

The Rt Hon Tony Blair
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London SW1 2AA

1a Waterlow Road London N19 5NJ
Tel: 020 7272 4474 Web: www.greenparty.org.uk

The Rt Hon Des Browne
Secretary of State for Defence
Ministry of Defence
Whitehall
London SW1A 2HB

Dear Prime Minister and Secretary of State,

Replacement of UK's Vanguard class Trident fleet of SSBNs

Proliferation of nuclear weapons threatens the extinction of all life on our planet. Alongside climate change, this is perhaps the biggest threat facing humanity, demanding urgent and global action.

The December 2006 White Paper should have focused primarily on plans to re-ignite international negotiations towards a nuclear weapon-free world. Instead, these aims were clearly tacked onto the document as an after-thought. This is particularly disappointing, given this government's relatively good record in the build up to the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

The biggest mistake of the White Paper is the assumption that the UK's nuclear weapons policy exists in a vacuum, that the choices of others are not influenced by our posture. In its attempt to answer criticisms that our nuclear policy is hypocritical, it relies upon a legalistic interpretation of the non-proliferation regime. The NPT gives countries the facility to leave with three months' notice and legally develop their own nuclear arsenal and depends for its success upon confidence and trust-building - on an honest commitment to achieving a nuclear weapon-free world.

Britain is a member of the nuclear 'club' that is collectively blamed by the majority of delegations to successive NPT Review Conferences for its failure to disarm. Iran is mentioned in the government's answer. They claim their pursuit of nuclear power is consistent with the NPT, and their population agrees overwhelmingly (see recent PIPA poll showing an overwhelming majority of Iranians support a full fuel cycle in Iran).

The NPT gives Iran the facility to develop a sophisticated nuclear weapon capability within the law, as long as they cooperate with the IAEA inspections process. And they have every reason to develop this capability, if the justifications put by the UK government in the White Paper for its own nuclear weapons are seen as having any traction.

While the White Paper talks of insurance against a possible future threat, the threat to Iran today is very real. Iran is surrounded by hostile forces in a region riven by conflict. The USA has a policy of regime change, and the capability to rain down thousands of munitions on Iran from 11

neighbouring states, two battle carrier groups, and a formidable arsenal based on Britain's Diego Garcia.

Iran faces a hostile, nuclear-armed Israel and is neighbour to the nuclear power of Pakistan. While we may think Britain's nuclear arsenal is no motive for Iran, it certainly gives them geo-political justification. Some within Iran do in fact see Britain as a threat, given our involvement in the invasion of Iraq and our support for the USA, and it is their perception that counts. British Trident submarines are seen as closely related the US Trident fleet.

We do not actively support the multi-party proposal that the decision be delayed, preferring instead that a decision be made now to wind patrols down and dismantle our warheads. However, given the rich evidence presented by a number of think tanks and supported in expert statements to the Defence Committee by Professor Richard Garwin of the US National Academy of Sciences and Paul Ingram of BASIC, how can the government justify the haste to come to this decision?

The evidence shows that delay would save several billion pounds and give time for a new multilateral disarmament initiative in advance of the 2010 NPT Review Conference, a proper cost-benefit assessment based on a new Strategic Defence Review, and an informed public and parliamentary debate of all the options.

Given the technical evidence that the ships could go on for much longer, we are left thinking that the rush to a decision is simply to keep BAE Systems afloat (in keeping with the decision to drop the SFO negotiation just before Christmas) and to nail down the Labour Party's public commitment to strong defence under the current premiership.

Every pound spend on Trident is a pound not spent on more appropriate responses to the real threat - climate change. And, as the recent report authored by Sir Nicholas Stern pointed out, every pound not spent on averting climate change leads to much greater costs down the line. The direct total costs of the new systems proposed could amount to approximately £40-50bn (discounted 2007 prices).

These resources are desperately needed elsewhere: for energy efficiency, energy conservation and renewable energy, which would make us more secure by reducing climate change, cold-related winter deaths, and our dependence on foreign oil – a key root cause of global terrorism. £16bn would be enough to insulate all 16 million homes in Britain that need it, saving 4% of UK carbon emissions and helping to prevent 20,000 cold-related deaths per year. £30bn could provide 3,500 off-shore wind turbines, capable of supplying 15% of our electricity.

In addition to the financial cost, our nuclear arsenal creates greater international distrust, harming collective action in other fields, such as reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Our superior attitude in the nuclear field harms the UK's ability to drive change where it's most needed. In addition, our investment of critically limited engineering skills in the construction and maintenance of nuclear weapons draws these skills away from the pursuit of technologies needed to combat climate change.

The Green vision is of a world of sustainable communities living with mutual respect, at peace and governed by international laws protecting human rights and genuine democratic structures. A world without nuclear weapons demands immediate and unconditional nuclear disarmament by Britain.

Given the government's commitment to ignore this course of action, the Green Party would like to take this opportunity to ask two specific questions: which future adversaries, exactly, does the government suppose they would use nuclear weapons against, and where do they see the greatest threats coming from?

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Lucas MEP

Siân Berry, Green Party Principal Speaker

cc Derek Twigg MP, Under-Secretary of State for Defence