

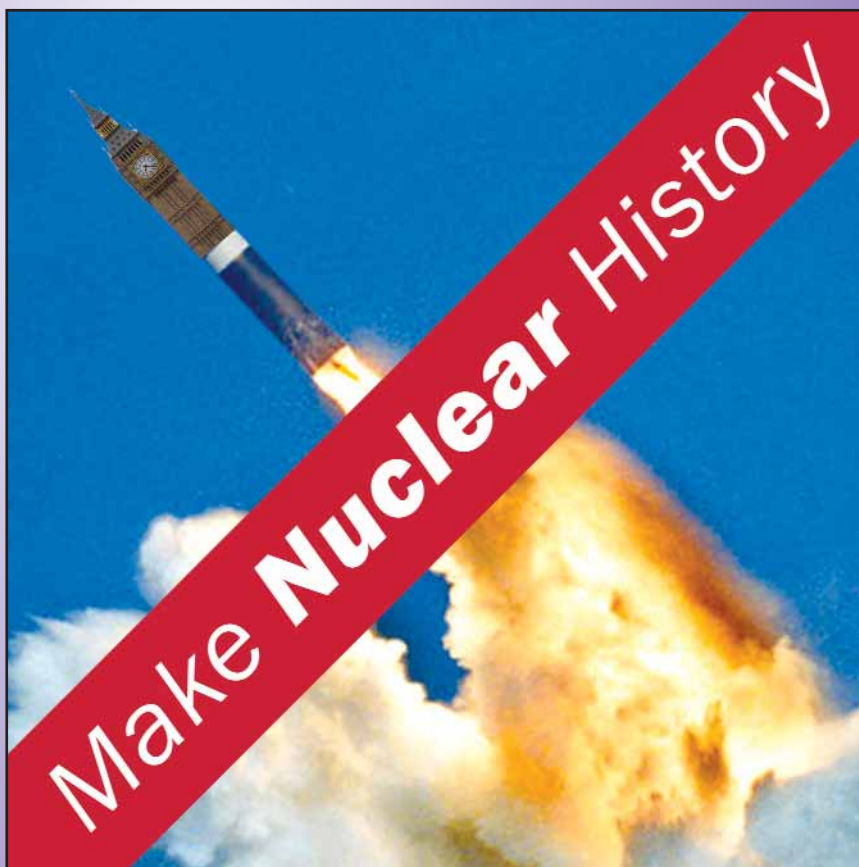
Desperate to be world champions...



**...there is another way
(and it doesn't involve penalties or facing Shane Warne)**

On March 14 Parliament will decide whether the UK commits now to building a new generation of nuclear-armed submarines. But what kind of relationship do we want to have with the rest of the world? One where we hold back on this decision and lead the world in framing treaties to build international security and eventually ban nuclear weapons, or one where we rush unthinking down a unilateral path that undermines international cooperation?

**Britain can lead the world into a more positive future
Why come second again?**



Let Britain champion disarmament



Don't Rush: The benefits of not replacing Trident could be considerable

Trident Briefing Number 2, March 2007, British American Security Information Council

Those who favour replacing Trident now are quick to argue: “If we fail to replace Trident now we get nothing in return”.

This is a false and misleading argument.

The alleged benefits of being in the nuclear club include:

- 1) Enhanced status and influence; and
- 2) An insurance against future threats.

These are ‘comfort blanket’ benefits. A deferral of any procurement decision would prevent a shock to the currently vulnerable non-proliferation system and open a window of opportunity for Britain to lead a new international nuclear disarmament initiative. We need time to consider properly Britain’s move towards non-nuclear status. The benefits are too significant to pass up in a hurry.

Britain’s International Status and Influence

Rather than losing political status, Britain’s reputation, and therefore influence, would almost certainly rise if it were to join the majority world (currently 184 states) committed to non-nuclear weapon status. Particularly after Iraq.

