



House of Commons  
Defence Committee

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# Deterrence in the twenty-first century

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**Eleventh Report of Session 2013–14**

*Volume II*

*Written evidence*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be published 11 March 2014*

## The Defence Committee

The Defence Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Ministry of Defence and its associated public bodies.

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The Reports of the Committee, the formal minutes relating to that report, oral evidence taken and some or all written evidence are available in a printed volume. Additional written evidence may be published on the internet only.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are James Rhys (Clerk), Dougie Wands (Second Clerk), Karen Jackson (Audit Adviser), Ian Thomson (Committee Specialist), Christine Randall (Senior Committee Assistant), Rowena Macdonald and Carolyn Bowes (Committee Assistants).

### Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Defence Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 5745; the Committee's email address is [defcom@parliament.uk](mailto:defcom@parliament.uk). Media inquiries should be addressed to Alex Paterson on 020 7219 1589.

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# Written evidence

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## Written evidence submitted by the Ministry of Defence

*“No state currently has the combination of capability and intent needed to pose a conventional military threat to the territorial integrity of the United Kingdom. Yet history shows that both capability and intent can change, sometimes in a matter of only a few years. Our aim is to deter direct threats, including through our membership of NATO and, ultimately, our independent nuclear deterrent.”*

2010 National Security Strategy

### INTRODUCTION

1. This memorandum considers the current role of deterrence in defence and the involvement of the UK Armed Forces, as well as highlighting areas where new thinking about deterrence is underway. Deterrence has an essential role to play in dealing with the diverse current and future threats facing the UK, but the rapid evolution of the threat, including new state and non-state actors, and the increased accessibility and proliferation of advanced technology, will in some circumstances challenge the UK's ability to deter in future. This paper aims to inform and reassure the Committee that these complex issues and series of relationships are being properly addressed in the run-up to the 2015 SDSR.

### WHAT IS DETERRENCE?

2. The deterrence of threats to the UK's security, influence and prosperity is the primary peacetime role of the Armed Forces. In strategic terms, deterrence is a “way” by which a state might seek to deliver its policy “ends”. In a military context, deterrence employs the proportionate threat of force to discourage someone from doing something, by convincing them that the costs of their actions will outweigh any possible benefits.

3. Ultimately, deterrence and coercion are about conditioning or changing the perceptions of a potential opponent in order to influence or persuade them. They are different from warfighting, which involves the actual use of physical force to degrade or destroy the capabilities of an adversary to the point where they are unable or unwilling to continue resistance. If force is used in support of coercion or deterrence, it is used in a limited way in order to demonstrate resolve and to establish the credibility of determination and ability to resort to more extreme measures if necessary. Of course, either the threat or the use of force can only be employed in circumstances where there is a sound legal basis.

4. The Armed Forces are only one tool, albeit an important one, in a nation's ability to deter. Diplomacy and economic statecraft can also offer important levers to affect an adversary's calculus. These can be used alongside the threat of force in varying combinations and sequences, and with differing degrees of intensity, to achieve the desired effect. Deterrence is in fact most effective when it harmonises effects across government, drawing together and using all the instruments of national and international power.

5. There are two main forms of deterrence: deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment. Deterrence by punishment, which threatens to inflict costs on an adversary through retaliation after an attack, is perhaps the better known. Deterrence by denial aims to dissuade a potential attacker by convincing them that their aggression will not succeed and that they will be denied the benefits they hope to obtain. Very often, the two forms of deterrence will work closely together.

### UK DETERRENCE POLICY AND DOCTRINE

6. The 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) acknowledged the important role of deterrence in supporting the strategic objective of a secure and resilient UK. Deterrence is seen as a core part of two of the National Security Tasks: exerting influence to exploit opportunities and manage risks; and protecting the UK and our interests against threats from state and non-state sources.

7. The 2010 SDSR demanded “a renewed emphasis on using our conventional forces to deter potential adversaries” as part of a broader focus by the Armed Forces on tackling risks before they escalate, and on exerting UK influence, as part of a better coordinated overall national security response. To this end, the SDSR sought consciously to maintain a broad spectrum of defence and other capabilities.

### CONVENTIONAL AND NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

8. To many, the word deterrence has become inextricably linked with nuclear weapons. The UK's nuclear deterrent is delivered by a fleet of four submarines, known as SSBNs, under Operation RELENTLESS. One of these submarines is always at sea as part of a Continuous At Sea Deterrent (CASD) posture, which has been unbroken since 1969. This capability is widely referred to as “The Deterrent”. It is there to prevent, at the extreme, any threat to national existence, or nuclear blackmail from a nuclear-armed state against the UK homeland or our vital interests. However, while the destructive potential of nuclear weapons is an extremely powerful deterrent, the possession of which helped to maintain peace with other nuclear powers, that same destructive potential means that the use of nuclear weapons is only appropriate to deter the most extreme threats. The UK views its nuclear weapons as political not military or war fighting weapons. Nuclear weapons

are therefore just one element of the total capability to maintain/achieve the deterrent effect the UK seeks. To be most effective, deterrence requires the knitting together of both conventional (including, increasingly, asymmetric capabilities such as cyber) and nuclear capabilities in a carefully graduated tapestry, supported by clear strategic messaging.

9. British Defence Doctrine recognises that, given the complexity and variety of threats faced, “most contemporary deterrence is achieved through conventional means and a wider, more flexible range of postures and responses with the associated levels of military and political risk”. Underpinned by this doctrine, the UK’s armed forces are involved in a number of deterrent activities. These include longstanding commitments, such as that undertaken by British Forces South Atlantic Islands whose mission is “to deter military aggression against the South Atlantic Overseas Territories,” and the RAF’s Quick Reaction Alert deterring threats to the integrity of UK airspace, as well as more targeted or one-off activities such as the deployment of the Rapier air defence system in London for the duration of the 2012 Olympics (a form of deterrence by denial) and the Royal Navy’s contribution to deterring piracy off the Horn of Africa.

10. Future Force 2020 is deliberately geared towards capabilities that have a potential deterrent effect. Ultimately, the British Armed Forces in their entirety serve to deter, with strategic deterrence underpinned by a nuclear capability. The Queen Elizabeth Class (QEC) aircraft carrier, and the Joint Strike Fighter aircraft that will fly from them, will be among the most powerful instruments of conventional deterrence within Future Force 2020. The total capability delivered by these assets is known as Carrier-Enabled Power Projection. This emphasis upon the projection of power and influence reflects a conscious effort to maximise the deterrent effect of this capability. Within the plans for Army 2020 the regional alignment of brigades will help to achieve positive influence with, and understanding of, countries in regions of interest. The retention of high readiness forces that can deploy rapidly to respond to contingencies anywhere in the world is designed to deter adversaries from acting against our interests.

11. The UK does not operate in isolation, but contributes to and benefits from a global network of allies and partners. Most importantly, from the perspective of deterrence, the UK is a member of NATO. Under the terms of Article V of the 1949 Washington Treaty, which established NATO, the Allies agree “*that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all.*” Today, the Alliance is able to draw upon the nuclear and conventional capabilities of 28 NATO Allies, the most important of which is the United States. This commitment to collective defence has played a critical role in maintaining peace in Western Europe since World War II. NATO, and the UK’s commitment to it, is the cornerstone of UK Defence policy.

## EFFECTIVE DETERRENCE

12. Deterrence is only likely to succeed if the envisaged use of force (and, in the case of wider dissuasion, incentives) is credible and deliverable, and its potential is communicated unequivocally to those whose decision-making it seeks to affect. Each of those component elements are expanded on briefly below:

- (a) *Capability*. At the most basic level, deterrence depends upon the maintenance of sufficient capability to carry out a threat. For deterrence to be effective it is necessary to demonstrate to a potential adversary that the costs of action outweigh the potential benefits to be gained. Thus, for example, in the nuclear context of the Cold War, “*neither Britain nor France could have obliterated the Soviet Union, as it could them, but to pose fearful damage as the cost of reaping the advantages of their removal was nonetheless a valid approach*”.<sup>1</sup> This principle can be adapted into the conventional deterrence context, where the UK on a national basis may not have the capability unilaterally to defeat states with larger populations and Armed Forces, but it can nevertheless still, by conventional as well as nuclear means, deter potentially hostile powers from targeting the UK or its interests.
- (b) *Credibility*. Credible deterrence is based not just on a level of capability, but also upon the demonstrable will to use that capability. If there were no circumstances in which Britain would be prepared to use its nuclear or conventional forces, then neither would have any deterrent value. Credibility depends as much on political will as it does upon military capability.
- (c) *Communication*. Ensuring an adversary understands both our demands and the consequences of not meeting them is challenging. Effective strategic communications are an essential component of deterrence. The secret treaties prior to World War I were an ineffective form of deterrence precisely for the reason that no-one knew about them; by contrast, the terms of NATO’s Article V are transparent and widely understood.

13. *Comprehension*. Although it is not, in doctrinal terms, a core principle of deterrence, all of this is underpinned by understanding. Just as they must understand us (our thresholds, capability and intent), we must understand them. As noted earlier, deterrence is psychological. In order to influence a decision-maker, or decision-makers, who may come from a different political, military or cultural background, it is necessary to understand their motivations and aims, and to identify those fears or aspirations which are most likely to affect their calculations. Effective deterrence is predicated upon being able to put oneself in the shoes of those whom

<sup>1</sup> Sir Michael Quinlan, “Thinking About Nuclear Weapons: Principles, Problems, Prospects”

one is seeking to deter. This is likely to require significant up-front investment in intelligence, engagement (where possible) and in cultural awareness.

#### DETERRENCE IN A CHANGING STRATEGIC CONTEXT

14. The end of the Cold War changed fundamentally the geostrategic context. The dominant doctrine of Soviet-Western nuclear deterrence through mutually assured destruction was relegated to the most extreme of potential future circumstances. The 2010 NSS, entitled “A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty”, noted that the risk picture was likely to become increasingly diverse, with no single risk dominating, and that, as a result, achieving security will become more complex:

*“During the Cold War we faced an existential threat from a state adversary through largely predictable military or nuclear means. We no longer face such predictable threats. The adversaries we face will change and diversify as enemies seek means of threat or attack which are cheaper, more easily accessible and less attributable than conventional warfare.”*

15. This diagnosis of uncertainty will pose significant challenges to the UK in the future. Future Force 2020 has been designed to ensure that the UK Armed Forces can keep pace with the evolving threat, but, as has already been highlighted, deterrence is a whole-of-government activity in which the military is just one of the instruments available. The important role for diplomacy and engagement in shaping the strategic context, in order to avoid the need for the application of military force, should not be understated. The Armed Forces have an important role to play in these activities too, including through defence engagement activity, such as capacity-building and training to strengthen alliances and partnerships, and to enhance collective defence and deterrence.

16. In this section, we highlight a number of areas to show how the UK Government’s approach has evolved, or is evolving, to face new and emerging threats.

#### NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

17. The UK’s nuclear policy and posture was explained in some detail in the 2010 SDSR. As a responsible nuclear weapon state and party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the UK is committed to the long term goal of a world without nuclear weapons, and continues to work to control proliferation and to make progress on multilateral disarmament. However, while large nuclear arsenals remain in existence, and while the threat of nuclear proliferation to new state or even non-state actors remains, the Government is clear that it will not countenance a position in which the UK could be open to nuclear blackmail, or where the UK could be deterred by nuclear means from taking the action necessary to maintain global and regional security. At the same time, the UK’s nuclear deterrent makes a substantial contribution to NATO’s deterrent posture, supporting collective defence of the Alliance as a whole.

18. The UK’s nuclear declaratory policy makes clear the restrained nature of our deterrence posture. The UK has long been clear that they would only be used in extreme circumstances of self defence, including the defence of our NATO Allies, and would not use any weapons contrary to international law. Our focus is on preventing nuclear attack or coercion that cannot be countered by other means. While the UK does not rule in or out the first use of nuclear weapons, in order not to simplify the calculations of a potential aggressor by defining more precisely the circumstances in which the UK might consider the use of nuclear capabilities, UK nuclear doctrine is exclusively one of deterrence. Maintaining ambiguity over when, how and at what scale nuclear weapons might be used enhances the deterrent effect.

#### BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENCE

19. Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) is a form of deterrence by denial. Though still evolving, the concept is designed to deter an actor with limited ballistic missile assets. It reasons that, faced by a reasonably effective BMD system, he may be less likely to launch a valuable missile. In the context of a future threat environment where Europe could be within range of ballistic missiles launched by medium-sized regional powers, BMD has the potential to play an important role within a broader deterrent strategy. It is not, and will never be, a panacea and is limited by the assets it has available. BMD systems are no substitute for a nuclear deterrent.

#### INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

20. The threat of international terrorism represents a significant challenge from a deterrence perspective. Non-state actors can complicate issues of attribution, defining and communicating “red lines”, and determining what represents a proportionate and deliverable response. Nevertheless, deterrence undoubtedly has a role to play in dealing with the threat of terrorism, and is a theme that runs through the Government’s counter-terrorism strategy, known as CONTEST.

21. CONTEST is built around four core strands: Protect, Prepare, Pursue, Prevent. The first two of these strands—Protect and Prepare—are forms of deterrence by denial. They involve, for example, the physical protection of infrastructure to make it harder for terrorists to operate, and to enhance the UK’s resilience where attacks succeed. Pursue involves elements of deterrence by denial, seeking to detect, investigate and disrupt terrorist activity before it can endanger the public, and also elements of deterrence by punishment by seeking,

wherever possible, to bring those involved in terrorist activity to justice. The latter may not be an effective form of deterrence against an ideologically-motivated terrorist, but it has relevance in the context of state sponsorship of terrorism, or of enablers such as those who offer financial backing. Prevent involves elements of what has sometimes been called “deterrence by counter-narrative”, seeking to undermine the ideological convictions of those who may be inclined to participate in terrorism.

#### CYBER

22. The deterrence of cyber attack arguably provides the most acute challenge due to its pervasiveness, ease of access, global reach and the difficulty of identifying actors in order to communicate a credible threat. Cyber defence, a form of deterrence by denial and a whole-of-government effort undertaken in close partnership with industry, has benefited from significant investment since the 2010 SDSR, although the exponential growth in the rate and sophistication of attacks undoubtedly represents a severe challenge. The MOD recently announced that, to supplement defensive capability, the UK will build a cyber strike capability—an offensive capability to deter adversaries from attacking us.

#### CONCLUSION

23. The UK Armed Forces are at the core of our nation’s security. Wherever possible, the UK will aim to deter a potential opponent from pursuing a course of action that runs counter to our interests, or coerce them into stopping or reversing actions that they have already undertaken through actions short of war. Above all, the Armed Forces give us the means to threaten or use force when other levers of power are unable to protect our vital national interests.

24. Both deterrence and coercion will depend upon the perceived credibility of the threat. An essential part of our credibility rests on the possession of sufficient military capability—both conventional and nuclear—and consistent messaging that, when circumstances warrant it, we can and are prepared to use it. Additionally, we can enhance our credibility both by working closely with other instruments of national power in order to give us more coercive options (for example, economic sanctions) and by aligning ourselves with allies and partners to achieve a multiplying effect. We must think and act creatively, particularly when faced by an asymmetric threat from a non-traditional adversary—for example, we must improve our ability to identify and deal with cyber attackers.

25. Whether deterring or coercing, success will be rooted in understanding the motivations driving the opponent’s behaviour, and we should be ready to consider a mix of threats and incentives in order to shift their decision calculus, persuading them that their interests would be better served by compliance. Where we cannot deter or coerce, we should consider whether the threat can be contained at a level that is acceptable. We will usually consider intervention only when deterrence, coercion or containment of a threat has been unsuccessful.

October 2013

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#### Written evidence from Professor Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield, FBA

At the end of the oral evidence session on 24 April 2013, the Chairman, Mr Arbuthnot, asked the witnesses to write to the Committee on the theme of “Nuclear deterrence: does it work anymore?” adding that:

It seems to me that if what you are defending against is a ballistic missile from another state, it is easy to know against whom you are retaliating. If instead what you are defending against is a nuclear bomb, clandestinely put in a container, sailed around the world and ending up in Southampton, which explodes, against whom do you retaliate? And if you do not know against whom you are retaliating, does deterrence as such work anymore?

There is a long historical provenance for part of the Chairman’s question. In deep secrecy in the early 1950s, the possibility of an atomic bomb-in-a-freighter and what we would now call a 9/11 contingency in the air, preoccupied the Chiefs of Staff, their planners and an inner group of ministers.

In September 1950, a group commissioned by the Chiefs of Staff and working under the cover-name of the Imports Research Committee contemplated an atomic bomb in a Russian or Soviet bloc vessel in a British port or “the detonation of an atomic bomb in a ‘suicide’ [civil] aircraft flying low over a key point”. The Committee concluded that: “short of firing at every strange civil aircraft that appears over our shores we know of no way of preventing an aircraft that sets out on such a mission from succeeding”.

Prime Minister Attlee was so briefed as was Mr Churchill, once returned to Downing Street, by the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Norman Brook. Brook explained to Churchill that “I have taken no further initiative to raise the matter since I myself believe that this is a risk against which we cannot at present take, in normal times, any effective precautions”.

It is interesting to note that the first UK nuclear test on 3 October 1952 in the Monte Bello Islands off the North-West coast of Australia was designed in part to examine the impact of an atomic bomb in a freighter alongside in a British port. The device was placed inside a frigate, *HMS Plym*, to simulate this very contingency.

Should, heaven forbid, such a “suicide” mission have been mounted or an atomic bomb in an eastern bloc freighter destroyed Liverpool or Southampton in a clandestine, pre-emptive strike during a transition from Cold War to World War III, the British government would have known it was Soviet mounted. As the Chairman’s question made plain, no such clarity or certainty would be the case today.

But an examination of the history of the notions of deterrence, the patterns of UK nuclear weapons decision taking fuelled by a trawl through the files at The National Archives suggests that the impulses of various clusters of decision-takers have seen deterrence as a last resort capability in certain highly unlikely contingencies which if they occurred would have devastating consequences for the UK that were “beyond the imagination” until they happened as the immensely secret Strath Report of 1955 put it as part of its investigation of what 10 10-megaton Russian hydrogen bombs would do to our islands.

Clement Attlee’s first paper to his new government’s Cabinet Committee on Atomic Energy, less than a month after the atomic bombs had fallen on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, set a pattern for successive generations of decision takers when he wrote on 28 August 1945 that:

“It must be recognised that the emergence of this weapon has rendered much of our post-war planning out of date ... It would appear that the provision of bomb proof basements in factories and offices and the retention of A.R.P. [Air Raid Precautions] and Fire Services is just futile waste”.

Attlee concluded that “The answer to an atomic bomb on London is an atomic bomb on another great city”.

My own view, having surveyed a considerable swathe of the paper trail, of which a collection is reproduced in Peter Hennessy, *Cabinets and the Bomb* (British Academy/OUP, 2007), is that Sir Michael Quinlan was right to characterize the discussions and decisions overseen by successive Prime Ministers, their nuclear groups and, sometimes, their full Cabinets, to make the UK a nuclear weapons state or to sustain it as a nuclear-tipped nation as “a set of rationales to clothe that gut decision” that this was not the moment to disarm and remove that capacity—that duty to protect against the ultimate, catastrophic contingency, as I would put it—forever. Because once a Prime Minister and his or her Cabinet had so decided, it is almost inconceivable that, given the time, the technology, the money and the skills required, the UK could ever reacquire such a capability. And if I was Prime Minister (a post to which I have never aspired!) I, too, would offer “a set of rationales to clothe” just such “a gut decision” which is why I am a supporter of the like-for-like replacement of the current system and the maintenance of continuous at-sea deterrence.

It is important, as the Chairman’s question implies, to know what, in its various configurations, the UK’s nuclear weapons capability has and has not been designed or provided to do. It is not now and never has been shaped to serve as a deterrent to counter terrorism for example. And, as the Chairman indicates tracing the original provenance of the materials for a primitive nuclear or radiological weapon used against the United Kingdom would not be swift or easy. But because this is so, it is not, in my view a convincing argument to suggest (not that the Chairman did) that the purpose of a UK nuclear weapons capability is pointless because it cannot cover—or deter—all contingencies.

