

# Why does Britain need to replace Trident?

February 2007

## 1. Introduction

It's great to see you all here. And we're here with a very important message for our government, and our message is this:

- The possession of nuclear weapons is **illegal and immoral**
- The cost of Trident replacement is **outrageous and obscene**
- The replacement of Trident is **utterly irrelevant to the real threats to our security that we face today**

The good news is that the **campaign against Trident replacement is growing**. The number of people prepared to come to meetings like this is getting bigger. We're increasingly winning the arguments. And more and more people are prepared to take part in peaceful protests at Faslane, the home of Britain's nuclear weapons submarines in Scotland.

I'd like to pay tribute to the organisers of Faslane 365, who had the vision and the ambition to think that we can keep a year-round protest at the base. I was there a few weeks back – and along with many others, was arrested by the Clydesdale police, on the grounds that our peaceful protest constitutes “action likely to cause a breach of the peace.”

I have to say I can never understand why it is our peaceful protest which is judged to breach the peace, rather than the Trident nuclear system itself, **with its 200 nuclear warheads, each of which has around 8 times the explosive power of the Hiroshima bomb which killed over 200,000 people.**

So let's be very clear. **Proliferation of nuclear weapons threatens the extinction of all life on our planet.** Alongside climate change, this is perhaps the greatest threat facing humanity, demanding urgent and global action. Yet, rather than seeking to defuse this threat, this government is actively increasing it, by planning a replacement to Trident.

## **2. Government Hypocrisy**

**Indeed the hypocrisy of this government, in maintaining and further developing our own nuclear weapons, whilst waging illegal wars to stop others from obtaining them, is truly breathtaking.**

Because Britain didn't need to go to Baghdad to find WMD – they're right here, on our doorstep, in Faslane.

**So what moral authority can we possibly have to lecture countries like Iran about not developing nuclear weapons, when we ourselves are continuing to do just that?**

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is made up of 2 pledges: non-nuclear states agree not to acquire nuclear weapons, **provided that** nuclear states begin a serious process of getting rid of theirs. **If we don't keep our side of that bargain, we can hardly be surprised if others don't keep theirs.**

Indeed, the biggest mistake of the Government's White Paper on Trident replacement is its **assumption that somehow British nuclear weapon policy exists in a vacuum**, and that other nations' choices are not influenced by our own posture.

**Take Iran, for example.**

Iran claims that their pursuit of nuclear power and a fuel cycle is consistent with the NPT.

And unfortunately, according to the letter of the NPT, they're right. The NPT does give them the facility to develop a sophisticated nuclear weapon capability within the law.

**And if they are allowed to use the same justifications for acquiring nuclear weapons as the UK government has put forward in its own White Paper for maintaining ours, one can only conclude that they have every reason to do so.**

Because while the White Paper talks of Britain needing nuclear weapons as an insurance against a possible future threat well into the future, **the threat to Iran today is very real.**

**Iran, in contrast to the UK, is surrounded by hostile forces, in a region riven by conflict.** The US has a policy of regime change, and the capability to reign down thousands of munitions on Iran every day from 11 neighbouring states, 2 battle carrier groups, and a formidable arsenal based on Britain's airbase at Diego Garcia. Iran faces a hostile nuclear-armed Israel, the unstable nuclear power of Pakistan is its neighbour.

And while we may think Britain's nuclear arsenal poses no threat to Iran, it certainly gives them geo-political justification. And indeed some within Iran in any case **do see Britain as a threat**, given our involvement in the invasion of Iraq and our support for the US. To many, British Trident submarines are seen as closely related the US Trident fleet, an important back-up to our conventional intervention capabilities. And in spite of the fact that there is no threat facing us, we still have 48 warheads on patrol at all times, and then claim it's a minimum.

### **3. Protection from Future Threats**

In September 2005, the then Defence Secretary John Reid suggested that a replacement for Trident would be necessary in case we face a nuclear enemy in the future. Another former Defence Secretary, Malcolm Rifkind, recently described our nuclear weapons as an insurance policy for the future. But rather than providing insurance against an unspecified future threat, replacing

Trident will increase the danger of nuclear proliferation and will contribute to a new nuclear arms race.

If the UK envisages at least another 50 years of British security being based on threatening other populations with mass destruction, then we encourage other states to do the same and so, paradoxically, we increase our security risk than decrease it.

The Nobel Laureate Professor Sir Joseph Rosblat put it well:

“If some nations – including the most powerful militarily – say that they need nuclear weapons for their security, then such security cannot be denied to other countries which really feel insecure. Proliferation of nuclear weapons is the logical consequence of this nuclear policy.”

#### **4. Dependence on US**

And let's not pretend that we would be acquiring an independent weapon. All levels of the Trident system, and any replacement, depend on US cooperation. The missiles aren't even owned by us, but are leased from the Pentagon in an arrangement that Denis Healy memorably dubbed as “rent-a-rocket”. Renewing our collaboration – and indeed dependence – on the US over nuclear weapons will deepen the bonds between Downing St and the White House, at the very time when the rest of the world longs for a more independent stance.