Even today, as a nuclear weapon state with a better record of disarmament than others, Britain is in a strong position to devise and drive a multilateral disarmament process that could accommodate threshold, virtual, declared and *de facto* nuclear states as well as the original five Nuclear-Weapon States (NWS). In doing so Britain would enhance its seat at the top-table by leading the way towards a nuclear weapon-free-world.

An early commitment now to build a new generation of nuclear ballistic missile submarines will dramatically harm this potential. Other states will view Britain’s commitment to disarmament with cynicism.

Insurance for Unknown Security Threats

What of future attempted blackmail by a WMD-armed terrorist group, ‘rogue state’ like Iran or North Korea or an existing nuclear weapon power, such as China or Russia, that ‘turns bad’?

The language of fear has framed the UK debate around a desire for a nuclear belt-and-braces approach, obsessed with maintaining a continuous patrol at sea at all costs. In contrast, the majority world of states without nuclear weapons already bears the risk, preferring to place their future security in an international non-proliferation effort. It is a powerful message to other governments and publics alike if Britain, in one of the most secure regions of the world and part of the largest military alliance on the planet, cannot contemplate giving up nuclear weapons. A terrifying cascade of new nuclear weapon states in the next decades would indeed become inevitable, and we would have to share the blame.

In any case, how credible is Britain’s nuclear deterrent today? We avoided Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD) during the Cold War more by luck than judgment. The persistence in a belief that retaliation with nuclear weapons is a legitimate and appropriate response to current terrorist and unknown future threats assumes even less understanding of human psychology and carries much greater risk.

“We endorse setting the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons and working energetically on the actions required to achieve that goal”

- George P. Shultz, William J. Perry, Henry A. Kissinger and Sam Nunn, *A World Free of Nuclear Weapons*, 4 January 2007



“We must put the goal of eliminating nuclear weapons back on the agenda, not in a distant future but as soon as possible”.

- Mikhail Gorbachev, *The Nuclear Threat*, 31 January 2007



A Trident nuclear submarine leaves the Barrow-in-Furness shipyard, passing a Royal National Lifeboat Institute station on Roa Island. Photo: © Bob Straughton

General Lee Butler, former commander-in-chief of the US nuclear arsenal, questioned the folly of nuclear deterrence ten years ago. Who can imagine our decision to shatter the 60-year precedent of non-use of nuclear weapons? How could the UK ever again advocate against nuclear proliferation? Would we hold an entire society accountable for the decision of a single demented state or terrorist leader? Butler concluded that we would martyr our enemy, alienate our friends and give impetus to states that seek such weapons covertly. In short, such a response on the part of the British Government is inconceivable, and therefore our 'independent' deterrent lacks credibility. It is effectively a neutered deterrent.

Even if a nuclear threat to our vital interest did emerge in the next 30 years, we cannot be confident that nuclear weapons would deter it. Only through a managed transition to the international abolition of nuclear weapons can real and lasting security from nuclear terror be obtained.

A different approach

In order to make nuclear weapons marginal to the everyday conduct of international affairs, secure countries like Britain need to lead by example and show confidence in the non-proliferation regime and collective security through the EU, NATO and UN.

There are two clear benefits to the UK suspending the decision to develop new nuclear submarines:

1. The opportunity to strengthen the NPT regime in the run-up to the 2010 NPT Review Conference; and
2. The chance to direct the expenditure to more appropriate security projects: proper pay, conditions and kit for our armed forces; cooperative threat reduction; and measures to combat climate change (as discussed in Briefing No.3 on costs)

"Britain cannot expect other countries to refrain from acquiring nuclear weapons if it upgrades its Trident nuclear weapons system"

- Dr Mohammed ElBaradei, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, speech at the London School of Economics, February 2007

The NPT Regime

The nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) forms the cornerstone of a process that has already successfully halved the world's nuclear weapons stockpiles and ensured the majority of the world today is nuclear-free.

The NPT confers no "right" to possess nuclear weapons indefinitely (as claimed by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons on 21 February 2007). The NWS are merely defined (in Article IX) "*for the purposes of this treaty*" as those who tested before 1967.