I am struck, too, when eavesdropping retrospectively on the Cabinet Room discussions frozen in the minutes and the memoranda preserved at The National Archives in Kew just how powerfully, when the question of the Bomb has gone on heat, the unknowability of the world in 40 to 50 years time has influenced the premiers and ministers involved.

For example, when Harold Wilson’s tiny Cabinet Committee decided on 11 November 1964, against the impression given in the party’s manifesto for the previous month’s general election, to carry on with the procurement of Polaris, they concluded that “three submarines would represent the minimum force which would be acceptable to us in the event of the dissolution of the NATO Alliance”. (As you know the later decision was for a Polaris squadron of four boats for the purposes of continuous at-sea deterrence).

More recent declassifications have embraced the run-up to the Trident decisions (first C4 then D5 missiles) in the early 1980s. Jim Callaghan’s Nuclear Defence Policy Group (a body created outside the formal Cabinet Committee structure) commissioned options studies for Polaris replacement in the knowledge that the decision would fall to the government in place after the next election (though Callaghan told his colleagues he himself favoured the Trident C4 option).

During a long discussion on 21 December 1978 inside what Callaghan called his “Restricted Group”, there was considerable humility about the predictive powers of those involved when contemplating the constellation of threats the country might face decades ahead. The minutes capture this without attributing views to particular ministers:

The Atlantic Alliance has lasted longer than might have been predicted 30 years ago [ie when NATO was formed in April 1949], but no one could say what would be its future or the future of the United States/Soviet relations in the period to which we had to look forward. Similar uncertainty applied to relations between the two parts of Germany and the Soviet Union and China.

There was a similar flavour to the discussions which took place inside Margaret Thatcher’s Cabinet Committee on Nuclear Defence Policy 1979–82, the most recent declassifications on the paper trail from 1945.



Briefing the full Cabinet on 4 March 1982, when it took the decision to purchase the D5 system from the United States, the Defence Secretary, John Nott, said, in the words of the minute taker:

that the strategic nuclear deterrent was central to the defence of the United Kingdom. No one could foresee what might over the next 30–40 years happen to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation or to the United States attitude to the defence of Europe. A strategic deterrent under British national control was therefore essential.

There is, I think, a value in eavesdropping on previous rounds of nuclear decision-taking if only to bring a touch of balm to those to whom it falls to wrestle with today's unknowabilities and intractables (including I would respectfully suggest, the Defence Committee of the House of Commons).

A final offering on that theme. Here is John Nott in a memorandum prepared for Mrs Thatcher's Cabinet Committee paving the way to the decision to procure what is the current capability of four Vanguard class Royal Navy submarines armed with Trident D5 missiles and UK warheads:

In the midst of a recession with no economic growth, low confidence and an understandable preoccupation with our short term economic difficulties it would be all too easy to wash our hands of this commitment. Our predecessors in both major parties also had economic problems which seemed equally pressing to them but they have kept this country with an independent deterrent ever since the 1950s.

Change the date and that could serve as a National Security Council memorandum today—or a submission to the Defence Committee of the House of Commons.

The need for deterrence against whom and what and when and with what over a 30 to 50 year period is not a thing of confident or even hesitant certainties. That, and for successive Prime Ministers, the possibility that an imperilled country in the future, however remote the contingency, would remember that it was on your watch in No.10 that the ultimate capability for national defence and deterrence was abandoned, combine, in my judgement, to form the arguments that trump when the question arises of the UK remaining nuclear-tipped—the sense of a last resort duty to protect and the gut instinct of which Michael Quinlan spoke.

2 July 2013

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### Written evidence from General (retired) Sir Hugh Beach

#### SUMMARY

1. The core argument for replacing Trident can be simply stated. If Britain were to divest itself of this weapon system and became a non-nuclear weapon state, then a state that did possess nuclear weapons and with hostile intent might “pose a grave threat to our vital interests”. Only possession of our own nuclear weapon can give us the ability to confront “blackmail and acts of aggression against our vital interests by nuclear-armed opponents”. The aim of this paper is to show that it is far from being the whole truth.

2. The first and obvious point is that of the 190 states party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) all but five have committed themselves to non-nuclear weapon status permanently. If this makes them all potential victims of nuclear blackmail, they do not seem to be unduly apprehensive on this score. The countries of NATO together with Japan and Korea undoubtedly shelter under the American nuclear umbrella. But if that is good enough for them, why not for the UK, supposedly the Americans' “best friend” and most valued ally.

3. One cannot demonstrate any direct benefit to Britain from her past possession of nuclear weapons. In looking to the future a crucial question is to what extent Britain can rely on the support of America in facing down any nuclear threat. The possibility is accepted that America, while not actively opposing British action might be unwilling to put its own nuclear weapons on the line. If a non-nuclear Britain were then threatened by a recidivist Russia, or an emergent rogue state, what could she do? Four historic instances are examined where non-nuclear states acted in defiance of threats by a nuclear weapon state with impunity. No instance was found where the non-nuclear state kow-towed. Hence by far the most likely outcome is that Britain would rely on adroit diplomacy coupled with a determination to call the bluff of any would-be blackmailer. The British decision to replace Trident thus becomes a decision based on a notion of British exceptionalism—of “just-in-case”—posited on a most unlikely concatenation of circumstances. In no other area of military procurement is the justification of a general insurance against the unforeseen accepted. Nor is this policy cost free, financially or militarily, since the country is faced with having to decide by 2016 whether to spend billions of pounds on acquiring the next generation of Trident, at a time when the Defence Budget is under exceptional strain and cuts are being made all round.

4. Rather than stay trapped in misleading and irrelevant 1980s rhetoric about “unilateral” versus “multilateral” disarmament, it would be more sensible and straightforward to act upon our own national interest when taking decisions on the size and indeed the future necessity (if any) of British nuclear forces.

*How would Britain fare as a non-nuclear weapon state?*

1. In the opinion of successive British Governments Britain without nuclear weapons would be badly placed. They have said that if Britain were to divest itself of this weapon system and become a non-nuclear weapon state, then a state that did possess nuclear weapons and with hostile intent might “pose a grave threat to our vital interests”. If this happened the British would have no option but to submit. Conventional capabilities would not suffice. Only possession of their own nuclear weapon can give them the ability to confront “blackmail and acts of aggression against their vital interests by nuclear-armed opponents”.<sup>i</sup> This argument carries a degree of conviction, if only because common sense suggests that states without nuclear weapons are more likely to be attacked than those who have them. The aim of this paper is to show that this is far from being the whole story.

2. There is no denying that threats of using military force are often used. In the year 2008, for example, there was a warning from Russia that the accord between the USA and the Czech Republic to station a radar component of America’s antiballistic missile shield south of Prague “could lead to a military response”.<sup>ii</sup> President Putin had said that Russia could target this site (and a proposed antiballistic missile site in Poland) with missiles and deploy missiles in Kaliningrad. A Russian newspaper had quoted a senior Russian air force official as saying that Russian bombers capable of carrying nuclear weapons could be deployed to Cuba.<sup>iii</sup> Defying Russia, the Czech government then signed an accord with the United States to accept the radars. Oil deliveries from Russia to the Czech Republic were promptly reduced by 40%, ostensibly because of technical reasons. The shortfall was offset by deliveries from Germany and in other respects economic and trade ties between Russia and the Czech Republic continued to flourish. According to one security expert the Czech government was adopting a “pragmatic attitude”.<sup>iv</sup> This episode is an example of precisely the question addressed in this paper, of how a non-nuclear weapon state can cope pragmatically, when threatened by a state that has these weapons and is prepared to brandish them.

3. As the government points out: “We judge that no state currently has both the intent and the capability to pose a direct nuclear threat to the United Kingdom or its vital interests”.<sup>v</sup> But we are considering a period stretching up to the middle of this century. By that time the population of the world may have risen to nine billion and the population of Russia halved; global temperature may have risen by two degrees Celsius and the energy consumption of the world shifted away from fossil fuels. America may no longer be a world power of the first rank and in any case the focus of American interest may have shifted decisively towards the Pacific Rim. The number of nuclear weapons states may have doubled or halved. In such a shifted scene the government is clearly right in saying that: “we cannot rule out the risk that such a (direct nuclear) threat will re-emerge over future decades”.<sup>vi</sup> This is precisely the argument made by the British Government in defence of Trident replacement as summarized in the first paragraph of this paper. What is to be said against it?

4. The first and obvious point is that of the 190 states party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) all but five have committed themselves to non-nuclear weapon status permanently. If this makes them all potential victims of nuclear blackmail, they do not seem to be unduly concerned. Many of them have the economic, industrial and scientific capacity to become nuclear weapon states if they wished, but have chosen not to. There is a handful of cases where countries have reneged on their commitment: South Africa and Libya both repented and made good. North Korea has formally withdrawn and the status of Iran is highly controversial. But the fact remains that a huge majority of states has voluntarily accepted non-nuclear weapon status and seems to suffer no disadvantage from this fact: specifically from the risk of being blackmailed by one of the eight countries that have these weapons. It could be said that the main reason why these countries are content is because they shelter under the American nuclear umbrella. This would certainly apply to the 25 non-nuclear members of NATO, also to Japan and South Korea. But if that is good enough for them, why not for the UK, supposedly the Americans’ “best friend” and most valued ally.<sup>vii</sup>

5. Nor has anyone claimed a direct benefit to Britain from her possession of nuclear weapons over the past 50 years. Specifically, it cannot be shown that Britain has been able to take any action against another country that she could not otherwise have undertaken,<sup>viii</sup> nor prevented action by any other country that she could not otherwise have prevented, by virtue of her nuclear arsenal. British nuclear weapons did not deter Argentina from attempting to annex the Falkland Islands in 1982, nor help her to recover them, despite the belief that a Polaris submarine was patrolling the South Atlantic.<sup>ix</sup> And nuclear weapons have given no protection against attacks by Irish Republican or Islamic terrorists. The most that has ever been claimed is that Britain, as a nuclear weapon state, has been influential in promoting arms control measures such as the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the various nuclear test ban treaties. It is said that Britain may have been able to dissuade America from contemplating the use of nuclear weapons, if not in Viet Nam then possibly in the Gulf War of 1991. It is a strange argument for possessing nuclear weapons if their main use is to help persuade one’s allies not to use theirs, and other countries to forgo them.

6. If the possession of nuclear weapons for the past 50 years has not done Britain any demonstrable good, what does this tell us about the next 50 years? In answering this we need first to consider Britain’s position vis-à-vis the United States. The crucial question is to what extent Britain can rely in future on the support of America in facing down any future nuclear threat. The possibility of having to confront a recidivist Russia is hinted at by the reference to re-emergence of “a major direct nuclear threat to the UK’s vital interests” and certainly it cannot be discounted. But if the American nuclear guarantee is regarded as fully watertight, why is there any need for an independent British system?

7. So far as the security of the British homeland is concerned this appears to fall squarely within the North Atlantic Treaty. Article 5 stops short of specifying any particular response from any party, even in the context of an actual attack, let alone a threat. So this provision was buttressed during the Cold War by the creation of a massive military structure, with American nuclear weapons in situ, explicitly to cope with any possible assault across the Iron Curtain. This structure remains intact, albeit in rudimentary form. It can surely be held to imply that the US provides member states of NATO with cover against nuclear blackmail in any European context, and it has undoubtedly been understood in this way by all the non-nuclear European members—not least those who have recently joined from Central and Eastern Europe.

8. But Britain also operates as an ally of America outside Europe and not necessarily in a NATO context. Here also there is an explicit policy of relying upon American protection. The British Defence White Paper “Delivering Security in a Changing World” (2003–04) explained: “The most demanding expeditionary operations, involving intervention against state adversaries, can only plausibly be conducted if US forces are engaged, either leading a coalition or in NATO.”<sup>x</sup> “The full spectrum of capabilities is not required (by Britain) for large scale operations, as the most demanding operations could only conceivably be undertaken alongside the US, either as a NATO operation or a US led coalition, where we have choices as to what to contribute”.<sup>xi</sup> Reference to “the most demanding operations” must surely imply that, where a nuclear threat is concerned, America would be in the lead and would provide the necessary cover.

9. Given this very close tie-up between Britain and America, what geo-political niche can be discerned in which Britain could be exposed to nuclear blackmail without being able to count on American cover? This, of course, is an ancient question and no such scenario has ever been described, clearly for good reason. Yet if such a contingency has been held in the past to be of enough weight to justify the costs of a separate British system, one could argue that the same should apply to the next half century. To this we now turn.

10. The issue needs to be discussed at two levels. If the US were to determine that co-operation on British Trident was no longer promoting American defence and security, or was posing an unreasonable risk to it, then all technical assistance would be withdrawn. Denied help in maintaining, testing and upgrading the missiles, the fire control system and key components of the warhead, and with no re-supply of life restricted items for the latter (tritium injection system and neutron generator) the whole system would become unworkable and probably unsafe within a year or so. The UK has had no capacity to design and build a missile of strategic range since the demise of the liquid fuelled Blue Streak in 1960. To re-create such a capacity would take decades and the expense would be astronomical. Shopping around for another foreign supplier (Russia, China, North Korea, or even France) would be very unattractive, and there would still be the difficulty of re-fitting the submarines and providing warheads to match the new missiles.<sup>xii</sup> Therefore, if Britain were to threaten to use Trident in circumstances of which the US actively disapproved it would be to sign the death warrant for British Trident.

11. There is also the question of actually firing a missile in circumstances where the Americans were actively opposed. The submarine could no doubt be sailed to an area where the sea-bed had been accurately surveyed by the British. The order to fire could be conveyed and authenticated without the submarine either raising an antenna or using an American satellite. The missile would then presumably work, although the accuracy might be impaired if gravitational and weather information, normally supplied by the Americans, was not available. The unsettling possibility has been raised that the software for fire control or in the warhead fusing system might have been secretly doctored so as to require independent US authorization to fire. But it is far from clear how any such instruction could be transmitted to the submarine at the time and this supposition hardly deserves serious consideration. The reasonable conclusion is that if the British Prime Minister, getting the bit between his or her teeth and deciding that “supreme national interests were at stake”, were to order Trident to fire then it would do so successfully. Short of attacking the submarine,<sup>xiii</sup> or the Prime Minister, there is nothing the Americans could do to stop it.

12. But how likely is it that a Prime Minister, regardless of the nuclear taboo, and no doubt the hostile reaction of popular opinion world-wide, were to threaten nuclear retaliation against any country in defiance of the United States? The last time that Britain took military action in the teeth of opposition from America was at Suez in November 1956. America checkmated this action within days by means of financial, economic and political pressure.<sup>xiv</sup> This situation is hardly worth contemplating seriously.

13. It remains to consider the situation where America, while not actively opposing British action, is unwilling to put its own nuclear weapons on the line. While difficult to visualize, such a case is certainly not impossible. Deeply engrained in the folk memory of the British is the failure of the USA to provide military help in 1940–41, when it looked as though the UK might go down, until the Americans’ hands were forced by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour.<sup>xv</sup> Lacking any direct historic precedent, it may be helpful to consider some past occasions when a non-nuclear-weapon state, acting on its own, has confronted a threat from a nuclear-armed adversary.

14. In July 1950, at the very beginning of the Korean War, President Truman ordered 10 nuclear configured B-29s to the Pacific, and warned China that the US would take “whatever steps are necessary” to stop Chinese intervention, saying that the use of nuclear weapons “had been under active consideration.” The Chinese at that time were many years short of acquiring their own nuclear weapons. By late November the Americans had made substantial incursions into North Korea. The Chinese then struck along the Chongchon River,

completely overran several South Korean divisions and attacked the flank of the remaining UN forces. The ensuing defeat of the U.S. Eighth Army resulted in the longest retreat of any American military unit in history. The U.S. forces in northeast Korea, who had advanced with great speed only a few months earlier, were forced to retreat with even greater speed. They formed a defensive perimeter around the port city of Hungnam, where a major evacuation was carried out in late December 1950. Facing complete defeat and surrender, 193 shiploads of American men and material were evacuated from Hungnam Harbor, and were shipped to Pusan. As they left, the American forces blew up large portions of the city to deny its use to the communists, depriving many Korean civilians of shelter during the winter. This was a major defeat for the Americans, and plainly their attempt at nuclear blackmail had not dissuaded the Chinese in any way.

15. After the front had stabilized in July 1951 the Americans continued with their nuclear threats. In 1952 President-elect Eisenhower publicly hinted that he would authorize the use of nuclear weapons against China if the Korean War armistice talks continued to stagnate. In 1954, the commander of the US Strategic Air Command General Curtis LeMay stated his support for the use of nuclear weapons if China resumed fighting in Korea. LeMay stated, "There are no suitable strategic air targets in Korea. However, I would drop a few bombs in proper places like China, Manchuria and South Eastern Russia. In those 'poker games,' such as Korea and Indo-China, we ... have never raised the ante—we have always just called the bet. We ought to try raising sometime." Finally, in January 1955, US Admiral Radford also publicly advocated the use of nuclear weapons if China invaded South Korea. To the extent that the Chinese did not continue fighting or invade the South this could be regarded as a success for nuclear deterrence, but it is far from clear that China had any intention of doing so anyway.

16. Saddam Hussein was not deterred from invading Kuwait in 1990 by fear of American nuclear weapons, although he had none himself. This was due, at least in part, to the uncertain note struck by American officials in the run-up to the attack. It has often been suggested that the reason Saddam did not use his chemical weapons to stave off subsequent defeat was that he had been warned repeatedly by the Americans, Israeli and British of dire consequences if he did so. While one might question whether the United States would actually have used nuclear weapons in response to a chemical attack, Saddam Hussein obviously could not have been confident that they would not. As Bruce Blair noted, "There's enough ambiguity in our deployments of nuclear weapons at sea and our ability to deliver nuclear weapons by air and quickly move them into the region to plant the seeds of doubt in Hussein's mind."<sup>xvi</sup> The effectiveness of the threat of chemical or nuclear retaliation was asserted by Lt. Gen. Calvin Waller, deputy commander of Desert Storm, who said that "we tried to give him (Saddam) every signal that if he used chemicals against us that we would retaliate in kind and may even do more, so I think he was hesitant to use them there."<sup>xvii</sup>

17. But there are other factors that could explain why Iraq did not use chemical weapons on this battlefield. Front line Iraqi soldiers had inadequate protective gear that was inferior to that of Coalition forces. The desert environment was not conducive to the effective use of chemical weapons. And despite reports prior to the war of extensive Iraqi chemical weapons deployments, coalition forces found no evidence that chemical weapons had in fact been moved into the Kuwait theatre. But these factors are irrelevant to the question of chemical armed missiles. These weapons would strike far away from Iraqi forces, and could cause important damage in an urban environment. And there certainly were chemical warheads available for the Iraqi missiles. The non-use of chemical-armed missiles did indeed appear to stem from deterrence of such use by the threat of "dire consequences". Whether the nuclear component of this was necessary or, indeed, decisive must remain a matter of speculation.

18. Iraq fired conventionally armed missiles at Israel in an effort to draw Israel into the war and split the Coalition. Here also Iraq limited its efforts to conventional weapons. But it was in no way deterred from striking Israel, in a notably provocative way, by fear of nuclear retaliation. In this respect, once again, nuclear deterrence spectacularly failed.

19. A fourth example was provided by Chinese threats against Taiwan in the 1990s. Concern over a formal declaration of Taiwan's independence had been a major impetus for the military buildup between Taiwan and mainland China. China had been increasing the deployment of missiles aimed at Taiwan by 100 a year or more, bringing the total arsenal to more than 700 ballistic missiles capable of being fitted with nuclear warheads. Presumably their deployment was a gambit on the part of China, increasing political pressure on Taiwan to abandon any unilateral move toward formal independence. (But the Chinese government never declared such deployment publicly, let alone giving any reason). And the US administration had declared, given the status quo, that it would not aid Taiwan if it were to declare independence unilaterally.

