

Preventing Trident Replacement
Strategic Planning Conference, London, 3 September 2005

Introduction

I'm very pleased to have been invited to say a few words at this enormously important conference.

I don't often expect to find myself on the same side of an argument as **Michael Portillo**, but in his article in the Times of just a few months ago, **he puts the case against Britain's nuclear missiles with surprising clarity and conviction**, arguing that there is simply no longer any credible threat that requires them.

"The Soviet Union collapsed long ago. There is no threat from China. The new nuclear weapons states, from India to Israel, do not have the capability to hit us. Relations between Tony Blair and Jacques Chirac may be strained, but **as yet** we have no reason to fear a nuclear strike."

And that, perhaps, is one of **the causes for hope** in the campaign to prevent Trident replacement – **the fact that we might find allies in unexpected places**.

So let's be very clear: Trident Replacement is **illegal, ineffective, and outrageously expensive**. It's **dangerous, it's counterproductive, and places Britain at greater risk of attack**. It will lead to **greater global instability**, and make it more likely, not less, that rogue states will obtain nuclear materials. It is irrelevant to the real threats that we face today, and indeed enhances those risks, rather than minimises them.

It seems to me that we have ALL the arguments our side. **The challenge is to make them more effectively, to get them heard more widely, to move it to the mainstream.**

Strategy

We need to build as wide an alliance as possible, and draw on all the different arguments which might bring people in.

That means **focussing not just on the ethical or moral arguments** against nuclear weapons, but also on the arguments based on **their in-effectiveness and irrelevance given the kinds of threats that face us today**. In reality, our most likely nuclear opponent is not a country **but an individual detonating a dirty bomb in a suitcase in one of our cities**. Who, exactly, would we be firing Trident, or its replacement, at? And the more countries that have nuclear weapons, the more risk there is of dangerous materials getting into the hands of non-state actors such as these.

I think we should focus, too, on the utter hypocrisy and absurdity of the pro-nuclear position. The government appears to think that possessing nuclear weapons helps to secure Britain's position as one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. But if the ability to blow up the planet is the qualification for presiding over the world's peacemaking body, then we should be welcoming India, Pakistan, and Israel to the Security Council too, and dusting off chairs ready for Iran and North Korea.

And what of our NPT obligations? How can we possibly be lecturing Iran or North Korea on their attempts to obtain nuclear weapons when we ourselves, far from disarming, are actually upgrading the weapons we have? Tony Blair might not be following the John Bolton school of politics, and demanding the withdrawal of any mention of nuclear disarmament from the draft document for this month's UN summit, but his actions amount to the same thing. In spite of all the fine words about the NPT, disarmament seems to be very far from his thoughts.

Believe it's possible

But to win more people to our cause, they have to believe that disarmament is possible – it's not just a dream – it can happen, and has happened. We should make more of the precedents that have already been set. **South Africa has disowned and dismantled its nuclear weapons** after the collapse of the apartheid regime. New states to emerge from the Soviet Union, like **Ukraine, renounced the nuclear systems they inherited on their territory. Argentina and Brazil dropped the nuclear capability they were developing** after negotiating a non-nuclear pact between themselves. **Even Iraq** turns out to have abandoned its nuclear weapons programme, although in that particular case the success of the non-proliferation regime was rather more of an embarrassment to Tony Blair than a cause for celebration.

Allies

Stop the War Campaigners – the millions who've marched to oppose the Iraq war

Obviously the links with the Stop the War Campaign are already very strong, and CND has been a key player and partner in much of their planning. But protesting against war on Iraq still attracts many more campaigners, gets more young people animated, than the debates on Britain's nuclear weapons. I think we need to address that. On all the major platforms, almost all of us have made the case that Britain didn't need to go to Baghdad to find WMD – we have our very own WMD here on our own doorstep. We've underlined at length the extraordinary hypocrisy of maintaining and further developing our own WMD, while waging illegal wars to stop others from obtaining them. Yet somehow the link still hasn't been really made among many.

But we do know that a lot of people are motivated by anger at the imperialism of the United States, and by the way Britain has now become nothing more than a client state. And so perhaps we should make more of the fact that Trident, and any replacement, is a living embodiment of our dependence on the US. All levels of the Trident system depend on US co-operation. We cannot use our nuclear weapons without US permission. The 58 Trident submarines on which it depends are not even owned by us, but are leased from the Pentagon in an arrangement that Denis Healey memorably termed “rent a rocket”.

Sir Rodric Braithwaite, former head of the Joint Intelligence committee and former ambassador to Moscow has observed, “Our ballistic missile submarines operate by kind permission of the Americans and would rapidly become useless if we fell out with them. Since it is no longer clear why we need a nuclear deterrent, that probably doesn’t matter. But it makes our admirals very nervous about irritating their US counterparts.”

