., February 2, 1998.

<sup>49</sup> Op cit., *The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent*, p. 18.

<sup>50</sup> The 1996 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice on Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons concluded that “the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law” but it could not “conclude definitively whether the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be lawful or unlawful in an extreme circumstance of self-defence, in which the very survival of a State would be at stake”. Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons, Advisory Opinion, International Court of Justice, July, 8 1996.

<sup>51</sup> Defence secretary Des Browne declared in January 2007 that “we have deliberately chosen to stop using the term ‘sub-strategic Trident’, applied previously to a possible limited use of our weapons”. “The United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, Speech by Secretary of State for Defence Des Browne, King's College London, January 25, 2007. But as the 2006 White Paper makes clear with reference to “the continued availability of a lower yield from our warhead”, the capability still remains. *The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent*, p. 23.

<sup>52</sup> Memorandum from Michael Codner, House of Commons Defence Committee hearing on *The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: The Strategic Context*, March 14, 2006, p. Ev 73.

The Labour Government and Conservative Opposition are both committed to an internationalist and Atlanticist foreign policy in which the UK is prepared to intervene militarily in conflicts around the world alongside the United States in defence of the 'Western alliance' and its 'vital interests'.<sup>53</sup> This rests on two enduring assumptions of the wider British political establishment: first, that the UK should play a major role in global affairs and that it is important for global order and stability that it does so;<sup>54</sup> and second, that the UK's primary foreign policy goal is to "remain the closest ally of the U.S., and as allies influence them to continue broadening their agenda".<sup>55</sup>

The British political and defence establishment views nuclear weapons as an important component of Britain's armed forces that give it the confidence to engage in such 'liberal interventionist' activities even in circumstances in which the prospect of nuclear use is very distant. Nuclear weapons facilitate Britain's willingness to support America militarily and are thereby seen to play a crucial, if indirect, role in allowing Britain to remain Washington's primary military ally. They are seen as part of a package of 'power projection' military capabilities that make the UK a 'major power' militarily and politically together with a range of other qualities, such as economic, diplomatic and cultural power. The Carrier Strike Programme comprising procurement of two new aircraft carriers and a fleet of Joint Combat Aircraft at a cost of £12-14 billion can also be seen in this context.<sup>56</sup>

Because of the role nuclear weapons play in supporting Britain's international identity it is very difficult for policy-makers who engage in activities that produce and reproduce that identity to conceive of *not* having nuclear weapons. A commitment to replacing Trident is therefore closely linked to a commitment to continue with an interventionist foreign and defence policy that has been widely questioned following the invasion of Iraq in 2003. An indication of this conception of the role of British nuclear weapons was revealed in March 2006 by Kim Howells, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth, who stated that "the UK is committed to helping to secure international peace and security. Since 1956, the nuclear deterrent has underpinned our ability to do so even in the most challenging circumstances".<sup>57</sup>

These identity relationships need to be acknowledged and challenged.

**Question:** *Are nuclear weapons essential for a 'force for good' interventionist doctrine? Australian support and military commitment to the US-led 'war on terror' has demonstrated that a nuclear capability is not necessary to participate fully alongside America in interventionist activity if a government so chooses.*

**Question:** *Are nuclear weapons a vital component of 'major power' identity? Japan's power on the world stage does not require nuclear weapons, despite the serious potential nuclear threats from North Korea and China. Tokyo has responded in other ways.*

**Question:** *Are nuclear weapons required for Britain's identity and capabilities as a 'defender of Europe'? A more progressive vision would seek a nuclear-weapon free zone in Europe similar to that adopted in Africa, South America, Central Asia and South-East Asia.*

**Question:** *Are nuclear weapons a crucial military capability for a major military power, or do they undermine it? The costs of the conventional military trappings of 'major powerhood' are expensive and arguably emasculated by a costly nuclear capability.*

<sup>53</sup> Tim Dunne, "When the Shooting Starts": Atlanticism in British Security Strategy", *International Affairs*, vol. 80, no. 5 (2004), pp. 893-909.

<sup>54</sup> See Tony Blair's speech on HMS Albion, "Our Nation's Future – Defense", January 12, 2007 and Lawrence Freedman, *Defence*, in Seldon, A. (ed), *The Blair Effect: The Blair Government 1997-2001*, Little Brown and Company: London, p. 295.

<sup>55</sup> Tony Blair, "Britain's Place in the World", Prime Minister's speech at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Leadership Conference, January 7, 2003, at [www.pmo.gov.uk/output/Page1765.asp](http://www.pmo.gov.uk/output/Page1765.asp). Lawrence Freedman, "The Special Relationship, Then and Now", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 3 (May/June 2006), p. 61.

<sup>56</sup> Paul Rogers, 'Big Boats and Bigger Skimmers: Determining Britain's Role in the Long War', *International Affairs*, Vol. 82, No. 4 (July 2006), p. 651.

<sup>57</sup> Official Report (Hansard), February 28, 2007, column 1384W.



## 5. Conclusion: If replacing Trident is the answer, what is the question?

The decision made by the Government to move forward with Trident replacement and the vote in Parliament in March 2007 do not constitute the final word but the first step in a long process. Further major decisions are required, not least of which is the crucial main gate decision in 2012-2014.