20. The nearest that matters came to a show-down was in 1996 when China began conducting military exercises near Taiwan, and launched several ballistic missiles over the island. This was done in response to the possible re-election of then President Lee Teng-hui. The United States, under President Clinton, sent two aircraft carrier battle groups to the region, sailing them into the Taiwan Strait. China, unable to track the ships' movements and unwilling to escalate the conflict, quickly backed down. The event had little impact on the outcome of the election, since none of Lee's contestants were strong enough to defeat him, but it is widely believed that China's aggressive acts, far from intimidating the Taiwanese population, gave Lee a boost that pushed his share of votes over 50%. (Mercifully tensions over the Taiwan Strait have greatly diminished since then.)

21. None of these four incidents is unambiguous. But all can be read as examples where a non-nuclear weapon state, faced with threats of attack by a nuclear weapon state, went ahead exactly as if such a threat did not exist. Nor is this surprising. Game theory suggests that states without nuclear weapons are likely to likely to disregard an enemy's nuclear potential and fight in two circumstances: where submission is likely to lead to the same outcome (ie total defeat) and where nuclear use by the aggressor would lead to such negative consequences (viz. the "Nuclear Taboo") as to be reasonably discounted. It follows that faced with the threat of nuclear blackmail, a non-nuclear-weapon state is by no means bound to submit. It could be objected that in all the instances quoted above the government under threat was authoritarian and that a democratic government (by definition more responsive to popular anxiety) might not act so robustly. But the record of the past 70 years hardly bears out this contention. "Appeasement" is a dirty word in British politics. And no government could seriously advance this supposition as a basis for policy.

22. Could a non-nuclear Britain ever be constrained in its actions vis-à-vis a nuclear adversary by fear of nuclear blackmail? Conceivably it might be, though we have failed to unearth a single unequivocal precedent. But for Britain to knuckle under in these circumstances is far from a foregone conclusion. The most important factor in such a situation is certain to be the attitude of the United States and we have had to postulate a very narrow range of circumstances where America—while generally supportive of Britain, otherwise the whole question of British Trident is moot anyway—would not put her own nuclear arsenal into the balance. An alliance with another nuclear protector is one possible response. Another might be ballistic missile defence. Both of these are highly problematic. A far more likely outcome is that Britain would come to rely on adroit diplomacy coupled with a determination to call the bluff of any would-be blackmailer. All the examples we have examined point in this direction. And as was said at the outset some 185 other nations find themselves in precisely this situation. Seen in this light the British decision to replace Trident appears to be rooted in a notion of British exceptionalism—of "just-in-case"—posited on a most unlikely concatenation of circumstances. No other area of military procurement is justified on the basis of a general insurance against the unforeseen.

23. Such a policy is far from being cost free, financially and militarily, since the country is faced with having to decide by 2016 whether to spend billions of pounds on acquiring the next generation of Trident, at a time when the Defence Budget is under exceptional strain and damaging cuts are being made all round. Rather than stay trapped in misleading and irrelevant 1980s rhetoric about "unilateral" versus "multilateral" disarmament, it would be more sensible and straightforward to act upon our own national interest when taking decisions on the size and indeed the future necessity (if any) of British nuclear forces.

September 2013

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- <sup>ii</sup> Judy Dempsey and Dan Bilefsky, "US and Czechs sign pact on missile shield: Russia warns of a military response". *International Herald Tribune*, 9 July 2008. p.3.
- <sup>iii</sup> Peter Finn, Washington Post Foreign Service, quoting an unconfirmed report in *Izvestia*, 21 July 2008.
- <sup>iv</sup> Judy Dempsey, "Keeping the oil flowing when Russia gets upset". *International Herald Tribune*. 24 July 2008. Quoting Vladimir Handl at the Institute of International Relations in Prague
- <sup>v</sup> *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom*. 2008. Paragraph 3–11 p. 14
- <sup>vi</sup> *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom*. 2008. Paragraph 3–11 p. 14
- <sup>vii</sup> The American Roger Cohen has written in his *Globalist* column: "When Britain opts for the sidelines with Germany, leaving an American president to look to France and Turkey for support in holding Bashar-al-Assad accountable for breaking the world's taboo on using chemical weapons there is little or nothing special left. Rather than standing shoulder to shoulder with its ally, Britain has turned its back". *International Herald Tribune*, 31 August/1 September 2013. His exasperation is understandable, but the Anglo-American special nuclear relationship is founded much too durably to be unhinged by differences of this kind.
- <sup>viii</sup> It has, for example, been suggested that the British might have been more reluctant to undertake "force for good" operations, like Afghanistan 2001 or Iraq 2003, if it had not been a nuclear weapon power. This seems far-fetched to the point of absurdity.
- <sup>ix</sup> Robert Green, in his book "Security without nuclear deterrence" Astron Media 2010, recounts a story apparently derived from President Mitterand's former psychoanalyst, Ali Magoudi. He says that Mitterand told him about a phone call he received from Margaret Thatcher, after a French-supplied *Exocet* missile fired by the Argentinians from a French-supplied *Super Etendard* aircraft disabled the British destroyer *Sheffield*. Thatcher allegedly threatened to carry out a nuclear strike against Argentina unless Mitterand gave her the codes for jamming the *Exocet* missiles. Mitterand had been so convinced of her seriousness that he complied. (p.36). If this is true it gives the lie to my contention that Britain has derived absolutely no benefit from its independent nuclear weapon system. I am unconvinced.

<sup>x</sup> *Defence White Paper*. December 2003, Cm 6041–1. Paragraph 3.5, p.8

<sup>xi</sup> *Future Capabilities*. July 2004. Cm 6269. Paragraph 1.2, p.2.

<sup>xii</sup> A recent Government study has found that the design staff at Aldermaston are so “optimised” for work on the existing Trident warhead that to bring into service a new warhead (eg for a cruise missile or bomb) would take 24 years. *Trident Alternatives Review* 16 July 2013.  
See [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/cabinet-office](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/cabinet-office)

<sup>xiii</sup> The Royal Navy claims that, since the British sonar is superior to the Americans, this option is also unfeasible.

<sup>xiv</sup> This is not a complete explanation. The attack on Suez attracted the condemnation of other members of NATO, the Commonwealth and the General Assembly of the United Nations. But it was the run on the pound and the oil embargo orchestrated by the United States that were decisive in forcing the Anglo-French forces to declare a cease-fire and withdraw.

<sup>xv</sup> An excellent account of the strength of isolationist feeling in the US at that time is given in Olson, Lynne, *Those angry days:Roosevelt, Lindberg and America’s fight over World war II*, Random House 2013. Current examples of isolationist tendencies in the USA are provided by the “Tea-Party” movement, and the recent unwillingness of the Congress to back a bombing campaign in Syria.

<sup>xvi</sup> Broder, David, “US Forces Have No Nuclear Arms in Gulf States, No Plans to Use Them,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 October 1990, page 6.

<sup>xvii</sup> Gilley, Ed, “N-Threat Deterred Saddam,” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 17 May 1991, page 1.

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### Written evidence submitted by Dr Jeremy Stocker, Associate Fellow, Royal United Services Institute

#### THE NATURE OF DETERRENCE

1. *SI VIS PACEM, PARA BELLUM*—If you want peace, prepare for war. This ancient adage expresses an idea at the heart of the concept of deterrence. It is also a prime example of what the strategic writer Edward Luttwak calls the paradoxical nature of strategy, namely that much of strategic thought, theory and practice is counter-intuitive. Put simply, only arms can fight a war. Yet arms are also required to prevent war. This is because of deterrence.

2. Deterrence is especially “paradoxical” which is why it is so often misunderstood or dismissed. It also, as Lawrence Freedman has observed, often performs better in practice than in theory despite, or perhaps because of, the complexity of much deterrence theory, a good deal of which is derived from the nuclear era. And if that was not complicated enough, it is also the case that deterrence can rarely be “proved”, in that when it is successful nothing happens. *Why* it didn’t happen often lies in the realm of counter-factual speculation and can rarely be quantified. What is clear, however, is when deterrence fails for then the unwanted outcome does occur.

3. Deterrence seeks to dissuade one party from undertaking actions that another party deems unacceptable. By removing a cause for war deterrence is therefore a powerful tool of conflict prevention, as well as a means of limiting the scope and nature of existing conflict. It can also serve to reinforce existing norms of behaviour, for example against the use of chemical weapons, by holding out the prospect of baleful consequences if such norms are broken. Deterrence, fundamentally, is about containment—containing potential adversaries and containing security problems.

4. Since the advent of nuclear weapons, deterrence has most commonly been associated with threats of retaliation—*deterrence by punishment* in the jargon. This is because of the impossibly high standards required of a worthwhile defence in the face of threats that are nuclear, numerous and sophisticated. During the Cold War nuclear stand-off even a 95% effective defence, if such could be devised, was of little point as 5% of a lot was still a lot. But a promise of retaliation is not the only deterrence mechanism. *Deterrence by denial* offers the prospect of successful resistance to unwanted acts, to defeat them on their own terms and therefore remove the incentive to undertake them in the first place. Both forms of deterrence pre-date the nuclear age, are not mutually exclusive and have continuing relevance. A comprehensive deterrence posture will combine both, promising both to defeat aggression and to offer the prospect of subsequent consequences. Those consequences need not necessarily be military.

#### THE FUNCTIONING OF DETERRENCE

5. Deterrence is a relationship between the *deterrer* and the *deteree*. Like all relationships, it is critically reliant on effective communication. The deterrer must make clear what it is that is to be avoided and the likely consequences if it is not. The deteree has to understand and act upon that message. Communication may include, but need not comprise, direct conversation. Signalling and perceptions are as important as first-hand communication. As such, deterrence is a deeply human, subjective activity subject to the psychology of perceptions, values, determination, assumptions, motivations and decision-making. As Keith Payne puts it, deterrence is an “uncertain art, not a precise science”.

6. A deterrence posture can be both general and specific. General deterrence is an expression of a state’s reputation and capability. A former MoD Chief Scientific Advisor, Sir Hermann Bondi, once observed that a

nuclear-armed state is one that no-one can afford to make desperate. That is general deterrence. The strategic maxim “don’t invade Russia” pre-dates the nuclear age and is another expression of general deterrence, as Russia (with or without nuclear weapons) is a state not to be messed with.

7. Specific or immediate deterrence is scenario-dependent. It relates to a particular actor and a particular act that one wishes to deter—for example, Syrian use of chemical weapons or an Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands. The promised response, whether of the punishment and/or denial variety, needs to be tailored to the specific circumstances and communicated accordingly. This can suggest “red lines” not to be crossed, but explicit and precise red lines can be counter-productive. They can suggest a range of undesirable actions which, because they stop short of the line, could be perceived as tolerable. And if the red line *is* crossed a response is required if deterrent threats are not to become incredible even if, under the circumstances, the deteree might not wish, or might not be able, to respond as previously promised. The recent crisis over the use of chemical weapons in Syria is a case in point. “Studied ambiguity”, a hallmark of the UK’s nuclear deterrence posture, has much to commend it. Equally, however, the deteree must understand the threat proffered and the action to be avoided. This is a delicate and ever-shifting balance.

8. Deterrence is critically about credibility. The threats and promises on which deterrence is based must be believable and believed. This is a function of capability, will and communication, *as understood by the deteree*, for it is the other party who decides whether or not to be deterred. Proportionality is key as disproportionate threats may be not just illegal but also unbelievable. And it is important not to over-threaten as doing so will generate the very hostility that deterrence is meant to counter.

9. A critical problem is self-deterrence. Why would you want to deter yourself? You don’t, but that can be the effect of a myriad of factors not least issues of proportionality, respective values, legal constraints and the extent of vital interests at stake. In the 1990s the Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević is reputed to have said “I am prepared to walk on bodies, but the West is not. That is why I shall win.” He was wrong about winning, but right to speculate that the Western powers could be self-deterred, in that they had less at stake and were not prepared to undertake certain actions—indeed, arguably they showed a greater concern for Serbia’s civilian population than did the Serbian leader himself. The same observation could be made about Saddam Hussein or Muammar Gaddafi.

10. Much of the problem of self-deterrence arises because of asymmetries of interest. Where one state has vital interests at stake, perhaps regime survival, but the other does not there will also be an asymmetry of will and purpose. Deterring actions that are objectionable but stop short of threatening national survival needs to be more nuanced than when the stakes are higher. And a perception that you will be self-deterred, whether accurate or not, will itself undermine deterrence and the deteree be tempted to call your bluff. International crises are made of these sorts of misperceptions and miscalculations.

11. Deterrence is often, though not always, a two-way relationship. Others may seek to deter us as we seek to deter them. The Cold War nuclear rivalry was an obvious and relatively simple example of this mutuality. More often, while two parties do seek to deter each other, they try to deter different things, for different reasons and in different ways. For example, The United States wants to deter Iran from developing nuclear weapons, attacking Israel or threatening its Gulf Arab allies. Iran wants to deter the US from intervening in the region. Each seeks to limit the other’s freedom of action whilst preserving its own.

12. Because being deterred limits one’s freedom of action no state will willingly acquiesce in its own deterrence, except perhaps in the important instance of mutual nuclear deterrence between “peer competitors”. So “counter-deterrence” is an important requirement for both strategy formulation and force planning. For example, Western powers have little option but to be deterred by the Russian nuclear arsenal when vital interests collide. They will not want to be similarly deterred by the embryonic nuclear capabilities of North Korea or Iran. So a mix of non-proliferation measures and active defences is used to prevent or retard these capabilities and to negate them if they are nonetheless acquired.

13. The prevention of conflict and the deterrence of threats to national interests are the essential tasks of military forces. In the UK of late, however, this has tended to be obscured by the country being strategically “fixed” by operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere such as the Persian Gulf, the Horn of Africa and the South Atlantic. National strategy and force planning have been focussed on the “here and now” commitments leaving little capacity for contingency and wider deterrence. And deterrence requires the demonstration of available and responsive capability. Armed intervention does just that, but once intervention becomes semi-permanent the opposite holds true as enduring commitments reduce responsiveness and flexibility. The UK’s post-Afghanistan “return to contingency” restores a degree of responsiveness that is the necessary underpinning of deterrence and conflict prevention. Their forward but non-territorial presence makes maritime forces of especial utility in this regard.

#### NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

14. Deterrence is about a good deal more than just nuclear deterrence, but the latter retains a central place in the theory and practice of deterrence. It might be noted in passing that nuclear deterrence can be the deterrence *of* nuclear threats or the use of nuclear weapons *for* deterrent effect. Intimately linked though they are, they are not synonymous. Nuclear use can, conceptually, be deterred by other means rather than, or in conjunction with, threats of nuclear retaliation. And nuclear threats can deter more than just other nuclear

weapons. The presence of nuclear weapons certainly exercises a cautionary effect all round and their general war-prevention role has long been a central pillar of NATO's nuclear doctrine. It is, critically, nuclear weapons that have made major war between the Great Powers virtually unthinkable. Nuclear abolition, were it ever to be possible, might not be an unmitigated good.

15. It is sometimes asserted that nuclear weapons are purely "political" and that they could never be used. This is a substantial fallacy in two senses. First, as the late Sir Michael Quinlan pointed out, "Weapons deter by the possibility of their use, and by no other route." An "unusable" weapon, nuclear or not, will deter no-one. That is why, however remote the possibility of their use, it is necessary for nuclear states to have doctrines and plans for their employment. To rely solely on the existential awfulness of nuclear weapons is insufficient as the party most likely to be thus deterred is oneself. Second, nuclear weapons are actually "used" everyday in performing their core deterrent function.

16. Two observations about Continuous-at-Sea Deterrence (CASD) may be appropriate here. First, because deterrence is all about signalling and credibility abandonment of CASD would send a powerful signal that while the UK is not ready to abandon nuclear weapons it is not really serious about threatening their use—remembering that it is others' perceptions, not ours, that ultimately matter. And second, maintenance of CASD provides an assured retaliatory capability in times of crisis, which is when its possession becomes important. In the absence of CASD in order to establish a credible deterrence posture it is necessary to receive and correctly interpret indicators and warnings of a deteriorating situation, and then to take the necessary political decision to deploy in time (assuming that time is available). This necessarily sends an escalatory signal at just the time when the government of the day might be seeking to do the opposite and de-escalate the situation. The relatively modest financial savings to be had from abandoning CASD make the serious compromise of the UK's deterrent posture and capability a very poor bargain.

#### NON-DETECTABLE ACTORS

17. A frequent criticism of deterrence is that some threats are non-detectable. An irrational actor, it is asserted, cannot be deterred. However, instances of genuinely irrational ("mad") actors are thankfully rare. It is rather that not all rationalities are the same. It all depends on an individual's, a group's or a state's underlying assumptions, perceptions, beliefs and values. A deterrence posture directed at a potential adversary must reflect these. It is essential to understand others' values and motivations and not simply assume mirror-images of our own. The concept of "tailored deterrence" is emerging in the United States to take account of these differences. And even this only applies to retaliatory deterrence. An ability to counter potential threats (defeat them) is just as important a deterrence tool. It establishes a degree of physical control lacking when one relies solely on a threat of retaliation.

18. Non-state actors are a related difficulty. In the event of anonymous attack by terrorist means, against whom should one retaliate? In this instance effective defence is critical to neutralise or deter the threat. But few threats are genuinely non-state and non-territorial. State-sponsorship or at the very least state acquiescence in non-state action makes accountability more difficult to establish, but not impossible. The relationships between Al Qaeda and the Taliban in 2001 or between Hezbollah and Iran today are cases in point.

#### BALLISTIC MISSILE DEFENCE

19. The role of Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD)<sup>2</sup> has become both prominent and controversial. The Cold War has unfortunately left a legacy of doctrines and assumptions that no longer fully hold true. It remains the case that, as observed earlier, that in the face of substantial nuclear arsenals (Russian and, increasingly, Chinese), BMD has little to offer and nor can it undermine the ability of a serious nuclear power to devastate whomsoever it might choose. In the case of small, emergent nuclear powers, however, BMD holds great promise. The ballistic delivery capabilities of recent and emergent nuclear states like North Korea, Pakistan and Iran are, though effective, based on very old rocket technology and are limited in numbers. And all actual use of ballistic missiles has, to date, involved non-nuclear payloads. Modern BMD systems, especially in the areas of sensing, computing and discrimination, offer the prospect of effective and worthwhile defence against threats that are modest in both numbers and sophistication. This is, crucially, a deterrence function as the ability to counter a missile strike reduces the utility and attraction of undertaking, or threatening, an attack in the first place.

20. There is also an important non-proliferation aspect to BMD. Missile defences substantially raise the bar, technological and financial, of effective nuclear/ballistic "entry", while by denying ballistic missiles a "free-ride" it reduces their attractiveness for strategic leverage.

21. Following NATO's 2010 Lisbon summit, the Alliance has placed BMD at the heart of its core Article 5 mission. But NATO has yet to address the looming problem of nuclear burden-sharing as the highly symbolic Dual-Capable Aircraft (DCA) approach the ends of their lives. A new generation of DCA looks highly unlikely on political and financial grounds. Done cleverly, BMD could provide an alternative means of burden-sharing in the nuclear arena, adopting a Denial rather than a Punishment deterrent mechanism.

<sup>2</sup> For a fuller discussion of the role of missile defences, see the author's "The Strategy of Missile Defence: Defence, Deterrence and Diplomacy", *RUSI Journal* June/July 2011.



## SUMMARY

22. Deterrence remains of fundamental importance in states' external security relations. It is also the basic purpose of a country's armed forces. Deterrence, when successful, prevents security problems arising or contains them when they cannot be prevented. There is an essential nuclear dimension to deterrence but it is not a purely nuclear matter. As the UK returns to "contingency" deterrence needs to be at the heart of strategy formulation and force planning in order to optimise its contribution to the defence of the UK's vital interests.

