



Abolition 2000 UK

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To achieve for the new century a global treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons

Evidence and comments submitted to the BASIC Trident Commission.

1) Should the UK remain a nuclear weapon state?

Abolition 2000 endorses the opinions expressed by ICAN UK and the related analyses already submitted which propose that the UK cease to be a Nuclear Weapons State (NWS). The UK's supposed 'independent' deterrent can play no effective role in defence of the UK in the foreseeable future. Eventual abandonment of the nuclear option is necessary and inevitable. But we recognise that immediate unilateral disarmament by the UK may not be politically possible. Efforts should therefore be made to take partial steps to reduce the weaponry without any technical modernisation. We must also diminish the threat implied by the supporting policy as well as the cost of the programme at a time of continued fiscal difficulty.

2) If it should, is Trident renewal the only or best option that the U.K. can and should pursue?

There are a number of problems with the Trident programme, even in the context of the UK remaining, perhaps temporarily, a NWS. The expected cost of a renewal programme will be a burden on the exchequer. Building a new generation of submarines devoted to ICBMs will send a negative message to a world still hopeful that the five present NWS, acknowledged by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), will make good on their commitments to disarm. Such commitments are expressed in the unanimous agreed statements from the 2000 and 2010 NPT Review Conferences.

The Commission might also examine the apparent asynchrony with US submarine plans, which could argue for substantial delay and improved maintenance of the present boats. There may be difficulty in converting Trident submarines to non-nuclear roles (cf. Lord Owen's submission) as would eventually be needed as part of a serious and progressive nuclear disarmament process. We understand that the proposed standard missile compartment (also to be used by the USA) is a 4-unit system. It has been suggested that the UK may use two such units for a total of 8 launch tubes carried on possibly smaller submarines than the present V-class. It would be feasible to reduce the number to a single unit of 4. The proposed number of 40 warheads per boat is far too many even for a maximum. Even if there are to be only 8 missiles, we must also further decrease the total number of warheads and reconsider the number of warheads per missile. Indeed in the interests of transparency the latter number, long regarded as either 3 or 4 but currently classified, should be revealed openly.

Before any new build there should be a re-examination of the idea of a minimum plausible deterrent. There should also be a re-examination of Trident's military purpose, if indeed it has any. Further delay would enable closer interaction with US, French and NATO plans and more thought. If dedicated submarines are to be built despite our and others' criticisms then far fewer than 4 boats will be 'enough', particularly if the doctrine of continuous ('24/7') patrols were to be abandoned.

3) *What more can and should the U.K do to more effectively promote global nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and nuclear security?*

Whatever the final Trident decision greater transparency *re* missile and warhead numbers is needed, with clear evidence of significant reductions from current levels and an intention to reach zero weapons within a reasonable time frame. We should be informed as to whether warheads are currently being decommissioned. Britain should offer to put its weapons 'on the table' at future disarmament negotiations instead of persistently arguing that our present warhead numbers are so much smaller than those of the USA and Russia that they need not be included until a far later stage. Britain should clearly declare a policy of 'no first use' instead of the uncertain policy wording currently used. Britain should join the UN majority, which includes some of our NATO allies, in supporting the annual UNGA resolution requesting the 'dealerting' of nuclear weapons. Our country's apparent dealerting of our own weapons should be internationally emphasised by making this a desirable policy for all weapons states. Britain should also seriously consider accepting the idea of a Nuclear Weapons Convention (NWC) and hence working with other nations in the UN and CD to bring about a formal discussion of such a NWC. This could provide a much needed basis for a future multilateral nuclear disarmament conference.

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