At the 2000 NPT Review Conference all five NWS made an "*unequivocal undertaking . . . to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals*", and committed themselves to a program of "*practical steps for the systematic and progressive efforts to implement Article VI*". Some of these '13 Disarmament Steps' were given a target date; others were not. An early decision to modernize its nuclear submarines would place Britain outside of this framework.

The future of Britain's nuclear deterrent is a tipping point with profound implications – positive or negative – for global security and nonproliferation efforts. It is as fatuous to claim that a British commitment to a new generation of nuclear weapons will have no impact on nuclear proliferation as it is to claim that a decision to disarm would in itself convince others to disarm. A deferral of the decision at this stage, combined with an assertive diplomatic push for disarmament internationally, would:

- pressurise others to further reduce their nuclear weapon stockpiles;
- isolate France in an otherwise nuclear-weapon free EU;
- encourage the majority nuclear weapon-free world to stay that way; and
- allow Britain to play an effective role in capping and rolling back the nuclear programmes within North Korea and Iran (as has been done successfully in other states – see Box), and to develop the verification and policing architecture for moving to a nuclear weapon free world.

Britain's nuclear weapons laboratories could refocus on developing international cooperative threat reduction measures (of the kind that are securing 'loose nukes' in the former Soviet Union) and defences against 'dirty bomb' attacks.

The spread of nuclear weapons is not yet out of control. The nuclear non-proliferation architecture has been relatively successful and robust. Since 1970 more states have given up their ambitions for nuclear weapons than have acquired them.

Conclusion: Delay the decision to replace Trident

The assumptions underlying the belief that nuclear weapons are a necessary deterrent and insurance policy need to be rigorously re-examined. The evidence suggests that the end of the Cold War has rendered irrelevant the concept of MAD and that, at best, reliance on nuclear weapons for the purposes of deterrence is increasingly hazardous and decreasingly effective. As Michael Portillo said, "Britain should base its nuclear weapons decision on future needs and not past traumas".

The strong article of faith in the pro-nuclear lobby that British nuclear weapons have little impact on other countries' calculations is not shared by the 184 majority states who would view positively a non-replacement decision. The majority nuclear weapon-free world recognises the value of non-proliferation and their appeal to the potentially proliferating states to stop is weakened by the clear lack of commitment to full disarmament displayed by NWS such as Britain. Confidence in non-proliferation is undermined by a British policy that shows no faith in the very architecture for restraint that it expects the rest of the world to abide by.

Henry Kissinger, Sam Nunn, William Perry, George Schultz and Mikhail Gorbachev, among others, have stressed the urgent need for a new global initiative to build a framework for a world free of the nuclear threat. A US-led international programme of nuclear stockpile reduction and other non-proliferation measures has been proposed. This provides a unique opportunity for Britain to work jointly with the United States in the cause of greater global security. Pending the development of such an initiative, any decision on the renewal of the Trident fleet of nuclear submarines should be deferred. By grasping this opportunity and offering to sacrifice the limited national self-interest that comes with the short-term, exclusive privilege of membership of the nuclear club, Britain would become truly world champions.

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Which countries have rolled back a nuclear weapons programme?

Argentina	Norway
Australia	Romania
Belarus	Switzerland
Brazil	South Africa
Egypt	South Korea
Indonesia	Sweden
Italy	Taiwan
Kazakhstan	Ukraine
Libya	Yugoslavia

However, one thing IS clear: the status quo is unsustainable. Replacing Trident would be interpreted by both the handful of nuclear weapon and aspirant nuclear weapon states, and by the majority nuclear-free world, as 'business as usual'. Nine countries cannot maintain their monopoly of nuclear weapons indefinitely. The slogan "Do as I say, not as I do" will not hold back the tide of nuclear proliferation much longer.

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The Trident briefings series:

- No.1 **UK Trident replacement: too important to rush into** (December 2006)
- No.2 **The non-proliferation benefits of delay** (March 2006)
- No.3 **The cost benefits of delay** (March 2006)
- No.4 **A cheaper insurance premium - virtual deterrence?** (March 2006)"