26 September 2013

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### Written evidence from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

## SUMMARY

Effective deterrence is an important part of a nation's defence strategy. The form that this deterrence should take should be decided based on what will be most successful in protecting citizens from a possible attack by an enemy. There are many possible options, including employing sanctions, diplomatic negotiations, improving the relationship and conventional military means. Nuclear weapons will be useless against the real threats we face today from terrorist groups, climate change and cyber-security breaches. The government should scrap the UK's nuclear weapons system, Trident, and cancel its successor.

## TRIDENT—BRITAIN'S NUCLEAR WEAPONS SYSTEM

1. Britain's nuclear weapons system comprises 225 nuclear warheads (to be reduced to 180 by the mid 2020s). Up to 40 of these, carried on eight Trident missiles, patrol the seas in one of four Vanguard-class submarines. Each warhead has around eight times the explosive power of the Hiroshima bomb which killed over 200,000 people in 1945. A parliamentary vote on whether or not the UK government replaces Trident is expected in 2016. That decision should be taken on the basis of what will most contribute to the security of the British people, with a clear understanding of the security challenges of the 21st century. Non-replacement offers serious strategic and economic benefits.

2. Remaining a nuclear-armed state would have huge consequences for Britain, in terms of our economy, our security, our legal obligations and our moral responsibility. A decision not to remain a nuclear-armed state will best meet the requirement of contributing to the security of the British people. 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 global and regional tensions: and it will release significant financial resources to meet a range of public spending priorities, including meeting the new security challenges of the twenty-first century.

## NO CURRENT NUCLEAR THREAT

3. The Trident system was developed by the US specifically for the Cold War context: to be able to win a nuclear war against a hostile, massively armed state. Despite the Cold War coming to an end, with the Soviet Union dissolving in 1991, the UK went ahead with acquiring Trident which was launched in the mid-1990s. Britain's greatest current security threat is generally accepted to be terrorism, perpetrated by non-state actors. It is widely agreed that nuclear weapons are unlikely to deter these groups. The Defence Committee Inquiry in 2006, which looked 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".<sup>3</sup> This point was also made by the Prime Minister who over-saw the pro-Trident replacement White Paper in 2006, Tony Blair, who stated in October 2005: "I do not think that anyone pretends that the independent nuclear deterrent is a defence against terrorism".<sup>4</sup>

4. The belief that we need nuclear weapons to deter unknown enemies is at odds with the more realistic and forward-looking analysis and assessment of the current government's National Security Strategy (NSS), published in autumn 2010. Whilst identifying a range of twenty-first century threats, including climate change, pandemics, organised crime and cyber warfare—as well as terrorism—the NSS downgrades the risk of state on state nuclear warfare to a tier two threat. This analysis should have forced the government to challenge the level of spending allocated to a Cold War nuclear weapons system.

## THE "ULTIMATE INSURANCE POLICY"?

5. Nuclear weapons have been described as "the United Kingdom's ultimate insurance policy in this age of uncertainty".<sup>5</sup> This is an odd turn of phrase given that insurance policies are designed to pay out after an

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the Strategic Context*, Eighth Report of Session 2005–06, The Stationery Office Limited, paragraph 88.

<sup>4</sup> House of Commons, 19 October 2005: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmhansrd/vo051019/debtext/51019-04.htm>

<sup>5</sup> "Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review". Cm 7948. Cabinet Office, October 2010. Foreword by David Cameron and Nick Clegg (p.5)

undesirable event has taken place—not to prevent them from happening. In this case, the nuclear “insurance policy” would actually put Britain at greater risk. Replacing Trident could act as a driver for the proliferation of nuclear weapons. In the words of Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, “the more that those states that already have (nuclear weapons) increase their arsenals, or insist that such weapons are essential to their national security, the more other states feel that they too must have them for their security.”<sup>6</sup>

6. Trident replacement serves to undermine and delegitimise the international non-proliferation regime. Ken Booth, Professor of International Politics at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, has asked the pertinent question: “If the present British government announces that it will retain nuclear weapons until about 2050, and if this contributes to the erosion of the norms so far sustaining the NPT (and history shows the fragility of international regimes when key states ignore their obligations) then what might British security look like, even if it possesses nuclear weapons, in a world of 20-plus nuclear powers?”<sup>7</sup>

#### PROTECTION FROM FUTURE THREATS

7. Those who believe that Britain’s possession of nuclear weapons act as a deterrent often refer to future unknown threats posed by the potential re-emergence of superpower nuclear rivals in decades to come—perhaps global competitors such as China, or nuclear-armed “rogue states”. The cases of Iran and North Korea and their actual or potential nuclear proliferation are of significance. Both countries were included in the United States’ “Axis of Evil” and in the light of the US-led war on Iraq (the third country in the so called Axis) not surprisingly had concerns for the security of their countries. The response of North Korea was a very clear indication of how proliferation can be provoked: it withdrew from the NPT, saying that it had a need to develop nuclear weapons. Whether or not Iran has intentions to develop nuclear weapons is unknown. It may be that it wishes to maintain a deliberate ambiguity about its capacities, also for deterrence purposes. Certainly there are many observers who take the view that Iran might well note the double standards of the West with regard to nuclear weapons. Remaining nuclear armed for at least another half century and by example encouraging other states to take the nuclear road, will ensure that we face those very threats in decades to come that we least want to see.

8. The most effective way to insure against future nuclear threats is to work towards nuclear disarmament, rather than pursuing a path which is certain to contribute to proliferation. Britain’s future security will be best provided for by pursuing global disarmament initiatives in tandem with the decision not to replace Trident.

9. The international community could be entering a new phase in how to deal with future threats. Pursuing diplomatic negotiations with, rather than an attack on, Syria has resulted in President al-Assad’s government agreeing to join the Chemical Weapons Convention and eliminate their entire stockpile of chemical weapons. A new, more positive, era in United States-Iran relations could be about to begin, not as a result of military attack but because of sanctions and negotiation. The government should take note of these developments.

#### DETERRENCE AT WHAT COST?

10. Even those who believe that nuclear weapons are a successful deterrent must accept the consequences of their possession and potential use. There are legal, economic and moral consequences as well as the ever-present dangerous threat of accidents.

11. Under international law, the use, or threat of use, of nuclear weapons is illegal under virtually all conceivable circumstances. In 1996, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that “the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be generally contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law”.<sup>8</sup> The ICJ went on to state that “the radiation released by a nuclear explosion would affect health, agriculture, natural resources and demography over a very wide area”.<sup>9</sup> The UK has binding legal obligations in international law requiring it to take steps towards the eventual elimination of its nuclear weapons. These obligations have been accepted by successive governments, both Labour and Conservative. The UK is a depository state for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Non-Proliferation Treaty-NPT). The UK has also signed and ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban-Treaty (CTBT), banning all nuclear explosions globally whether for military or for peaceful purposes.

12. The cost of replacing and running a new nuclear weapons system will be well in excess of £100 billion. Not surprisingly, military sources have questioned whether this money would be better spend on meeting other, more pressing and relevant military needs. Field Marshal Lord Bramall, General Lord Ramsbotham, General Sir Hugh Beach, and Major General Patrick Cordingley—four former senior military commanders—have written in *The Times* that “replacing Trident will be one of the most expensive weapons programmes this country has seen. Going ahead will clearly have long-term consequences for the military and the defence equipment budget that need to be carefully examined”. They pointed out that “this decision will have a direct impact on our overstretched Armed Forces”, and that “it may well be that money spent on new nuclear weapons will be

<sup>6</sup> Kofi Annan speaking at the UN 60th anniversary celebration, London, January 2006

<sup>7</sup> “Debating the future of Trident: Who are the real realists?” Ken Booth. In *The Future of Britain’s Nuclear Weapons* edited by Ken Booth and Frank Barnaby. Oxford Research Group, March 2006, (pp.76–91)

<sup>8</sup> International Court of Justice, 1996, *Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons*, 105.2.E: <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/index.php?sum=498&code=unan&p1=3&p2=4&case=95&k=e1&p3=5>

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

money that is not available to support our frontline troops, or for crucial counterterrorism work; money not available for buying helicopters, armoured vehicles, frigates or even paying for more manpower”.<sup>10</sup>

13. The consequences for the UK of remaining a nuclear-weapon-state will be neither neutral nor benign if a serious accident involving nuclear weapons takes place in the UK. Accidents can and do happen.

#### CONCLUSION

Britain currently faces no nuclear threat, and no other security threat that can be resolved through the possession or use of nuclear weapons. Possession of nuclear weapons does not deter terrorist attacks and their continued possession is more likely to lead to nuclear proliferation than to counter it. As new economic powers emerge, so there is the possibility that they may choose to develop large nuclear arsenals. They are more likely to do so under political or military pressure from other nuclear-armed states, in response to a perceived threat to their own security. It is by no means a foregone conclusion that any emerging economic power would wish to invest large sums of money in arms, which could be used instead to advance the well-being of their populations. The decision not to replace Trident will help shape the type of world we will face in decades to come. The choice we face today is clear: nuclear disarmament or nuclear proliferation and war. A decision by Britain not to renew its nuclear weapons system would improve the country’s deterrence policy.

26 September 2013

#### Written evidence from the United Nations Association–UK

*“Nuclear deterrence is sometimes treated as a known quantity—a definite thing that keeps us safe, and ensures our security. It has also often been used as a justification for possessing nuclear weapons. Nuclear deterrence, however, is based on an unexamined notion: the belief that the threat to destroy cities provides decisive leverage.”*

**Ward Wilson**

#### INTRODUCTION

1. No less a figure than Thomas C. Shelling outlined in 2006 the dual difficulty represented by deterrence underpinned by nuclear weapons: whether they deter, and the problems of use. Paraphrasing President Eisenhower, Shelling recounts the President, stating that “if nuclear weapons can be used for purely military purposes on purely military targets, I don’t see why they shouldn’t be used just as you would use a bullet or anything else.” However, nuclear weapons lack offensive subtlety, and this challenges their efficacy as a deterrent and ultimately questions their potential use by a nation.

#### LIMITED DETERRENT VALUE

2. In his foreword to the 2006 White Paper *The Future of the United Kingdom’s Nuclear Deterrent*, then Prime Minister Tony Blair stated that “an independent British nuclear deterrent is an essential part of our insurance against the uncertainties and risks of the future,” and the White Paper continues this thread by reinforcing that the “Government’s primary responsibility is for the security of current and future UK citizens.”

3. Yet the question must be asked, faced with a myriad of near certain short, medium and long-term international challenges, what does an independent nuclear deterrent bring to the table for a country that—as was shown by recent cuts in defence spending, including to every army infantry battalion—is already stretching itself thin? The United Kingdom has P5 status, it has a comparatively well-resourced and modern military, and the country is a top financial services hub and, with numerous overseas footholds from Diego Garcia to The Falklands, its imperial footprint, and the relative strategic advantage that this accords, is not entirely diminished.

4. But the UK is no longer a great power, as most decision-makers are aware, and yet it also struggles to match the prosperity enjoyed by citizens of other advanced economies. Many would argue that the United Kingdom must make a decision about which path it wishes to follow. According to CIA 2012 estimates, the UK lies 34th globally in terms of GDP per capita (taking into account purchasing power parity), and sits behind over two dozen nations on the United Nations Development Programme’s Human Development Index (HDI). Such indicators are coupled with long-term security challenges posed by a lack of surety over energy independence (as of 2012 only 43.1% of British energy came from UK sources—see [www.goodenergy.co.uk](http://www.goodenergy.co.uk)), coupled with threats posed by, for example, climate change and cyber security.

5. As UNA-UK’s chair and former UK Ambassador to the UN, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, has commented on publicly (13 March 2013, International Institute for Strategic Studies), a range of factors contribute to the UK’s image and influence in the world. Amongst these, nuclear weapons capability is one of the least relevant. Ultimately, he states, the most important criterion for influence is a country’s economic strength, and the UK’s global influence comes from its: 1) association of relationships; 2) ability to manage those interests and

<sup>10</sup> “Money spent on Trident can’t go on troops”. Field Marshal Lord Bramall, General Lord Ramsbotham, General Sir Beach, and Major General Patrick Cordingley. *The Times*, 21 April 2010: [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest\\_contributors/article7103196.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/columnists/guest_contributors/article7103196.ece)

relationships around the world; 3) capacity to solve problems in the international community in the various committees and councils; and 4) input into development and security in the developing world. An independent nuclear deterrent thus brings neither influence nor prosperity. It is equally limited militarily.

6. Today, and for the years ahead, the greatest direct security challenges that face the United Kingdom are represented by the uncertain asymmetric threats posed by various terrorist groupings, in addition to the instability of states within which, or near to where, the UK has resource interests. These frail states cannot be solidified by the UK's nuclear deterrent, and the deterrent cannot be used as leverage or as "a big stick" towards irregular forces within such states or in adjacent countries. Al-Shabab does not feel threatened by any state's nuclear weapons, and the only time Al-Qaeda cogitates over any state's nuclear deterrent, is possibly to consider how it might compromise the security of it. If, as the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review states, we require "a minimum effective security nuclear deterrent as the ultimate means to deter the most extreme threats," questions must be asked of the imagination of military planners who see nuclear weapons as the ultimate antidote to unseen, future challenges. Thirty-one years after Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands, the UK is without a carrier-based strike-force.

7. Within this multipolar world, a world that each day becomes more interdependent, it is difficult to see just how the UK's independent nuclear deterrent retains the pre-eminence it does. In terms of political leverage, it is doubtful that it either solidifies the UK's place on the UN Security Council (and even if it did, this would not necessarily be reason for retention) or helps sharpen the UK's diplomatic hand with friends or foes to a degree that balances out the cost. The deterrent neither stopped an invasion by Argentina of The Falklands nor deterred Iraqi forces from invading Kuwait in 1990. The UK had significant interests tied up in both regions—territorial in the former and economically in the latter. It provides no extra strength in UN Security Council negotiations and, again, it is difficult to see what external threats it is currently set to counter.

8. If the argument "we don't know what is around the corner" is utilised again and again for retention, it is virtually impossible for multilateral disarmament to take place, and thus create a more stable, secure world. The irony is that history has shown that nuclear deterrents the world over perpetuate conditions for insecurity through their presence and encourage proliferation by their existence. In the 2009 FCO policy information paper *Lifting the Nuclear Shadow: Creating the Conditions for Abolishing Nuclear Weapons*, the authors state that "Reducing and eliminating nuclear weapons without also addressing the balance of power in other respects could be dangerously destabilising."

9. Yet not considering openly what regional or global security contexts would be required to disarm the UK's independent nuclear deterrent in the 21st century would be equally unwise. Who is to say that the retention of the independent deterrent perpetuates stability? Is it not equally true that many states globally will view the decision to renew as reason for them to seek to acquire?

#### MASS DESTRUCTION

10. A starting point for its retention and use must also imagine the situation where it might be used. A nuclear weapon is neither made nor capable of striking with pinprick precision or to affect limited collateral damage. Even the smallest nuclear weapons will have a devastating impact. For example, it is estimated that the smallest yield within warheads fitted to the Trident missiles probably lie close to the yields demonstrated by the British "Julin Bristol" tests carried out in 1991 in Nevada, USA. This would be comparable to the first atomic weapon detonated over Japan in 1945 which killed tens of thousands of people directly. Any discussion of the deterrent must also envisage its use, and envisage the consequences of its use, and this raises questions of legality, morality and also begs questions of British democratic accountability.

11. The UK, as a state party to the 1949 Geneva Conventions, to both 1977 Additional Protocols and to the 2005 Additional Protocol III, is obliged to refrain from harming civilian populations, directly or indirectly. Specifically, Protocol I, Article 51, paragraph 4 states that "Indiscriminate attacks are prohibited. Indiscriminate attacks are: (a) those which are not directed at a specific military objective; (b) those which employ a method or means of combat which cannot be directed at a specific military objective; or (c) those which employ a method or means of combat the effects of which cannot be limited as required by this Protocol; and consequently, in each such case, are of a nature to strike military objectives and civilians or civilian objects without distinction." This realistically pertains to any weapon of mass destruction.

12. It is highly unlikely that a nuclear attack, even with a relatively modest 10–15kt device, could be detonated without incurring significant civilian casualties. The United Kingdom has signed and ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention, which prohibits the storage or usage of any chemical weapons. It has denounced the use of such weapons by the regime in Syria, and yet the potential carnage that a nuclear weapon would unleash is much, much greater. A deterrent they may be, but they are not merely a chess piece stored in a closet.

#### MULTILATERAL DISARMAMENT COMMITMENTS

13. Discussions of deterrence must not be disassociated from disarmament. Supporters of the independent nuclear deterrent iterate that nuclear disarmament cannot be contemplated realistically until the global security backdrop is favourable. Yet who decides what is favourable? The international security context is unlikely ever to be idyllic: there will always be threats—certain, perceived and those that may exist "just around the corner".

The existence, threat of use of, and integration into strategy of nuclear weapons may even perpetuate or create some of these, and one detonation in anger or by accident will almost certainly change global diplomacy and warfare as we know it.

14. The virtual reaffirmation by the UK of its commitment to an independent nuclear deterrent represents a challenge to its disarmament commitments. The UK has made these commitments under the auspices of the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)—repeated and reinforced in 1995 when the Non-Proliferation Treaty was extended indefinitely—which the United Nations Association of the UK (UNA-UK) urges the UK not only to uphold, but to promote internationally, particularly with other nuclear weapons states.

15. Article VI of the Treaty, for example, iterates that, “Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.” With a commitment to an independent deterrent, it is difficult to see how the UK can reconcile this with its commitments to the NPT, nor signal that it is in any way serious about nuclear disarmament, unilateral or multilateral.

## CONCLUSION

16. The current UK government inherited the British independent nuclear deterrent from its predecessor and it from the government before. From government to government they have been passed since 1952 and, though the global stage has changed greatly, the nuclear weapons have changed little. Delivery systems have been altered or cancelled, or new ones have been designed, but the physics of a detonation remain unalterable, and this is reflected in the weapon. As nations’ militaries around the globe reform their assets to effectively confront multifaceted challenges, nuclear weapons retain a Cold War purpose from which they cannot escape—blunt and uncompromising.

We have inherited these things. The key question is: would we go out of our way to get them now if we didn’t already have them?

## UNA-UK

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## AUTHOR

**James Kearney** is Peace and Security Programmes Manager at UNA-UK. A member of the United Nations Association’s delegation to the 2010 Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in New York, James edits the organisation’s nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation briefing report series, chairs the London-based “Young Nuclear Professionals Group” and is a frequent contributor to national and international print and online media. He has degrees from Oxford and Cambridge Universities and his doctoral studies at Edinburgh University examined societal reconstruction in post-Genocide Rwanda.

September 2013

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## Written evidence from Dr Rebecca Johnson, Director, Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy

### CONCEPTS OF DETERRENCE WITH AND WITHOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

1. Forms of deterrence have been part of individual and collective security and defence strategies in most if not all societies from time immemorial, though they may have carried different connotations and meant different things to different practitioners.

2. For purposes of Cold War politics, the concept of deterrence came to be treated by some analysts as associated solely or primarily with nuclear weapons capabilities. Since the 1950s, Britain has adopted a variety of the nuclear-centred concepts and doctrines driven by US defence and academic establishments and, as the debate over Trident replacement illustrates, has great difficulty looking beyond nuclear weapons to a more networked concept of deterrence appropriate for the range and nature of diverse threats and actors posing actual and realistically potential threats to our security.<sup>1</sup>

3. This has started to change, as illustrated by discussions in NATO and elsewhere on “tailored deterrence”, but the nuclear-armed states are still largely vested in equating deterrence with nuclear weapons, either through national possession and deployment or by “extended deterrence” through nuclear-armed alliance arrangements.

In Britain, the major resistance to diversifying the concept, tools and approaches of deterrence beyond nuclear weapons come from special interests in the navy and nuclear-weapon-related defence contractors, and their supporters among policymakers and in the MoD.