#### **5. Today's Security Challenge**

It's widely agreed that the main military threat facing Britain today is terrorism carried out by non-state actors. The Defence Committee Inquiry in 2006, looking into the strategic context of Trident Replacement, concluded that: “the most pressing threat currently facing the UK is that of international terrorism. Witnesses to our inquiry overwhelmingly argued that the strategic nuclear deterrent could serve no useful or practical purpose in countering this kind of threat.”

Indeed, in October 2005, the Prime Minister had also come to this conclusion. “I do not think that anyone pretends that the independent nuclear deterrent is a defence against terrorism.”

We already know from the terrible attacks in New York and London that possession of nuclear weapons by a nuclear weapon state does not dissuade terrorists. In addition, terrorists could never present any accurately located target for such a weapon of indiscriminate devastation.

And so when it comes to terrorism, **nuclear weapons are hopelessly irrelevant.** The elegant theories of deterrence all appear beside the point in the face of a suicide bomber who actively courts martyrdom.

## **6. Cost**

Investment in a new strategic nuclear system would be worse than an irrelevance, however. **It would be an extravagant and unforgiveable diversion of resources from the real priorities we face.**

Initial estimates suggested that the cost of Trident replacement would be in the region of £25 billion.

That’s the equivalent of the money needed to pay for 60,000 newly qualified nurses and 60,000 new secondary school teachers for the next 10 years.

Recent estimates suggest that when the annual costs of maintaining a replacement for Trident throughout its life are added in, we’re looking at a bill of nearer £76 billion.

To use that amount of money on a project that will make Britain and the world a far more dangerous place is politically irresponsible, morally bankrupt, and economically obscene.

## **7. Climate Change**

Every pound spent on Trident is a pound not spent on more appropriate responses to the real threat we face – climate change. After the most recent IPCC report last week, no-one can be in any doubt that, unless we take urgent action now, we face a world of floods, droughts, and famines –

together with the conflict over ever more scarce resources which those are likely to bring in their wake.

As the government's own report authored by Nicholas Stern pointed out, every pound not spent on climate change now means an extra £5-6 of cost just a few years down the line – every year, in perpetuity.

The £76 billion price tag for Trident replacement is desperately needed elsewhere, for energy efficiency, energy conservation, and renewable energy, making us more secure by reducing the impacts of climate change, and by ending our dependence on foreign oil – a key root cause of global terrorism. £16 billion would insulate all 16 million homes in Britain that are currently uninsulated, saving 4% of UK carbon emissions and helping to prevent 20,000 annual cold-related deaths. £30 billion would provide 3,500 off-shore turbines, supplying 15% of UK electricity use.

## 8. **Disarmament is possible**

And disarmament is possible - it's not just a dream. It can happen, and has happened:

- **S. Africa** has disowned and dismantled its nuclear weapons after the collapse of the apartheid regime.
- New states to emerge from the **former 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 this government than a cause for celebration.

## 9. **Why the Rush?**

Greens don't actively support the proposal that the decision on Trident replacement be delayed, preferring that a decision be taken now to wind down

patrols entirely and to dismantle our warheads. But we do nevertheless want to challenge the government to justify its haste to come to this decision. Given the technical evidence that the submarines could go on for a great deal longer, we are left to imagine that the government's decision is designed more to establish Blair's legacy to Britain of a Labour Party strong on defence, and to keep BAE systems afloat, than for any deeper strategic reasons. And in the wake of the Special Fraud Office investigation into BAE, one wonders how wise that is, anyway.

A leading US nuclear expert, Professor Richard Garwin, former chair of the US government's science advisory committee and consultant to the nuclear weapons programme, has branded the plans to replace Trident as "premature and wasteful". According to Garwin, inexpensive engine repairs to the 4 boats could extend the vessels' active service by 10-15 years – and delaying the decision for 15 years would save around 5 billion pounds.

## **10. Conclusion**

The government's case depends upon the conjunction of a number of highly flawed assumptions all coming together at once over the next 40 years:

- That there will re-emerge an active nuclear state-based threat to Britain that uniquely requires a British nuclear deterrent.
- That nuclear deterrence works effectively against possible threats
- That it is failsafe and secure
- That UK nuclear capacity does not itself drive the proliferation that they eventually seek to act in deterrence against

Each of these assumptions is full of holes, and ignores all the other arguments about illegality and immorality. Working towards a nuclear weapon-free world (which is meant to be government policy!) more seriously is far more realistic, and promises a much better, safer, future.

The decision on whether or not to replace Britain's nuclear weapons system must ultimately be taken on the basis of what will most contribute to the

security of people in Britain. A decision not to replace Trident will best meet that requirement:

- It will strengthen the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime by ensuring Britain's compliance with its international treaty obligations
- It will deter nuclear proliferation and de-escalate current tensions leading towards a new arms race
- And it will release significant financial resources to meet a range of other spending priorities

A decision not to replace Trident shouldn't be taken in a vacuum, as a single measure alone, however. It needs to be taken in tandem with government initiatives towards its stated goal of multilateral disarmament: backing a World Summit on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, and working towards a Nuclear Weapons Convention banning all such weapons.

We're always told that Tony Blair is in search of a legacy. Well here, Tony, believe us, is a truly noble legacy – to rid this country of our illegal nuclear arsenal, and put our resources instead into tackling the real social and environmental challenges we face.