And so as the - very much missed - Robin Cook so eloquently wrote for the Guardian, just a few weeks before his cruel and untimely death, “Renewing our collaboration with the US on nuclear weapons will deepen the bonds between Downing Street and the White House, at the very time when the rest of the nation longs for a more independent stance.”

Make Poverty History Campaigners

The costs of Trident replacement offer a good starting place for finding allies with us, who could see a hundred more effective ways of spending millions of pounds than on nuclear weapons. Could make stronger allies with the unions over this, who are crying out for greater investment in our schools and hospitals.

Recent reports in the Times suggest that the full cost of developing the Trident replacement will be between £15-20 billion, and that the defence secretary, John Reid, has already taken the first steps towards committing

these funds by opening talks with the US government on a successor to Trident. He's authorised officials to begin negotiations with Washington and with the defence companies on the project before the cabinet or MPs have had the chance to seriously debate it.

In the run-up to the recent G8 meeting in Gleneagles, the MPH campaign organised hundreds of thousands of people to take to the streets to demand an end to world poverty. But how many of them made the link with the billions that are wasted on Britain's nuclear weapons systems?

Whether Blair will succeed in reducing global inequality is highly doubtful, because – even if he had sufficient political will – it's not entirely in his gift. Yet he is about to spend sums on new nuclear weapons which will dwarf our newfound "generosity" to Africa. And it is entirely in his hands to make a unilateral cut in the global arsenal of weapons and to lead the world by example. We need to persuade campaigners that this is where they need to put their energies.

Commentators tell us that Blair is looking for a legacy. Well, here Tony, believe us, is a truly noble legacy.

Some existing military experts

Might seem a very unlikely alliance, but there are many military experts who would much rather see military spending on troops and tanks than on nuclear weapons. Trident costs us more than £12.5 bn – roughly half the whole defence budget for a year. Even if its successor didn't have a higher price tag (which it assuredly would), it could not be bought without cutting back on the conventional capacity of our armed forces. The army is already facing spending cuts, and many would be unhappy to see even more of the defence budget being diverted into another generation of nuclear weapons.

Mayors for Peace

An international campaign to help build up grassroots awareness and opposition to nuclear weapons, supporting the emergency appeal of the Mayor of Hiroshima for the elimination of nuclear weapons by 2020 – gives people something practical they can do – to lobby their mayor to sign up..

NVDA

Peaceful direct action has a key role to play, focusing attention, getting media coverage, and potentially obstructing work for months or even indefinitely. At Aldermaston, the Block the Builders initiative is an excellent one, but it needs to be much better known, with far more pledges made.

Role of EU (nb EP resolution)

The EU Strategy against the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction

As part of implementing the European Security, adopted by the European Council in December 2003, the Council also adopted an EU Strategy against the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction to address the threat posed by WMD.

One of the key measures of this EU WMD Strategy is firm engagement to promote the universalisation and reinforcement of multilateral agreements to prevent the proliferation of WMD and their means of delivery.

The other key measures of the EU WMD Strategy are the reinforcement of export controls, within and outside the EU, and the criminalisation of activities which contribute to the proliferation of WMD and WMD-related materials (a declaration has been adopted by the European Council).

5. 'Nuclear-sharing' – ie the hosting of US nuclear weapons bases – is probably outlawed under NPT. This is an issue for the EU too, as the EU itself – or non-nuclear member states – may find themselves in breach of NPT – and, having contributed directly to nuclear proliferation, if they enter into any mutual defence alliance (eg CFSP) with EU nuclear states (eg France and the UK).

I think this is the key to the argument you hoped to make really, as it leads to the conclusion that NATO states either protected by or hosting US nukes are potentially in breach of NPT – and are certainly unlikely to support either a harder stance on NPT from EU or a kind of nuclear-free EU, if such a future disarmed EU would require them to break nuclear ties with NATO.

This applies especially in the accession states which have been drawn to NATO's bosom as part of the Westernification post-1990. Ie Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland. It would become even more pronounced in the event of Turkish and Bulgarian accession.

3. EURATOM gives the EU responsibility for all radioactive material in the EU, particularly its safe storage and transportation. This has meant anti-Trident campaigners have been able to use EU law to challenge safety breaches arising from Trident, at Devonport and Aldermaston. See attached press release

An enlarged EU more likely to strengthen the majority in favour of NATO, and nuclear weapons deterrence.

But just a few months ago, the Belgian Senate adopted a resolution on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, demanding the withdrawal of US nuclear weapons that are currently based in Belgium, and indeed throughout many countries in Europe.