4. MoD, military analysts and senior serving and retired members of the armed forces closer to the army and airforce tend to take a more nuanced and diversified approach to Britain's deterrence needs, capabilities and options.

5. Nuclear deterrence as a concept has been translated into various kinds of doctrines by different defence establishments, and at different times. The most recent incarnations of UK nuclear doctrine (from both Labour's 1997–2007 and the Coalition's 2010 security and defence reviews and policy documents) appear to make assumptions that British nuclear weapons are:

- (a) a minimum deterrent (the notion of "minimum" has varied considerably over time and usually equates with whatever force configuration the MoD actually has or seeks to maintain or deploy in the future);
- (b) useful in preventing nuclear attack and war (except in the circumstances in which they are acknowledged as not being relevant, such as terrorist attack, war with a non-nuclear armed adversary such as encountered by nuclear-weapon states in Viet Nam, Argentina, Afghanistan, Iraq... future resource wars, and so on);
- (c) to create uncertainty or ambiguity in a potential aggressor's mind about the risks and consequences of threatening the UK and any vital assets or allies—it is assumed in this that the consequence of creating that uncertainty will be restraint rather than increased insecurity leading to the adversary taking pre-emptive or desperate risks;
- (d) necessary for NATO and Britain's role in NATO or, alternatively, necessary as a counterweight to US or French nuclear-armed projections of political weight or force;
- (e) credible in their own right as a weapon that UK decision-makers would/could fire and detonate in a range of "deterrent" scenarios—begging questions discussed below about what constitutes "credible" in such contexts; and
- (f) able to provide an "independent centre of decision-making", meant to imply that we could—or might want to—decide differently from the United States on when and how to use "our" nuclear weapons, a rather far-fetched proposition politically, militarily and probably technologically (Trident II D-5 missiles are the current delivery system for UK warheads, and dependent on US technology and guidance systems).

6. These assumptions all need to be rigorously interrogated and analysed to see if any of them hold water now or for the foreseeable future. Each aspect of what the government currently assigns to Trident should also be analysed in terms of:

- (a) whether these are useful objectives for British security, identity and foreign policy in today's world;
- (b) who the targets of deterrence now are (or should be): eg military competitors? states or non-state actors possessing or seeking weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or other advanced military capabilities? who is deterable (and who not?) and under what kinds of circumstances?
- (c) whether there are other—non-nuclear—means to achieve the desired objectives; and
- (d) whether other means and tools could be better and more effective in relation both to deterrence and to promoting British and international security and enhancing our influence, respect and role in international relations.

7. Associating nuclear capabilities with deterrence was not only a Cold War military strategy directed towards adversaries (at that time principally the Soviet Union, hence the "Moscow criterion" of holding at risk the Russian capital and several of its largest industrial cities), but was also a public relations strategy to justify—or make more publicly palatable—the growing costs and sizes of British (and other relevant states' nuclear arsenals and dangers from nuclear bases).

8. The euphemistic substitution of the term "deterrent" for "nuclear weapons" in UK debates over nuclear policy and Trident replacement is a linguistic spin strategy to foster a psychological and emotional locking together of the concepts of nuclear weapons and deterrence. Intended to sustain dependence on nuclear weapons, the language closes off meaningful inquiry into whether nuclear weapons do deter, as illustrated by the absurdity inherent in asking the question "does the deterrent deter?" Such tautological chicanery conveys nothing about the real world, where life and death may depend on whether there is an actual or credible connection in the minds of a supposed deteree. Naming a cat "dog" does not, after all, confer the ability to bark.

9. At the core of nuclear deterrence doctrines is the threat to launch weapons that would create massive "counter-value" destruction of cities, thereby causing an adversary's leaders to refrain from any aggressive acts they might be contemplating. Threatening cities has not deterred military leaders in past wars and may not be the clinching deterrent supposed by nuclear theorists.<sup>2</sup>

10. One dangerous, presumably unintended consequence, of equating nuclear weapons with deterrence capabilities is the undermining of security and non-proliferation objectives by promoting a potent proliferation

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driver, and not only for nuclear weapons. In this context, cheaper or more accessible weapons of mass destruction (WMD), such as chemical and biological weapons came to be regarded as “poor man’s [sic] nukes”.

11. Nonetheless, drivers for chemical and biological weapons proliferation have in the past 20 years been substantially eroded, in large part due to the way in which the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), which entered into force in 1997, helped stigmatise those weapons and embed and oversee their prohibition—also stimulating further implementation and verification efforts for the 1972 Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BWC).

12. By contrast, the nuclear proliferation driver of the asserted “promise” of deterrence through the acquisition and deployment of nuclear weapons has continued to be pernicious, playing a significant role in the proliferation decisions of Israel, Pakistan and North Korea (and potentially Iran, at least in terms of its nuclear options), as well as other programmes during the 1970s, 80s and 90s that have been discontinued for a range of political, economic, regional and security reasons. India’s decision to conduct nuclear tests in 1998 and declare its nuclear weapon status arguably had motivations more associated with the “great power” connotations that have also been counterproductively attached to nuclear weapons since their first uses in 1945.

13. For the “nuclear-weapon states” defined in the 1968 Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) the deterrence association continues to be both a factor and excuse for not moving more quickly and resolutely towards compliance with the nuclear disarmament obligations in Article VI. Even where reductions have been undertaken by some nuclear-weapon states since the end of the Cold War, these have been offset by other NPT-undermining activities such as nuclear modernisation programmes, the Teutates Treaty between Britain and France to institutionalise nuclear collaboration on warhead research and share design technologies and facilities, and the ongoing nuclear collaboration and missile transfers between Britain and the United States under the much-renewed 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement.

14. The majority of UN member states (over 150 out of 193) employ deterrence in a range of forms and in accordance with rational security doctrines appropriate for their needs without any reliance on nuclear weapons. Not only do they not possess nuclear weapons themselves or engage in nuclear-armed alliances, but they consider that the existence of nuclear weapons poses risks to their national, regional and international security, and make their engagement of diplomatic, legal and political tools for deterring potential adversaries and threats more difficult, while also increasing the costs and risk of a “deterrence failure”.

15. In their view, deterrence is not a property or attribute of nuclear weapons—or of any weapons per se. On the contrary, they understand deterrence to be a communicative relationship and security process between or among adversaries, military competitors or potential adversaries, which is best asserted, assured and signalled by a variety of different tools: diplomatic, political, legal and collective, as well as military, intelligence and cyber.

16. In NPT and UN contexts many of these governments have argued that nuclear weapons pose continuous threats to their security through their production, deployment, transporting, proliferation, accident, threat of use, miscalculation and intentional or inadvertent uses. A growing number of non-nuclear governments are raising concerns about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and expressing interest in starting a multilateral process aimed at achieving a nuclear ban treaty under international law. Whether or not Britain and the other eight nuclear-armed states participate in negotiations, a nuclear ban treaty is now on the international agenda.

17. Equating and relying on nuclear weapons for deterrence has skewed thinking in certain nuclear-armed countries, including Britain, about the objectives, processes and mechanisms involved in effective deterrence. Where most regarded deterrence as intended to “convince” an actor to refrain from certain actions, emphasis was also placed on compellence (forcing an actor to do or refrain from something) and denial, as well as threatening “punishment” or retaliation if “red lines” were crossed.

18. Nuclear weapons are practically irrelevant for preventing and dealing with the security challenges of the 21st century. There is a significant risk that they impede and complicate the restructuring of national priorities and international relations necessary for resolving deeper security problems. At worst they create major additional risks and threats, including the possibility of nuclear war and the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that would follow the detonation of one or more nuclear weapons, whether through the actions of state or non-state terrorists or through accident or other dangers if nuclear weapons are not kept fully safe and secure pending their elimination.

19. Equating and relying on nuclear weapons for deterrence will inevitably direct military, political, economic etc, resources towards doctrines, strategies and weapons that may not be appropriate or effective for the desired purposes, or even be counterproductive for security.

20. Nuclear deterrence doctrines tend to reduce security, deterrence and defence planning into issues about size, firepower and configurations of nuclear forces.

21. Depending on the country concerned, this leads to military-industrial investment and profiteering to persuade or blackmail political leaders into spending money on maintaining, modernising or increasing nuclear arsenals.

22. Driven by special interest groups, doctrines of deterrence have been overly focussed on nuclear operations issues such as whether or not to incorporate first use or assured second strike; hair-trigger or certain alert postures (mated, demated, continuously-armed deployments and postures such as “continuous-at-sea deterrent” (CASD) patrols); single, dual or “triad” nuclear force configurations, and so on. These are much less relevant for real and effective deterrence than their proponents would like policy-makers to believe.

#### DETERRENCE AS A COMMUNICATIVE RELATIONSHIP, REQUIRING CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AND CAREFUL CALIBRATION FOR DIFFERENT KINDS OF ACTORS RATHER THAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS

23. During the 2000s, NATO-led discussions on “tailored deterrence” began to reintroduce a more realistic and focussed approach to deterrence. Though nuclear weapons were still treated as an essential component of NATO’s deterrence, tailored deterrence allowed for a broader and more nuanced analysis of the role, needs and tools of and for deterrence. This called for tailoring communications and capabilities to specific actors and situations across a spectrum.

24. The term “tailored deterrence” seems to have fallen out of favour but it was useful for NATO to begin to think more deeply about how to meet the security objectives assigned to nuclear deterrence with other tools and approaches. (One reason for the term to lose resonance was that deterrence should always have been tailored and so it exposed the theoretical rigidity of earlier incarnations of nuclear deterrence as being distortions/aberrations, not the norm.)

25. Since the nuclear concepts of deterrence were most influential on the large militaries of NATO, Russia and former Soviet states, the recent discussions about tailored deterrence helped to shift perceptions by loosening the stranglehold of 20th century notions of nuclear deterrence and legitimising the recognition of a spectrum of tools in addition to nuclear weapons for deterring the 21st century’s range of potential threats and adversaries.

26. In conjunction with this comes an increased awareness (for some) that incentives and rewards are as (and often more) useful than threats and coercive tools, and that restraint (self denial) is more effective in the long term if states and leaders have made informed choices through educative and reframing approaches rather than being coerced or threatened.

27. Deterrence is a relationship, depending on communications between adversaries or potential adversaries. The overall purpose of deterrence should be to convince an adversary (state or non-state) that undertaking certain violent, coercive or oppressive actions would not be in their interests. Means for doing this would likely require being able to communicate effectively that the violent, coercive or oppressive actions that we have reasonably-founded fears or concerns or credible intelligence about would be counterproductive for the adversary’s own security, would not achieve their perceived interests or objectives (whatever those might be), would not have the expected impact on UK policy, decision-making, lives or security, and would not succeed in its intended or predicted purpose.

28. Intelligence and international relations are important, to reduce ignorance not only about adversaries’ capabilities but their cultural and psychological values. Intelligence can get it wrong and cyber strategies may be a doubled-edged sword. Security is significantly undermined if those charged with intelligence and resourcing the country for defence and the avoidance of attacks and wars are looking the wrong way, or still expecting to fight the wars of the past, rather than equipping to address the security challenges Britain is likely to face now and in the future.

#### RISKS AND DANGERS ASSOCIATED WITH DETERRENCE MISCALCULATION, EXTENSION OR FAILURE

29. While military threats can be a useful component of deterrence in certain circumstances, they may also result in unintended consequences, including miscalculations—for example, inducing a level of fear in an adversary is presumed to support deterrence, but may be as likely to create crisis instability in which a target state or non-state actor perceives a threat to their own perceived interests or security rather than a warning not to threaten ours, and therefore decides to launch a pre-emptive attack to neutralise a perceived but perhaps “unintended” attack from us. Military history is full of examples of miscommunication leading to miscalculation, leading to worse outcomes than the original threat that was supposed to be deterred.

30. Significant NATO experts at a 2008 conference at Wilton Park on nuclear deterrence acknowledged that relying on nuclear weapons for deterrence creates perpetual insecurity by making calculations and actions dependent on the intelligence, stability and rational good sense of adversaries in a context of mistrust and fear. Not a good basis for our security!

31. Relying on nuclear weapons greatly increases the humanitarian and security costs if communications go wrong; for example if there are miscalculations or misunderstandings resulting from assertions of “red lines” that must not be crossed, ultimatums, threats of assured destruction, and military operations meant to demonstrate credible intentions as well as capabilities to wreak unacceptable harm on anyone crossing a red line or posing a threat.

32. Misinterpretation of deterrence communications because of (for example) mixed messages, or misreading cultural cues, values or psychological contexts, may result in failures of deterrence.



33. Since the technologies and assumptions on which deterrence communications, psychology, intelligence and threat perceptions rely may be wrong or fail for various reasons, deterrence can fail—and history suggests that wise leaders have fall back plans to offset the risks and consequences of deterrence failures. Since it is unrealistic to expect 100% success and security from deterrence, it is essential that the risks and consequences of failure are not more catastrophic for human and national security than the perceived threat that a deterrence posture is meant to address.

34. Any first use or retaliatory use of nuclear weapons by Britain would represent a failure of deterrence. Such uses would create catastrophic humanitarian harm for civilian populations and would likely create far more devastating and serious harm for people in Britain as well. Such uses would almost inevitably violate international law as well as the deeply held values and interests of most if not all British people—and the community of nations and rule of law that we seek to uphold, respect and participate in.

35. Relying on other tools for deterrence may also fail; the consequences of such failure might be undesirable and unpleasant, but they would be likely to be more survivable and less catastrophic than when nuclear deterrence fails.

36. In the Trident debate it has been problematic and misleading to hear some political and military proponents speak of “more” or “less” deterrence depending on the quantity or firepower of various nuclear weapons options. Deterrence is not a quantifiable attribute in that way, nor can it be calculated in terms of the size or firepower of nuclear or other weapons or military forces.

37. Through “extended deterrence”, nuclear alliances have blurred the obligations, roles and security interests of states that have joined the NPT as “non-nuclear-weapon states”. Such nuclear alliances may be regarded by some as a way of avoiding the costs and consequences of acquiring nuclear weapons of their own (and arguments are sometimes made that this enabled states with nuclear programmes in the 1960s to forego national acquisition costs and consequences and join the NPT). While this may have been true early on, the politics and operations of nuclear dependency as promoted through NATO and in US compacts with Japan, South Korea and Australia, are now regarded by many other NPT states parties as being contrary to the text, objectives and intentions of the NPT, creating additional dangers and threats to the security of states inside and outside such alliances, with training and collaboration for military personnel of “non-nuclear-weapon states” to receive, acquire or take control of nuclear weapons belonging to a nuclear-armed ally, either through a declaration of war or through non-state terrorism during nuclear transports and deployments.

## CONCLUSIONS

38. The core question is not whether deterrence is a useful component of defence and security, but whether nuclear weapons are a useful, necessary or counterproductive component of deterrence. The central conundrum is that if nuclear weapons are used operationally—actually fired (and cities as well as military targets are generally on war-plans developed in conjunction with doctrines of deterrence)—then deterrence has failed, and the adverse consequences will far outweigh any gains—for everyone.

39. To the extent that deterrence works, it is the product of the interplay of multiple instruments, any one of which might fail. Therefore, part of deterrence is making sure you can survive and recover from that failure. Nuclear weapons make that much harder, whether or not their role has been reduced from sole dependence to back-up. As well as hard and soft power, psychological, cultural and communications factors play important but not necessarily predictable roles in deterrence. It is inappropriate—and counterproductive—to rest the weight of deterrence strategies on a single weapon system: if that were justifiable, all governments would feel duty-bound to provide such protection to their populace. And that is a recipe for nuclear proliferation.

40. By contrast with the weapons-based notions of nuclear deterrence, effective deterrence needs to be tailored for different actors, requiring recognition that potential adversaries can be dissuaded, deterred and convinced by a mix of messages that can be transmitted by diplomatic, political and economic means, and that these are likely to be more sustainable than threats of overwhelming force through pre-emptive military action or retaliation.

41. Given the multiplicity of potential actors to be convinced, dissuaded, deterred and denied, British foreign and defence policies need to be much better integrated to reduce the motivations, incentives, opportunities, perceived benefits and threatening capabilities of potential adversaries.

42. British policy-makers need to reframe deterrence in the context of:

- (a) the changing context of British, European and international security, and a realistic, sensible analysis of actual and potential threats and actors;
- (b) assessment of what actual and potential actors and actions can be deterred, and analysis of the most appropriate mixture of tools, approaches and communications that would enhance deterrence, including also the policies and communications that might erode deterrence;
- (c) strategic cost-benefit analysis of deterrence options, with recognition that deterrence failures must be survivable and not all actors can be deterred; and

- (d) avoidance of weapons, tools or the issuing of “deterrent” threats or red lines that may create more devastating (if unintended) humanitarian and security consequences than the potential threat Britain is purporting to deter.

43. The communicative messages and variety of tools that can most effectively achieve the security objectives currently assigned to “deterrence” may not fit the categories of Cold War deterrence theories, but are likely to be far more effective for today’s security needs, and so need to be recognised and developed as a matter of security and defence urgency.

44. Non-deterable and many deterable threats may be neutralised or diverted into less violent, coercive or oppressive avenues through diplomatic, political, international and other actions and means designed to persuade and encourage all sides to seek non-violent and non-coercive means to resolve the causes of potential conflicts rather than resorting to the use of force. That such approaches would be persuasive rather than dissuasive should not blind us to their deterrent value.

45. Stronger implementation of international laws and treaties, including disarmament and weapons prohibition treaties where applicable, will provide enhanced deterrence, including uncertainty in the minds of potential violators (suppliers as well as perpetrators) that they will evade detection, identification and legal charges, convictions and penalties, including for serious crimes against humanity, war crimes and/or treaty violations.

46. The BWC and CWC, combined with the broadening role, powers and recognition of the International Criminal Court (ICC) should be utilised more fully to deter proliferators, suppliers and users of inhumane weapons, especially against non-combatant populations.

47. A multilaterally negotiated, globally applicable and non-discriminatory nuclear prohibition treaty banning the use, deployment, production, transfer and stockpiling of nuclear weapons and requiring their elimination will be an important and desirable tool for legal and political deterrence in the future.

48. To enhance UK deterrence capabilities and eliminate future nuclear dangers and threats (or in the short term to greatly reduce nuclear dangers, terrorist access and proliferation incentives) the British government should eliminate the role of nuclear weapons in deterrence concepts, doctrines and operations, promote the denuclearisation of NATO, foster and resource better conflict management and resolution strategies, and take the lead in promoting multilateral nuclear ban treaty negotiations. In conjunction with this the UK should renounce plans to modernise and replace our nuclear forces, take Trident out of deployment and place the demated warheads into safe and secure storage pending their total elimination.

*26 September 2013*

#### REFERENCES

1 See Commander Robert Green (Royal Navy, retired), *Security Without Nuclear Deterrence*, including Rebecca Johnson’s Introduction, “Turning Back from Doomsday”, Astron Media, NZ, 2010.

2 See Ward Wilson, *Five Myths about Nuclear Weapons*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012

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#### **Written evidence submitted by Dr Andrew Futter & Dr Benjamin Zala, University of Leicester**

1. This submission addresses the call for evidence on “the different levels of deterrence, especially nuclear deterrence, deterrence through conventional forces, the link between the two, and the significance of ballistic missile defence.” While much of our evidence is US-centric, the closeness of the US-UK relationship and the inevitable knock-on effects of changes in the US defence posture for the United Kingdom, mean that current policy trends in the US will form a significant part of the strategic debate in the UK as we look to the future.

#### SUMMARY

2. The vast majority of the public and scholarly debate about nuclear deterrence in recent years has focused on the relationship between existing deterrence doctrine and the renewed push towards a nuclear weapons-free world. Yet the increasing importance of strategic conventional weapons—namely long-range conventional strike and missile defence technology—has been largely overlooked. In particular, the link being made by the Obama administration between strategic conventional weaponry and nuclear weapons reductions has important implications that need to be considered carefully.