Future decisions will be subject to a number of dynamics. With a major capital spending programme through the 2010s the Navy's budget and wider MOD spending could be squeezed to the extent that procuring four new ballistic missile submarines begins to look unattractive, particularly if the UK faces an economic downturn over the next decade. Procuring Trident's successor will cost £15-20 billion. This will come at a time when MOD is procuring the new Astute-class attack submarine (£3.5bn for the first three of a possible seven), six Daring-class Type-45 destroyers (£3.6bn), the two new aircraft carriers and Joint Combat Aircraft (£12-14bn), the Future Rapid Effects System range of armoured vehicles for the Army (£6bn for 3,500 vehicles), 232 Typhoon fighter aircraft (£21bn), and 14 new Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft (£13bn). This comes at a time when three former Chiefs of the Defence Staff are arguing that the Government is underfunding the armed services and short changing troops in the field.<sup>58</sup>

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**For the Government replacing Trident is the answer, but it is not at all clear what the question is**

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Progress on nuclear proliferation and steps towards nuclear disarmament at the 2010 and 2015 NPT Review Conference could erode the rationales presented by the Government for replacing Trident. Parliamentary resistance in Westminster on grounds of cost, relevance or international political impact could constrain and undermine the Trident replacement process.

Scottish civil, parliamentary and Executive opposition could prove politically insurmountable. On May 3, 2007 the Scottish National Party gained a majority in the Scottish Parliament. The SNP and the majority of Scottish MPs are committed to a nuclear weapon-free Scotland. On June 14, 2007 the Scottish Parliament voted overwhelmingly against the British Government's decision to replace Trident by a vote of 71 to 16 with 39 abstentions. Opinion polls show a majority of Scots opposed to Trident.<sup>59</sup>

The Government, however, is convinced that Trident is a strategic military and political asset and has shaped the debate to reflect that conviction. It cannot conceive of not having nuclear weapons, primarily because it now has them. But if Britain did not now have nuclear weapons it is very unlikely that it would seek to acquire them<sup>60</sup> – suggesting that the strategic *need* identified by the government is less urgent and essential than claimed.

As far as the Government is concerned, replacing Trident is the answer, but it is not at all clear what the question is. The Government has tried to argue that future strategic nuclear threats are the question. But the rationales presented to support this argument can be unpicked to reveal a shaky foundation.

A more powerful argument can be made that challenges the relevance of Trident replacement to the strategic deterrent tasks asked of it and exposes the potential liability it poses in terms of the impact on the non-proliferation and disarmament norms at the heart of the NPT.

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<sup>58</sup> Michael Evans, "Retired Military Chiefs Join Forces to Battle for a Bigger War Chest", *The Times*, November 9, 2007.

<sup>59</sup> Rob Edwards, "Salmond: Help us get rid of Trident", *Sunday Herald*, October 21, 2007.

<sup>60</sup> See comments by former Director of Nuclear Policy at MOD, Commodore Tim Hare, "What Next for Trident?", *RUSI Journal*, April 2005, p. 30.

Compelling arguments can also be made that replacing Trident is the answer to a different question, or set of questions, to do with maintaining a close defence relationship with America, maintaining the ability or confidence to engage in 'liberal interventionist' activities as a self-proclaimed 'force for good', a strong desire on behalf of the Labour Party not to revisit in any way the unilateralist debates of the 1980s, a strong historical association between an 'independent' British nuclear arsenal and status as a major power, and a powerful gut-feeling not to leave France as the only nuclear weapon power in Europe.<sup>61</sup>

Nowhere are these issues addressed in the Government's White Paper and they have only been superficially examined in the wider debate. But, as George Lee Butler argues, it is essential that "the root causes, the mindsets and the belief systems" that underpin the commitment to a nuclear defence policy and nuclear exceptionalism are brought to light and better understood.<sup>62</sup>

Finally this government has repeatedly committed itself to a process of multilateral nuclear disarmament and the norms established by the NPT. It regularly articulates a self-identity as a 'force for good' in international security affairs. It is therefore incumbent upon the Government to fully support and resource detailed examination of the issues highlighted under question two in collaboration with external expertise and with nuclear- and non-nuclear weapon states where appropriate and feasible.

It is equally crucial that Parliament be given the information and opportunity to scrutinise, question and challenge Government decisions on the long-term Trident replacement programme through its committees and parliamentary debate.

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<sup>61</sup> Sir Michael Quinlan, former Permanent Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, stated in 2006 that "to leave the French as the only people with this [nuclear capability] I think would twitch an awful lot of fundamental historical nerves". Oral evidence taken before the House of Commons Defence Committee inquiry into "The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: The Strategic Context", March 14, 2006.

<sup>62</sup> Op cit., Butler "The risks of Nuclear Deterrence".

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## **Trident: The Deal Isn't Done**

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### **Serious Questions Remain Unanswered**



***“For the Government replacing Trident is the answer, but it is not at all clear what the question is”***

This briefing paper argues that the decision taken by Parliament in March 2007 to endorse replacement of the Trident nuclear weapon system was the first step on the path towards Trident replacement but it was not the final word.

Parliament will have a major opportunity to revisit the decision when the contracts are placed for building new Trident missile submarines in 2012-2014.

It examines the nature of decision made by Parliament in March 2007, future decisions for the Trident replacement programme, and identifies five crucial questions that the Government has not adequately explained or has dismissed.

It argues that the Government should re-think its understanding of ‘minimum deterrence’ and examine further steps towards reducing the salience of nuclear weapons.

It argues that is not at all clear what British nuclear weapons are for, why Britain, specifically, needs them, and how their long-term retention can be reconciled with the NPT.

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