3. Unilateral advances in such US conventional capacities may incentivise Washington to reduce its nuclear arsenal but they are likely to have the opposite effect on other nuclear-armed states, which will feel increasingly vulnerable. In the medium-long term, conventional weapons imbalances may hinder progress in getting all nine nuclear weapon states on the path of abolition. In the short term this trend has the potential to jeopardise strategic stability, particularly in regions such as Northeast Asia. There is a strong, and problematic, link between nuclear and conventional weapons created by the way that nuclear weapons act as the “great equalizers” in global strategic relations: ie lowering the impact of conventional weapons imbalances between potential rivals.

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## BACKGROUND

4. Over a number of years, the Obama administration has made moves to reduce the role played by nuclear weapons in the US defence posture, at least in part to help facilitate the achievement of a nuclear weapons-free world. A central component of the administration's plan (but often overlooked in wider discussions about the pros and cons of nuclear disarmament) is the gradual shift to a far greater reliance upon advanced conventional weaponry in US defence policy, specifically through a larger role for ballistic missile defences (BMD), advanced conventional strike weapons such as the Prompt Global Strike (PGS) programme, and sophisticated command, control, and monitoring capabilities.

5. The imperative behind this move is that the administration hopes to foster the domestic conditions favorable for further US nuclear reductions—thereby reigniting the push towards nuclear abolition internationally—while at the same time placating domestic critics concerned about a weakening of US security and of the US' global role. From the point of view of the Obama administration, an increased role for advanced conventional weapons will allow it to reduce its own nuclear stockpile, signaling to other nuclear powers its intent to eventually disarm. This move was illustrated in the administration's 2010 US Nuclear Posture Review.

## PGS AND BMD

6. The two main pillars of this approach are the offensive PGS capabilities and the defensive BMD programme. The PGS system is essentially an attempt to create a capability for a rapid precision missile strike across the globe using conventional warheads. The idea, in its simplest form, is to mount conventional warheads (rather than nuclear ones) on long-range missiles (although other means of delivering the warheads are also being examined, such as boost glide systems, and even armed drones). In principle, this would allow the United States to strike targets anywhere in the world in as little as an hour.

7. The US BMD programme is a complex global network of radars, satellites and missiles used to identify, track and intercept incoming missiles aimed both at the US homeland, US allies, and US troops in theatres around the world. Despite the public image of an administration less convinced of the virtues of BMD than its predecessor, the administration has supported levels of BMD funding far higher than that under Reagan, Bush senior, or Clinton. Indeed, during Obama's first term in office, an ambitious and flexible BMD plan for the defense of Europe was unveiled; the very wide-ranging Ballistic Missile Defense Review was produced, outlining the administration's decision to push ahead with BMD around the globe; and finally, US negotiators fought hard to keep limitations on BMD out of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) signed with Russia in April 2010.

## THE PROBLEM

8. While the idea of increasing the role of advanced conventional weaponry as a component of US national security thinking and practice is not new, Obama is the first president to strongly link these plans with the goal of pursuing a world free from nuclear weapons. However, the administration's domestic policy focus must also take into consideration the international impact of the disarmament agenda on the major military fault lines in key US nuclear relationships. When examined in this context, the Obama administration's plan to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons through—at least in part—a greater role for advanced conventional weaponry in order to foster larger nuclear reductions appears unlikely to succeed at best; and likely to derail long-term progress at worst.

9. The inescapable problem is that US superiority in advanced conventional weaponry already exists, making it very difficult for any potential rival (let alone an adversary) to agree to work toward a nuclear-free world when such a move—already made difficult by existing conventional imbalances—will magnify US power. The close link between nuclear reductions and increases in conventional capabilities essentially works to decrease US vulnerability in a nuclear disarmed world, while at the same time increasing the vulnerability of its current or future rivals and adversaries.

## GLOBAL CONCERNS

10. Despite the fact that there are still many obstacles to the full and effective deployment of BMD and PGS systems in their most ambitious incarnations, the overall trend towards a greater reliance on these weapons systems creates concern in the capitals of other nuclear powers. Increasing constraints on the US defence budget that are likely to place limits on continued conventional development, particularly on PGS, in the short-term, are insufficient to counter the image of a future nuclear disarmed world defined by overwhelming US conventional superiority. In short, future uncertainty and vulnerability are more important factors for Moscow and Beijing than whether a particular component of advanced conventional weaponry is funded in this year's defence budget.

## THINKING BEYOND NUCLEAR WEAPONS

11. The central problem for the United States as it attempts to use the growth of unrivalled U.S. conventional military capabilities and major improvements in missile defenses to reduce its reliance on nuclear weapons is that the equalising effect of nuclear weapons cannot be wished away. As such, it may well be more useful for

the Obama administration to think beyond the current focus solely on nuclear weapons reductions as a means of ensuring global security, and instead toward much more nuanced agreements covering a much wider range of weaponry. Although this will be more difficult than focusing explicitly on numbers of nuclear weapons, it is arguably the only way to build trust with nuclear rivals to the extent needed to make deeper nuclear reductions possible.

12. If including conventional programs in future strategic arms limitations negotiations (not just with Russia) proves too difficult, then Washington will face a choice between dramatically scaling back the deployment of PGS and significantly delaying the deployment of BMD, or suspending efforts at further nuclear reductions altogether.

#### TIMING

13. is key to addressing the ways in which BMD research and deployment act as a barrier to multilateral nuclear disarmament. Indeed, President Reagan's statement to President Gorbachev at the 1986 Reykjavik summit that the Strategic Defense Initiative deployment could come after the elimination of nuclear missiles was an important conceptual point that few observers have noted. Many of the concerns expressed, particularly by Russia and China, about BMD could be countered by aligning the timetables of deployment with nuclear reductions to ensure that the shield is only lifted after the sword has been buried. Deterrence may be a far from perfect strategy, but it is far better than one side achieving effective impunity by maintaining a nuclear arsenal and a large-scale BMD system *at the same time*.

14. However such assurances still do not address the longer-term concern about US conventional superiority in a nuclear disarmed world, and therefore a short-term focus on the timing of BMD deployment should not be thought of as a long-term solution in which limitations will be unavoidable.

#### ARMS CONTROL

15. In relation to the PGS system in the United States and other long-range conventional offensive systems being developed by others, while confidence building measures can be useful in the short term, over the medium-long term, given the United States' existing conventional superiority, there is no alternative to arms control measures.

16. Two options are available immediately. The first is to include such weapons in efforts to renew the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty. Russian concern over BMD in Europe was one of the drivers of Moscow's decision to suspend the treaty in 2007 and the inclusion of PGS in future discussions could be used as tool for reinvigorating negotiations.

17. The second option is to widen future US-Russian talks on a follow on to the recent Strategic Arms Reductions Treaty (New START) to include non-nuclear strategic weapons including those intended under the PGS programme. Such efforts would serve to reinforce the link between nuclear and advanced conventional weapons but in a way that reduces both rather than increasing one in order to reduce the other.

#### REGIONAL DIALOGUE

18. A renewed focus on regional dialogue on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament will also allow for more opportunities to highlight and discuss the problem of intended and unintended consequences of advanced conventional weapons programmes. For example, the main intention behind US, Japanese and South Korean development of missile defence capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region is to counter potential threats from North Korea and cement the deterrence link with United States. However, the significant but unintended effect of this is to make China far less likely to join multilateral efforts to reduce its nuclear arsenal. The same is true in relation to Russia's concerns over US and NATO defences primarily aimed at countering Iranian missiles, and Pakistan's concerns over India's burgeoning system that is only partly aimed at countering Pakistani missile threats (and some analysts claim is actually more directed towards a potential Chinese threat).

#### PUBLIC DEBATE

19. At the very least, a far greater level of public debate is needed in relation to the growing link between strategic conventional weapons and nuclear arsenals. The Committee would be advised to include some discussion in its report from this inquiry of these issues in order to help raise their profile in public discussions around nuclear weapons and defence strategy. Given the seemingly technical nature of the subjects involved and the relative lack of public knowledge that programmes such as PGS even exist, the Committee could play an important role here.

20. The British Government should use the avenues presented by its close diplomatic and military relationship with the United States to raise the issues discussed above with defence and foreign policy officials in Washington. Doing so will help in highlighting the global implications of the growing nuclear-conventional link in US defence policy.

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## UK DEFENCE POLICY

21. While the majority of these dynamics are playing out outside of the United Kingdom, the general trend toward advanced conventional capabilities will become increasingly important for UK security planning—not least in decisions over resource allocation and Trident replacement.

22. Specifically, these developments are likely to effect the United Kingdom in two main ways; (1) while nuclear weapons and traditional notions of deterrence, such as that adopted by the United Kingdom, are unlikely to disappear anytime soon, these Cold War axioms are increasingly being challenged, and it seems likely that the future nuclear order will be more nuanced as we look forward—this could begin to cast doubt on the efficacy of a UK deterrent posture based solely on nuclear retaliation; (2) equally, the growth in advanced conventional capabilities is likely to make any push for multilateral nuclear reductions more difficult (as explained above), and undermine the goal of global zero.

23. As a result, any UK non-proliferation and disarmament agenda must be cognisant of the impact of diversifications in US (and increasingly other powers') nuclear thinking and policy toward advanced conventional capabilities. We hope that the Committee will encourage the Government to address these issues in the updated National Security Strategy to be released in 2015.

## NOTES

These issues are discussed in more detail in Andrew Futter and Benjamin Zala, “Advanced US Conventional Weapons and Nuclear Disarmament: Why the Obama Plan Won’t Work”, *The Nonproliferation Review*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2013, pp. 107–122. A copy of the article has been included as an attachment to this submission.

For specific examples in current public documents that make the link between advanced conventional weaponry and nuclear reductions see:

- US Department of Defense, “Nuclear Posture Review Report” (April 2010), pp. 6–7, 15–16, 25, 32, 45.
- US Department of Defense, “Quadrennial Defense Review Report” (February 2010), p. 14.
- US Department of Defense, “Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report” (February 2010), p. 23.
- Executive Office of the President, “Statement Of Administration Policy H.R. 2219—Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2012” (June 2011), p.1.

## AUTHORS

Andrew Futter is a Lecturer in International Politics at the University of Leicester specialising in strategic studies and nuclear weapons and is the author of “US Missile Defence and National Security: Normalisation and Acceptance after the Cold War” (Routledge: 2013).

Benjamin Zala is a Lecturer in International Politics at the University of Leicester specialising in great power politics and security issues and has published in journals such as *The Nonproliferation Review* and the *RUSI Journal*.

September 2013

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## Written evidence from the Nuclear Information Service

1. Nuclear Information Service (NIS) is a not-for-profit, independent information service which works to promote public awareness and debate on nuclear weapons and related safety and environmental issues (see <http://nuclearinfo.org> for more information). Our research work is supported by funding from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

2. NIS welcomes the Defence Committee’s inquiry into “Deterrence in the 21st Century” and welcomes the opportunity to give evidence to the committee. Our evidence deals mainly with nuclear deterrence and the UK’s nuclear deterrence doctrine, although many of the points we discuss will apply to the broader concept of deterrence.

## THE CONCEPT OF DETERRENCE

3. The concept of deterrence is largely based on theory rather than empirical evidence. Its logic is based on mathematical game theories and is underpinned by a number of assumptions—most significantly, that players will act rationally. A model of deterrence will reflect values and political judgements about the world view and intent of potential adversaries, the capabilities of the deterrer and their adversaries, and the vulnerability to attack of both parties. A broad range of factors will contribute to a deterrent effect—economic, political, and cultural—and not just issues concerning military force.

4. Deterrence is not an objective science and its success cannot be guaranteed. The logic of deterrence was questioned by a range of critics during the Cold War and historical examples illustrate cases where deterrence has failed in maintaining security (see paragraph 8 below). There is an absence of firm evidence to demonstrate

the effectiveness of deterrence and, unfortunately, deterrence does not provide a guarantee of security or act as an “insurance policy” against an uncertain future. If a deterrence model breaks down in a particular situation, the consequences are likely to be both unintended and serious.

5. A deterrent approach to security is usually a component of a “control paradigm” to security—an attempt to maintain the status quo through military force and control insecurity without addressing its root causes.<sup>11</sup> In our view, such an approach is self-defeating in the long term, and a new approach based on a “sustainable security paradigm” is needed.

6. During the Cold War a common understanding of what deterrence was between “East” and “West” led to a certain degree of continuity in superpower relations—although not without significant dangers. The Cold War was neither stable nor predictable, representing a highly dangerous stand-off with serious risks of either an inadvertent or deliberate nuclear exchange. Since the end of the Cold War, nuclear deterrence has no longer been a defining feature of relations between the major global powers, which are gradually beginning to work together as strategic partners. At most, deterrence acts as a hedge against a severe breakdown in relations between global powers at some time in the future. Whether such a breakdown is likely, and the mechanisms through which it might happen, are matters which are usually skipped over by proponents of nuclear deterrence. The costs and benefits of providing the deterrent hedge have not been assessed against the costs and benefits of addressing other security threats which may be more plausible and immediate.

7. In other respects, deterrent relationships can be expected to become more complex as asymmetries between actors, their capabilities, and their intentions widen. The common knowledge and understanding which underpinned deterrent relationships between the superpowers during the Cold War is likely to be replaced by a range of more complex, uncertain, and ambiguous relationships.

#### THE LIMITATIONS OF NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

8. The limits of deterrence may be illustrated by the following examples, where international crises and aggression were not prevented despite the doctrine of nuclear deterrence:

- Post-war Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe during the 1940s and 1950s despite the then US monopoly on nuclear weapon technology, and continuing Soviet control of Eastern Europe until the 1990s.
- The North Korean invasion of US-backed South Korea in 1950.
- The Sino-Soviet border war between two nuclear-armed states in 1969.
- The military defeat of the US and China, both nuclear-armed, by North Vietnam in the 1970s.
- The Argentinian invasion of the Falkland Islands in 1982.
- The invasion of US-backed Kuwait by Iraq in 1991 and subsequent Scud missile attacks against nuclear-armed Israel.
- The Indo-Pakistani war of 1999, again between two nuclear-armed states.
- The 9/11 terrorist outrages in the USA.
- The use of chemical weapons in the current Syrian civil war in defiance of international law and norms.

These examples illustrate failures in the concept of deterrence and highlight the impracticality of using nuclear weapons as a credible deterrent threat, given the immense consequences that would result from their use.

9. Nuclear weapon postures continue to rely on the deterrent approach, even though it cannot be assumed that the deterrence model will continue to operate in the same way as it did during the Cold War or be understood in the same way by new players in the international security landscape. The international Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, led by Hans Blix, concluded that “even though governments frequently invoke deterrence as a rationale for retaining nuclear weapons, its relevance has sharply diminished if not completely vanished. It originated in the effort to avert the danger of war in a bipolar nuclear world that no longer exists. Invoking it in a very changed world tends to keep mistrust alive and inhibit the closer international cooperation necessary to address common problems, including the threats of nuclear proliferation and catastrophic terrorism”.<sup>12</sup>

10. Writing in the Wall Street Journal in January 2007, former secretary of State Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of Defense William Perry, former Senator Sam Nunn, and former Secretary of State George Shultz unequivocally stated their view that nuclear deterrence poses significant risks and is an unsound base upon which to build long-term security. Warning of the “tremendous dangers” posed by nuclear weapons, they concluded that: “The end of the Cold War made the doctrine of mutual Soviet-American deterrence obsolete. Deterrence continues to be a relevant consideration for many states with regard to threats for other states. But

<sup>11</sup> “Global Responses to Global Threats. Sustainable Security for the 21st Century”. Chris Abbotts, Paul Rogers, and John Sloboda. Oxford Research Group, June 2006.

<sup>12</sup> “Weapons of Terror: Freeing the world of nuclear, biological, and chemical arms”. Report of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, Stockholm, Sweden. June 2006.

reliance on nuclear weapons for this purpose is becoming increasingly hazardous and decreasingly effective.”<sup>13</sup> The four statesmen made the case that the international community would not be able to indefinitely restrain the proliferation of nuclear technology, manage relations between nuclear armed states, and secure fissile materials, resulting in an imperative need to eliminate nuclear weapons.

11. Despite the “control paradigm” approach to international security taken by the UK, the US, and the “West”, it is becoming increasingly difficult for these powers to retain control over events. The possession of nuclear weapons will be unlikely to guarantee security if the current nuclear order breaks down and the number of nuclear-armed states in the world increases.

#### THE UK’S NUCLEAR DETERRENT POSTURE AND TRIDENT

12. In our view, the UK’s Trident nuclear weapons system provides the nation with very limited security benefits yet is potentially a driver for the future proliferation of nuclear weapons.

13. The government’s National Security Strategy, published in 2010, assesses an attack on the UK or its Overseas Territories by another state or proxy using chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear weapons as merely a “Tier Two” threat, stating that “A CBRN attack on the UK by a state was judged to be low likelihood but high impact”.<sup>14</sup> Europe remains one of the safest parts of the world, with the vast majority of European nations feeling no need to develop their own nuclear weapons to guarantee security. According to NATO, “the threat of general war in Europe has virtually disappeared”.<sup>15</sup> If the UK is not under strategic threat, what are the nation’s nuclear weapons intended to deter against?

14. The reasons the government considers that the UK needs to retain its nuclear weapons were outlined in the 2006 White Paper on Trident replacement<sup>16</sup> and are as follows:

15. *Reason 1: To deter against the re-emergence of a major direct nuclear threat to the UK or our NATO allies, and prevent major war which threatens the British state.* The government accepts that the UK currently faces no such threat and has not done so since the early 1990s. The only nations which could pose such a threat to the UK in the foreseeable future are Russia and possibly China. However, there has been a positive trend in the UK’s and the European Union’s relationships with both these countries since the end of the Cold War.

16. Russia is not the Soviet Union and NATO leaders have expressed the desire to work towards a strategic partnership with Russia.<sup>17</sup> Former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told the Russian media in 2001 that: “I don’t go to bed at night worrying about the Soviet Union attacking Europe through Germany any more. The Soviet Union is gone. I don’t worry about the threat of a ballistic missile attack from Russia ... Our relationships have been changed dramatically over the last decade. It is time to acknowledge that fact and address how best to go forward”.<sup>18</sup> Sir Michael Quinlan, former Permanent Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Defence and an expert on nuclear deterrence, wrote that “even if grounds for unease about Russia’s internal evolution intensify, it is hard to imagine that country re-emerging as a military threat to the political freedom of the countries of the European Union”.<sup>19</sup>

17. China’s priorities over the next few decades will be to promote economic development and integrate into global economic and political systems on its own terms, but as a “good neighbour”. Chinese foreign policy and military interests are focused on what China defines as its “core interests” based around state sovereignty and territorial integrity. China has rapidly become integrated into the global market economy and financial system, and despite its growing international influence has shown no evidence of a desire to reshape the international order or establish its own power blocs.<sup>20</sup>

18. The possibility that Russia or China would at some time over the next fifty years pose a direct military threat to the UK represents an unlikely and exceptionally worst case scenario. A military confrontation with the “West” involving either of these powers would be highly damaging to their development and economies. Tensions will be inevitable at certain times, but it is difficult to see how the UK’s nuclear weapons could play any role in resolving such tensions. It is time for the government to accept that Russia and China do not pose a military threat to the UK and that they are now becoming our economic and strategic partners.

19. *Reason 2: To deter against the use of weapons of mass destruction by a rogue state during a regional intervention in which UK forces were involved, allowing the UK to continue to be able to intervene militarily*

<sup>13</sup> “A World Free of Nuclear Weapons”, George P Shultz, William J Perry, Henry A Kissinger, and Sam Nunn. Wall Street Journal, 4 January 2007.

<sup>14</sup> “A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy”. Cm 7953. Cabinet Office, October 2010.

<sup>15</sup> “Lecture 1: How did NATO survive the Cold War?” NATO video lecture by Jamie Shea. Online at <http://www.nato.int/multi/video/lectures/031104/031104.htm> (accessed 26 September 2013).

<sup>16</sup> “The Future of the United Kingdom’s Nuclear Deterrent”. Cm 6994. Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, December 2006.

<sup>17</sup> “NATO’s relations with Russia”. Online on NATO website at [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_50090.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50090.htm) (accessed 26 September 2013).

<sup>18</sup> “Russia, U.S. Must Get Beyond Cold War, Rumsfeld Says to Putin”. Jim Garamone, US Department of Defense News Article, 14 August 2001. <http://www.defense.gov/News/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=44779> (Accessed 26 September 2013).

<sup>19</sup> “The Future of United Kingdom Nuclear Weapons”. Sir Michael Quinlan. International Affairs, Volume 82(4) page 633. 2006.

<sup>20</sup> “When China Rules the World”. Martin Jacques. Penguin Books, 2009.

around the world without fear of “nuclear blackmail” or coercion. We find it difficult to see how UK nuclear weapons could make any difference in a scenario involving a rogue state armed with weapons of mass destruction. Firstly, there is no evidence that attempts at nuclear blackmail aimed at influencing military or political action have ever been successful.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, if the survival of a rogue regime armed with weapons of mass destruction was genuinely under threat, military intervention would be an unpredictable high-risk option, with a disproportionate risk that the regime might use its weapons in a last-ditch attempt to survive. The UK’s nuclear weapons would not provide a deterrent effect under such circumstances and would not act as a reliable “nuclear umbrella” to support a conventional attack.

20. *Reason 3: To deter against state-sponsored acts of nuclear terrorism.* It is unlikely that conventional deterrence theories would apply to terrorism and the calculations of terrorist groups and their sponsors. In the event of a nuclear terrorist attack, the UK would have to be able to prove with absolute certainty that the suspected state sponsor had provided nuclear materials and expertise to terrorists with the intention that they would be used to attack the UK for any retaliation against the suspected state sponsor to be justified. The threat of nuclear retaliation in such a situation—which could be expected to indiscriminately kill thousands of innocent civilians, making it unlawful and counterproductive—is barely credible and if exercised, would almost certainly play into the hands of terrorists by mobilising international opinion dramatically against the UK.

21. *Reason 4: To act as an insurance against emerging threats to the UK’s vital interests and the uncertainties and risks of the future.* It should be remembered that insurance does not prevent unwelcome events from happening, but merely provides compensation to mitigate against them. The best that nuclear weapons can do is allow the UK to retaliate or take revenge against a potential—but improbable—nuclear attack or invasion. Such an event would require an aggressor to suddenly emerge and take action against the UK under circumstances where NATO’s conventional defences could not be brought into play—a remotely unlikely scenario.

22. The emerging threats which look likely to threaten the UK over the first half of this century are of a nature which military responses and a deterrent approach cannot address. Threats posed by climate change, pandemic diseases, shocks to financial markets, and extremism have both their roots and solutions in a complex mix of environmental, economic, social, and political factors. Future conflicts are likely to be “hybrid” conflicts at the regional or sub-regional level, blending war, terrorism, and insurgency, in which there is no conceivable role for nuclear weapons and which deterrence cannot prevent. Such threats are far more likely than an existential military threat challenging the survival of the British state. It makes sense to allocate security resources to address threats that can realistically be anticipated rather than against a remote contingency.

23. The UK’s nuclear deterrence doctrine makes the assumption that nuclear weapons will automatically and unproblematically ensure that potential enemies will be deterred from taking aggressive action against the nation. In reality, the situation is far more complex. A deterrent will not work if an enemy does not consider it credible or relevant to its interests, or is absolutely determined to act aggressively, or thinks it can control the risks or survive an attack. The apparent security provided by a nuclear deterrent is, when analysed critically, exposed as an illusion.

#### DETERRENCE AS A DRIVER FOR THE PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

24. The adoption of a nuclear deterrence posture by nuclear-armed states such as the UK is a driver for the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The principle of nuclear deterrence can be used by any state that feels under threat, regardless of any legal obligations under the NPT. The logic and principles of nuclear deterrence are universally applicable, and do not just apply to the nuclear weapon-states recognised in the NPT.

25. Despite the government’s claims that the programme to replace the Trident nuclear weapons system will not undermine the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the decision to embark on the programme sends out a powerful message that the logic of nuclear deterrence is seen by the UK as a “fact of life” in international politics and is therefore a legitimate form of state behaviour which other states can also adopt. It indicates that the UK sees nuclear weapons as a permanent feature of the international security environment and has little confidence in efforts to eliminate them globally. In the words of Mohammed El Baradei, formerly Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Britain cannot credibly “modernise its Trident submarines and then tell everyone else that nuclear weapons are not needed in the future”.<sup>22</sup> The House of Commons Committee on Foreign Affairs took a similar view in its 2009 report “Global Security: Non-Proliferation”, concluding that “the decision to renew the UK’s Trident system is perceived by some foreign states and some among the British public as appearing to contradict the government’s declared commitment to strengthening the international nuclear non-proliferation regime”.<sup>23</sup> The general “insurance policy” nature of the UK’s rationale for retaining nuclear weapons—rather than in response to any specific security need or strategic threat—further serves to reinforce the message to others that nuclear weapons will be an essential capability in an uncertain future world.

<sup>21</sup> “Trident—White Elephant or Black Hole?” Sir Hugh Beach. *RUSI Journal*, Vol 154(1), pages 36–43. February 2009.

<sup>22</sup> “UN nuclear watchdog calls Trident hypocritical”. David Blair, *Daily Telegraph*, 20 February 2007.

<sup>23</sup> “Global Security: Non-Proliferation”. House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee Fourth Report of Session 2008–09. HC 222, 14 June 2009. Paragraph 133, page 62.



26. Trident replacement can do nothing other than reinforce perceptions that nuclear weapons are valuable and desirable security assets, and promote the logic of nuclear deterrence in international politics. The eventual result will be the erosion of confidence in the NPT and a weakening of its legitimacy and effectiveness. In our view the only legitimate alternative is for the UK to reject the logic of nuclear deterrence and take measures to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons in its security posture. Such steps—undertaken before the next NPT Review Conference in 2015 by a member of the United Nations Security Council, one of the pioneers behind the original atom bomb project, and one of the NPT depositary states—would be a turning point in regenerating momentum towards achieving a world without nuclear weapons and bolstering the NPT itself, which is coming under increasing strain.<sup>24</sup>

#### ALTERNATIVES

27. Nuclear weapons are not a substitute for the stability provided by good relations between nations in a just, rules-based international framework. Over recent years actions undertaken by the UK, such as involvement in the invasion of Iraq without a legal mandate from the United Nations and moving towards modernising its nuclear arsenal regardless of its NPT disarmament commitments, have, if anything, served to undermine rather than reinforce such a framework.

28. Rather than a security model based on the “control paradigm”—seeking to maintain the status quo and keep the lid on security problems through use of military force rather than addressing the root causes of problems, we consider that the UK should move towards adopting a “sustainable security” approach to addressing international conflicts.<sup>25</sup> This would require tackling the root causes of security threats—for example, by taking co-operative steps to reduce competition for resources and mitigating climate change; addressing legitimate political grievances and tackling poverty; and moving towards demilitarisation and disarmament. Military operations should gradually shift in emphasis towards peacebuilding and reconstruction, rather than offensive combat operations.

29. Such an approach to international security issues should go hand in hand with, domestically, steps to improve resilience and local self-sufficiency—accepting that government cannot protect against all kinds of threat and preparing to withstand some damage. Preparations to improve national resilience are in themselves both a form of deterrence and a means of making British society a less attractive target for aggressors.

30. A gradual shift along these lines away from the control paradigm of security and the associated deterrence culture is both possible and desirable. It would require the government to accept that the UK does not need nuclear weapons or a major military presence to be a leading global power, and to invest instead in diplomacy, conflict resolution, and development as a means of addressing security concerns and remaining an influential activist nation at the centre of world events. More specifically, by taking steps to demonstrate to the world that it no longer considers nuclear weapons necessary to guarantee its security—for example, by stepping down from a posture where nuclear weapons are constantly deployed at sea—the UK would be making a major contribution to help tackle risks arising from the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

October 2013

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#### Written evidence submitted by Dr Nick Ritchie, Department of Politics, University of York

1. This submission to the Committee’s inquiry into “Deterrence in the 21st Century” focuses on the practice of nuclear deterrence by the United Kingdom through its continued deployment of the Trident strategic nuclear weapon system.

2. UK nuclear weapons discourse is in flux. Debate on whether and, if so, how to replace the current system beginning with the procurement of a new fleet of ballistic missile submarines has been underway since 2005.

3. The strategic rationale for retaining a nuclear system as sophisticated and powerful as Trident, or even retaining nuclear weapons at all, has been at the centre of the debate. The purpose of this submission is to challenge claims about the necessity and efficacy of nuclear deterrence in UK defence and security policy. Before that, it raises a number of general contextual points about deterrence and the national interest.

#### DETERRENCE AND NATIONAL INTERESTS

4. The scope of the Committee’s inquiry is broad in its focus on the nature and role of deterrence in the round in UK defence and security policy. Some general points about deterrence for the Committee’s consideration are:

- (i) Discussion of deterrence in UK defence and security policy is a discussion about deterring threats.
- (ii) Threats to be deterred are routinely framed as threats to the nation’s “vital interests”.

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<sup>24</sup> “Deterrence, Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and UK Trident”. John Simpson. Discussion Paper 4 of the BASIC Trident Commission. British American Security Information Council, March 2013.

<sup>25</sup> “Global Responses to Global Threats. Sustainable Security for the 21st Century”. Chris Abbots, Paul Rogers, and John Sloboda. Oxford Research Group, June 2006.

- (iii) Some “vital interests” are clear, in particular those that relate to the functioning of the state, namely: protection of the state and its people from external attack; and assured access to sufficient resources for a functioning economy such as energy, food, water, commodities, and credit.
- (iv) Beyond these practical requirements, defining national interests becomes a deeply political and often aspirational debate. The House of Commons Public Affairs Select Committee has recently examined ideas of national interest and national strategy.<sup>i</sup>
- (v) Similarly, defining threats to vital national interests is a political and subjective process. Some are obvious, others less so as the recent debate on Syria and the use of chemical weapons has demonstrated.

5. The Committee’s study of deterrence in UK defence and security policy will necessarily entail a series of judgments about what constitutes vital national interests and threats to those interests, however they are defined. Only then can it proceed to examine how those threats might be reduced or eliminated through an implicit or explicit UK counter-threat—the essence of deterrence.

6. Deterrence should be distinguished from other national means of reducing or eliminating threats to vital national interests. These include direct violence by the UK, resilience through protection and redundancy, containment and isolation, and diplomacy and engagement.

#### CERTAINTIES OF NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

7. Deterrence is a process that produces a political effect. Nuclear deterrence is no different. The process of nuclear deterrence is one of communicating, directly or otherwise, an explicit or implicit threat to use nuclear weapons in response to aggression that threatens vital interests. The political effect is to cause the aggressor to cease and/or desist from its unacceptable behaviour—ie to deter them from embarking upon or continuing aggression. This constitutes a successful practice of nuclear deterrence. The political effect is generated by an aggressor’s *fear* of the threatened consequences of their actions: fear of enormously destructive, indiscriminate, immediate and incontestable nuclear violence at the disposal of the deterring state. “Safety”, as Winston Churchill memorably put it in 1995, now being “the sturdy child of terror”.<sup>ii</sup>

8. Many advocates of nuclear deterrence argue that deterrence is an inherent characteristic of a nuclear weapon: it exists; therefore it deters by virtue of their destructive potential. Colonel Chance Saltzman (Chief, Strategic Plans and Policy Division, USAF), James Forsyth and Gary Shaub (both USAF scholars) argued in 2010 that “Nuclear weapons produce strategic effects. Their presence compels statesmen to behave cautiously in the face of grave danger. This cautiousness produces restraint, which shores up international stability. In short, nuclear weapons deter.”<sup>iii</sup>

9. The logic of nuclear deterrence says that nuclear weapons will deter existential military threats to the state. The process works, and works unproblematically. This view is widely held in Whitehall. It is reflected in then Secretary of State for Defence Des Browne’s remarks in 2007: “Why do we need a nuclear deterrent? The answer is because it works. Our deterrent has been a central plank of our national security strategy for fifty years. And the fact is that over this fifty years, neither our nor any other country’s nuclear weapons have ever been used, nor has there been a single significant conflict between the world’s major powers. We believe our nuclear deterrent, as part of NATO, helped make this happen.”<sup>iv</sup>

10. The conflation of the material object (the nuclear weapon) with a political effect (deterrence) is evident more generally when UK policy-makers routinely refer to Trident as “the deterrent”. In doing so, they assign to Trident an innate and certain ability to deter by virtue of what it is.

11. Put simply, nuclear deterrence as a system of logic works. Possession of nuclear weapons guarantees the survival of the state in the face of existential military threats. They are an “ultimate insurance” of national survival. The David Cameron, for example, has often referred to Trident as “the ultimate insurance policy against blackmail or attack”.<sup>v</sup> Tony Blair was quite clear in 2006 when he stated his belief that “an independent British nuclear deterrent is an essential part of our insurance against the uncertainties and risks of the future” and that “An independent deterrent ensures our vital interests will be safeguarded.”<sup>vi</sup> These are the certainties that come with the possession of nuclear weapons. This is why the UK must prioritise retention of a strategic nuclear capability after Trident.

#### UNCERTAINTIES OF NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

12. This paints an attractive picture of policy-makers faced with a complex and messy global security environment. Nuclear weapons and the practice of nuclear deterrence provide an oasis of certainty in a sea of uncertainty. But the reality is that nuclear deterrence does not come with such certainties. Nuclear deterrence is a political process designed to cause a political effect. It is therefore subject to the uncertainties of politics. It is not a rational and objective “science” as often presented but a practice based on subjective political judgement.

13. The uncertainties of nuclear deterrence stem from:
- The context out of which US nuclear deterrence theory emerged.
  - The growing complexity of nuclear deterrence relationships.
  - Divergent strategic cultures.
  - Disputed efficacy of nuclear threats.
  - Self-deterrence.

*The context of nuclear deterrence theory's emergence*

14. What US scholar Philip Lawrence called the “scientization of nuclear strategy” during the Cold War was based on an illusion of precision and exactness.<sup>vii</sup> It was a result of the social and historical context out of which the theory of nuclear deterrence emerged. The root of the problem is (mercifully) the absence of empirical evidence about the use of nuclear weapons. The absence of evidence enabled emerging ideas of nuclear deterrence in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s to be dominated by theories of rational actors interacting according to the precepts of probabilistic game theory. UK scholar Michael McCgwire describes “a central dogma concerning the requirements of deterrence and, more importantly, a frame of mind that went with the dogma... it became a kind of intellectual tranquiliser, its sophisticated logic imparting a sense of false certainty and inhibiting attempts to challenge its underlying assumptions.”<sup>viii</sup>

15. In fact, the seemingly objective and rational theory of nuclear deterrence and nuclear doctrine reflected specific politicised ideas and understandings about nuclear weapons, the Soviet Union, vulnerability to attack, a tendency to “fantasize about Soviet military power,” and selective construction of problems affecting nuclear strategy and the solutions required (usually new weapons).<sup>ix</sup> Nevertheless, the posited certainties of nuclear deterrence became embedded as a bureaucratic truth.

*Complexity of international nuclear order*

16. The uncertainties of nuclear deterrence are exacerbated by the growing complexity of international nuclear order. A successful process of nuclear deterrence requires an understanding of an aggressor’s motivation, world-view, resolve, and cost-benefit calculus. The ability to understand a potential opponent(s) in sufficient depth to have confidence in the efficacy of a nuclear deterrent threat is likely to become more difficult as the range of nuclear relationships increases, and with it the range of asymmetries in those relationships in terms of types of nuclear actor, capabilities, identities, and intentions. This complexity will generate significant challenges for policy-makers in terms of the ambiguity of the nuclear situations they might face. Effective nuclear deterrent threats are likely to become harder to define, communicate and execute in a complex international nuclear environment.<sup>x</sup>

*Divergent strategic cultures*

17. An important ingredient in the complexity of international nuclear relations is divergent strategic cultures. The received wisdom on nuclear deterrence suggests that it stabilises relations between nuclear-armed opponents based on a basic common rationality. But the political process of nuclear deterrence is mediated through the strategic cultures and institutions of the actors involved. History suggests that different states, regimes, and leaders can interpret the dynamics of nuclear threats quite differently. To assume that nuclear deterrent threats will work unproblematically and uniformly is difficult. US scholar James Lebovic says this requires “heroic assumptions about the adversary—its ability to think dispassionately, process information, and make the “right” decision under the most challenging of conditions.”<sup>xi</sup> This can lead to misunderstandings, miscalculation or determined resistance to deterrent threats. The Cold War nuclear confrontation was not the stable, predictable relationship of assured destruction it is often portrayed as today.<sup>xii</sup> It was highly dangerous, plagued by uncertainty, fuelled by worst-case assumptions and planning with very serious risks of a deliberate or inadvertent cataclysmic nuclear exchange. General Lee Butler, former head of U.S. Strategic Command, stated in 1998: “While we clung to the notion that nuclear war could be reliably deterred, Soviet leaders derived from their historical experience the conviction that such a war might be thrust upon them and if so, must not be lost. Driven by that fear, they took Herculean measures to fight and survive no matter the odds or the costs. Deterrence was a dialogue of the blind with the deaf”.<sup>xiii</sup> Some leaders may simply choose not to be deterred, particularly if they harbour doubt that the threat will be carried out given perceived interests at stake.

*Efficacy of nuclear deterrent threats*

18. The efficacy of nuclear deterrence as a stabilising mechanism in major power relations is also far from certain. Advocates of nuclear deterrence state with certainty that nuclear deterrent threats prevented the Cold War turning hot and will continue to prevent war between the major powers. This cannot be claimed with certainty. It assumes that the major powers would have “allowed their various crises to escalate if all they had to fear at the end of the escalatory ladder was something like a repetition of World War II” if nuclear weapons did not exist, as US scholar John Mueller argues.<sup>xiv</sup> Powerful arguments have been made that the sheer scale of destruction that accompanied World War II through conventional weaponry was sufficient to deter future global war between the major industrialised powers. Leading British historian Sir Michael Howard agrees. He argues that by 1914 mass war between the major powers was fast becoming an “unusable instrument for the

conduct of international affairs” due to the ever-increasing cost and uncertain political and economic outcomes. The advent of nuclear weapons intensified this reluctance to engage in war but it did not establish it.<sup>xv</sup> Even Ambassador George Kennan, who in 1946 first articulated the doctrine of long-term military and political containment of the Soviet Union as part of a new Cold War, concluded in 1984 that the Soviet Union had no interest in overrunning Western Europe militarily and that it would not have launched an attack on Europe in the decades after World War II even if nuclear weapons did not exist.<sup>xvi</sup> The efficacy of threatening massive destruction through nuclear violence has also been challenged. Ward Wilson’s work in particular has challenged that idea that threat of massive and indiscriminate violence will necessarily persuade a state to halt aggressive behaviour.<sup>xvii</sup>

### *Self-deterrence*

19. Leaders can also be deterred from action by the political impact of using their own country’s nuclear weapons. This “self deterrence” in the post-Cold War world refers to what the late French scholar Therese Delpech described as “the reticence, or the refusal, to exert nuclear deterrence in any event, either due to fear of the consequences or because the abhorrence of possible nuclear use is stronger than the perceived need to retaliate in case of an attack.”<sup>xviii</sup> The legitimacy of nuclear weapons has been subject to renewed challenge in recent years based on the unacceptable humanitarian consequences of any use of nuclear weapons. In the context of regional intervention, Western governments and armed forces accept that indiscriminate killing of civilians in warfare is counter-productive to war aims and political support in Western capitals. It can undermine the case for military intervention that is routinely framed as defending “civilised” international values and global peace and security. Western governments are therefore unwilling to contemplate inflicting massive and indiscriminate loss of life upon a “rogue” nation’s population for the actions of its leadership. The use of even one or two “sub-strategic” 10kt Trident warheads would likely kill and severely injure tens of thousands of people and totally overwhelm the health services of even a developed country. Nuclear use in the Middle East, North East Asia or other regional conflict zones would be an unprecedented disaster with massive humanitarian, political, environmental and economic costs and deeply counter-productive to Western political values and objectives.

20. In sum, these arguments do not claim that nuclear deterrence can never work. What it does insist is that the practice of nuclear deterrence offers no certainties. It offers only the *possibility* of generating a desired political effect (deterrence of aggression) through the threat of nuclear violence in extreme circumstances. Having that possibility at the UK’s disposal is evidently important enough for some to insist upon continued retention of nuclear weapons for decades to come. The next section challenges this conclusion by questioning the utility of nuclear weapons in UK defence and security policy.

### UK NUCLEAR WEAPONS POLICY

21. UK nuclear doctrine currently says that nuclear deterrence pertains in a range of circumstances. The most recent comprehensive statement remains the 2006 White Paper on “The Future of the United Kingdom’s Nuclear Deterrent”.<sup>xix</sup> The paper identifies four deterrent roles for UK nuclear weapons:

- (1) Deterrence of aggression towards British/NATO vital interests or nuclear coercion/blackmail by major powers with large nuclear arsenals (presumably Russia).
- (2) Deterrence of aggression by “emerging nuclear states” (“rogue” states) to enable regional intervention, if necessary.
- (3) Deterrence of state-sponsored acts of nuclear terrorism.
- (4) A general basic, deterrent to preserve peace and stability in an uncertain world.

The efficacy of UK nuclear deterrent threats in these four contexts is questionable.

### *Deterrence of major powers with large nuclear arsenals*

22. Only two states are likely to have the capability and conceivably the intention in the future to threaten Britain and Western Europe with nuclear weapons: Russia and China. Yet the overall trend in relations with both countries has been cumulatively positive since the end of the Cold War, the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict notwithstanding.<sup>xx</sup> UK nuclear deterrent threats are of little relevance to its strategic relationship with either country. It is widely and officially acknowledged that the Cold War is truly over and that the possibility of a surprise Russian nuclear first-strike is so low as to be near zero.<sup>xxi</sup> According to NATO, “the threat of general war in Europe has virtually disappeared”.<sup>xxii</sup> It is notable that former permanent undersecretary at the Ministry of Defence, Sir Michael Quinlan, argued in 1993, just two years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, that if the UK did not now possess nuclear weapons “the strict security case for doing so might well seem inadequate”.<sup>xxiii</sup> Both NATO and Russia have accepted that engagement and partnership is the only sustainable path for lasting security despite pervasive mistrust. Russia is not the Soviet Union. As Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated in 2007, after the Cold War Russia “renounced an ideology of imperial and other “great plans” in favour of pragmatism and common sense”<sup>xxiv</sup> coupled with repeated expressions from the Russian leadership of its desire and intention to be a “normal” not a revisionist major power. To quote Quinlan again, in 2006: “Even if grounds for unease about Russia’s internal evolution intensify, it is hard to imagine that country re-emerging as a military threat to the political freedom of the countries of the European Union”.<sup>xxv</sup> The credibility

of this worst-case scenario must be questioned. Michael Clarke, Director of the Royal United Services Institute, also observed in 2004: “none of these existential possibilities are worth much of the time of a policy planner, still less a politician”.<sup>xxvi</sup>

23. China’s history of the past few decades indicates that Beijing will continue to prioritise economic development and that it will continue to steadily integrate into the global economy and international political system, albeit at its own pace and on its own terms—integration rather than assimilation. Relations between the UK and China have steadily improved since the early 1990s post-Tiananmen Square and relations between the EU and China have been similarly transformed into “a comprehensive and multidimensional relationship—even strategic partnership”, according to David Shambugh, a leading scholar on China’s foreign relations.<sup>xxvii</sup> China’s overwhelming military focus is on ensuring Chinese sovereignty, national unity and national development and preparing for contingencies involving Taiwan, including the possibility of US intervention.

24. Both Russia and China have become more integrated into the global economy and institutions of global governance. They have exhibited no desire to refashion the current international order in their own image through use or threat of military force or to establish ideological or geo-political blocs in opposition to the “West”. Their long-term integration into the global economy and prevailing international order mean that the costs of aggression between the major industrialised and industrialising powers are now enormous for all potential parties in terms of GDP, human suffering and environmental impact.

25. A long-term trend of improving relations from Cold War lows and the absence of a direct strategic nuclear threat does not suggest that confrontation between the UK, Russia and China has been consigned to history. Russian and Chinese economic growth and nationalism and their desire for a degree of autonomy within the international system will inevitably bring both countries into confrontation with others, including the UK, on a range of issues, ranging from human rights to military capabilities, regional stability, trade policies, global energy markets and territorial disputes with their neighbours, particularly Beijing’s disputes over the status of Taiwan and islands in the South China Sea and Russia’s “near abroad”.<sup>xxviii</sup> There is also a powerful constituency in the US that continues to view both Russia and China as rival powers to be contained politically and militarily unless and until they fully align with the West. Similar constituencies in Beijing and Moscow foresee dark threats in their perceptions of Western, particularly NATO, strategic encirclement that belittles their legitimate interests. Despite future tensions, disagreements and political crises, some of which may have military dimensions, it is barely conceivable that UK nuclear deterrent threats and consideration of using nuclear weapons against Russia or China will ever be part of the solution to future confrontations, particularly in the absence of ideological enmity.

*Deterrence of aggression by “emerging nuclear states”:*

26. The efficacy of UK nuclear deterrent threats against a regional nuclear-armed “rogue” state is dubious. States such as Iran are only likely to develop nuclear weapons to deter external intervention. In this context, it would be dangerous to assume, contra Blair’s argument in the 2006 White Paper, that UK nuclear deterrent threats could keep a conflict with a “rogue” state in possession of nuclear weapons and a means of delivery at the level of conventional weaponry. In such circumstances the wisdom of pursuing a strategy of regional intervention with or without insertion of ground troops would be open to serious question. If the survival of the “rogue” regime is threatened then the asymmetry of the stakes involved becomes deeply destabilising in a nuclear environment. Given such asymmetrical stakes it is unlikely (and certainly cannot be in anyway assured) that UK nuclear deterrent threats would prevent the use of nuclear weapons by a regime facing imminent termination by Western conventional forces in a last desperate attempt to save a lost cause.<sup>xxix</sup> This can easily be exacerbated by the difficulties of understanding the behaviour of “rogue” regimes and problems of mutual incomprehension of motives, values and perceptions of “rational” behaviour that were a factor in the Cold War’s near misses. Major pre-emptive or retaliatory military intervention involving UK forces would likely be judged too dangerous regardless of whether Britain possessed nuclear weapons or not. MoD’s Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, for example, warns that “Operations that threaten the personal or regime security of autocratic leaderships in nuclear-armed states will entail particular risk.”<sup>xxx</sup> The 2006 White Paper’s insistence that possession of nuclear weapons will “ensure no aggressor can escalate a crisis beyond UK control” must be treated with scepticism.<sup>xxxi</sup>

27. Would this leave Britain open to nuclear coercion—being forced to undertake actions the country would not otherwise contemplate due to the threat of nuclear violence? Unlikely. UK officials often claim that the country must retain a nuclear capability in order to prevent nuclear coercion. Yet nuclear coercion, or “blackmail”, has rarely worked in practice. MccGwire argues “despite theorists” best efforts, there is still no example of nuclear compellance. This inherent constraint applies to the rogue state that acquires a minimal capability”.<sup>xxxii</sup> Indian scholar P. K. Ghosh similarly concludes that nuclear armed states have often resorted unsuccessfully to nuclear coercion in pursuit of their national interests, and that the consequences have proved “dangerous and ambiguous at best”.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Instances where nuclear compellance has been claimed to work, notably Eisenhower’s threat to China if it did not agree to terminate the Korean War in 1953 and George H. W. Bush’s veiled threat of nuclear retaliation in response to the use of chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein in 1991, have been widely questioned.<sup>xxxiv</sup>

*Deterrence of state-sponsored acts of nuclear terrorism*

28. Using the threat of nuclear violence to deter a state-sponsored terrorist nuclear attack is equally questionable. Terrorist groups, state-sponsored or not, are extremely difficult to deter because they are generally revisionist and may regard even failed attacks as superior to inaction. Plausible deniability, the limits of nuclear forensics, the difficulty of determining and demonstrably establishing linkages between non-state actors and state sponsors make the prospect of an immediate retaliatory nuclear strike incredible. The nebulous nature of al-Qaeda and the A. Q. Khan nuclear smuggling network in Pakistan and questions over exactly how much Saddam Hussein knew about the state of Iraq's WMD programmes prior to the US-led invasion in 2003 raise serious questions about the degree of certainty with which a "rogue" state leadership could be directly and immediately implicated in a successful terrorist nuclear attack.<sup>xxxv</sup> This severely weakens the efficacy of nuclear deterrent threats against a state leadership. Again, one cannot disprove the potential deterrent effect of UK nuclear weapons in this context but, as Quinlan argued, "if we came under attack, or felt ourselves to be under close threat of it, by nuclear, chemical or biological weapons in the hands of terrorists clearly supported or sheltered by identifiable states, nuclear weapons in our hands just might have a part to play in deterrence or response. But I find this a very remote hypothesis."<sup>xxxvi</sup>

29. The ability to deter direct aggression by nuclear-armed "rogue" states or indirect aggression through terrorist proxies in a regional context is further undermined by historical experience. Strategic history demonstrates that the possession of nuclear weapons does not prevent regional aggression against the interests of nuclear weapon states. The Soviet Union, for example, established control over Eastern Europe during the period of US nuclear monopoly, North Korea invaded US-backed South Korea in 1950, North Vietnam fought a nuclear-armed China and United States, Argentina invaded the Falklands/Malvinas in 1982, and Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990 and launched Scud missiles against nuclear-armed Israel. As UK scholar Jeremy Stocker argues, "to date, Britain's possession of nuclear weapons has not been relevant to a series of regional crises and interventions—Suez, confrontation with Indonesia, the Falklands, and the Gulf Wars."<sup>xxxvii</sup> The late Robin Cook also suggested that "it is not easy to see what practical return Britain ever got out of the extravagant sums we invested in our nuclear systems. None of our wars was ever won by them and none of the enemies we fought was deterred by them. General Galtieri was not deterred from seizing the Falklands, although Britain possessed the nuclear bomb and Argentina did not."<sup>xxxviii</sup> An important study by US scholar Jacek Kugler in the mid-1980s found that nuclear weapons did not "directly affect the outcomes of extreme crises or deter conflicts" involving nuclear powers with other nuclear or non-nuclear nations or provide an obvious advantage.<sup>xxxix</sup>

THE LIMITS OF NUCLEAR "INSURANCE"

30. Advocates of nuclear deterrence will reply that this analysis may well be correct, but one cannot predict the future and, of course, they are right. The truism of future uncertainty means no one can *guarantee* the UK will never face a military threat to the survival of state that might only be averted through the threat of nuclear retaliation. The 2006 White Paper also noted the possibility of a major direct nuclear threat to the UK or our NATO Allies over the next 20 to 50 years cannot be ruled out. Indeed, Blair made precisely this point before parliament in 2006, stating that "It is written as a fact by many that there is no possibility of nuclear confrontation with any major nuclear power—except that it is not a fact. Like everything else germane to this judgment, it is a prediction. It is probably right—but certain? No, we cannot say that."<sup>xl</sup> Defence Secretary Des Browne argued in 2007 that "yes, the nature of our security situation has changed; but a proper understanding of it suggests that, while there is, right now, no nuclear threat, we cannot rule out the possibility that one will re-emerge."<sup>xli</sup> Nuclear weapons, as noted above, are framed as a dependable insurance against a return to major power war. Michael Quinlan cogently argued in 1993 that the UK must retain nuclear weapons after the Cold War "to underpin war prevention, to close off nuclear adventurism and to serve as a low-key element of insurance, not directed against specific adversaries, in support of world order."<sup>xlii</sup>

31. The question then becomes one of risk and risk assessment that weighs the probability and consequences of major power war involving direct, existential nuclear threats to the state, the costs of deploying a nuclear capability to try and deter such a threat should it emerge, and the opportunity costs for other capabilities to address a host of other security challenges. Whilst accepting that history is full of surprises, future uncertainty must be considered within the context of an environment where some significant security threats and risks are relatively clear, where known contingencies are important to plan for with limited defence resources, and where a nuclear weapons capability appears to be of minimal relevance.<sup>xliii</sup> The UK cannot rule out a 1940-type situation where the UK faced a very serious existential threat from the German armed forces sweeping across Europe, nor can it exclude a prolonged nuclear stand-off with an ideologically opposed major power prepared to run the risk of escalation of a limited conventional conflict to a nuclear exchange. But the circumstances are now so remote for the UK and the global security context so different as to very seriously question the necessity and opportunity costs of continued possession of nuclear weapons after Trident. Successive UK governments have formally acknowledged that the UK faces no major direct nuclear or other military threat to the survival of the state and hasn't for nearly two decades since it de-targeted its nuclear forces in the early 1990s.<sup>xliiv</sup> That is fully one third of the time the UK has been a nuclear power (it conducted its first nuclear test in 1952) in which it has faced no threat that might conceivably invoke serious consideration of use. This could change, but that time period should give pause for thought.

32. It is also important to acknowledge a wider set of limits to the “future uncertainty” and “ultimate insurance” narrative invoked to justify long-term possession of nuclear weapons by the UK, and there are three:

- (1) Self-imposed limits on the scope of UK nuclear deterrence in practice.
- (2) A misreading of “insurance” in relation to the logic of nuclear deterrence.
- (3) The political conflation of general future uncertainty with a subsequent requirement for nuclear weapons.

33. Self-imposed limits: The UK has, to its credit, steadily restricted the circumstances under which it would consider using nuclear weapons through a number of political and legal commitments. The UK updated its “negative security assurance” to non-nuclear weapon state parties to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review to state “the UK will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states parties to the NPT”.<sup>xlv</sup> The UK has legally codified this assurance for nearly 100 countries by ratifying the protocols annexed to the Treaties establishing nuclear weapon-free zones in Latin America and the Caribbean, the South Pacific, and Africa. This will increase by 15 more countries if the UK resolves outstanding differences to enable signature of the protocols to the Treaties establishing the South-East Asia and Central Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zones.

34. The UK has also explicitly accepted the judgement of the 1996 International Court of Justice (ICJ). The Court’s Advisory Opinion concluded that “the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law” applicable in armed conflict because the destructive blast, incendiary and radiation effects of nuclear weapons cannot be contained either in space or time.<sup>xlvi</sup> It could not, however, “conclude definitively whether the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be lawful or unlawful in an extreme circumstance of self-defence, in which the very survival of a State would be at stake”(emphasis added).<sup>xlvi</sup> The UK does not dispute that international humanitarian law applies to the use of nuclear weapons and has incorporated the notion of “extreme circumstances of self-defence” into its declaratory nuclear policy statements.<sup>xlviii</sup> Defence Secretary Des Browne stated in December 2007 that “The UK’s nuclear weapons are not designed for use during military conflict but instead to deter and prevent nuclear blackmail and acts of aggression against our vital interests that cannot be countered by other means...We would only consider using nuclear weapons in self-defence—including the defence of our NATO allies—and even then only in extreme circumstances. That has been and will remain our policy.”<sup>xlix</sup>

35. In sum, the UK has accepted that it would only ever consider using nuclear weapons if it constituted a proportionate response to aggression, was a necessary response to a nuclear attack, discriminated between combatants and non-combatants, did not cause unnecessary suffering, and was consistent with the protocols to the nuclear weapon-free zones Britain has ratified. The cumulative result is an extremely narrow set of scenarios for the use of UK nuclear weapons in which the state faces extermination through hostile occupation or being nuclear bombed or perhaps poisoned past the point of recovery.

36. Misreading “insurance”: the government’s emphasis on nuclear weapons as a form of insurance is misleading. Insurance is commonly understood to involve an indemnity for loss following an incident. It does not prevent an incident from occurring. Nuclear deterrence is not an “insurance” against the possibility of a nuclear attack on the UK or its allies. It cannot prevent its occurrence. The most that can be said is that possession of nuclear weapons represents a *possible*—though not assured—ability to deter a would-be aggressor from attacking. Insurance framed as a guarantee of protection is fundamentally misleading since it infers an unproblematic ability of nuclear weapons to deter.

37. General future uncertainty: Government frequently conflates general future uncertainty in international politics with a requirement for nuclear weapons though this insurance metaphor. Yet the practice of nuclear deterrence represents a potential solution to only a very narrow set of possible strategic military threats to the survival of the state, as outlined above. Statements endorsing the necessity of nuclear weapons as a crucial insurance against strategic threats *per se* to the state’s vital interests sit in marked tension with the very narrow set of conceivable circumstances in which the UK would ever consider using nuclear weapons. General future uncertainty, and the trepidation that goes with it, is used to justify the retention of nuclear weapons based on the supposed certainties of nuclear deterrence.

38. It is clear, however, that nuclear weapons offer little solution to the types of threats to UK “vital interests” likely to arise from “future uncertainty”. Such threats are likely to be messy and arise from an interdependent mix of environmental, economic, military and political sources of insecurity. These include the effects of climate change, mass poverty and global economic injustice, global pandemic diseases, mass migration and refugee flows, weak and failing states, international terrorism and asymmetric warfare, the spread of WMD and advanced conventional military technologies, ethnic and sectarian nationalism and competition over access to key resources such as oil and water. Future conflicts are likely to be complex and diverse. They will not be susceptible to purely military solutions and the use of military force in regional crises will be difficult, indeterminate and of limited value. Western military solutions to crises will have to increasingly factor in the effect of the use of force on non-military dimensions of security to ensure legitimacy and lasting effectiveness. Stability, security, peace-building and reconstruction tasks are likely to become core military missions alongside or even in place of combat operations. Nuclear deterrent threats and the possible use of nuclear weapons can

play no conceivably useful role in addressing the complex challenges of future international/civil “hybrid” wars.<sup>1</sup>

39. It is tempting to look to the apparent certainties of nuclear deterrence for comfort when confronting this milieu of threats and risks, but it is a false comfort. Necessity and insurance in the face of uncertainty might be the theme, but nuclear deterrence offers no certainties and nuclear weapons provide little solution to the vulnerabilities the UK is likely to face from these types of conflict and security challenges.

#### THE DANGERS OF EXHORTING THE BENEFITS OF NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

40. The UK places considerable value on the NPT as an unqualified global security good and has regularly described the NPT as the cornerstone of international security. John Duncan, the UK’s Ambassador for Multilateral Arms Control and Disarmament who led the UK delegation to the 2010 NPT Review Conference, stated in 2008 that “the NPT remains the foundation stone of international non-proliferation architecture. If it didn’t exist, the world would be a much more dangerous place, and we would assuredly need to re-invent it”.<sup>ii</sup>

41. The UK’s decision to renew the Trident system with a like-for-like replacement reinforces the value of nuclear weapons and the logic of nuclear deterrence in international politics. The decision to replace Trident and the rationales presented to support send an unambiguous message to the rest of the world that nuclear weapons are an essential capability in an increasingly uncertain world. It is very difficult for the UK to credibly support efforts to reduce the spread of nuclear weapons and support a universal norm against nuclear proliferation whilst insisting that it needs these weapons for its own security for the foreseeable future, particularly when the country faces no strategic nuclear threats. As Director General of the IAEA Mohammed ElBaradei said in February 2007, Britain cannot “modernise its Trident submarines and then tell everyone else that nuclear weapons are not needed in the future”.<sup>iii</sup>

42. UK governments have routinely argued that the UK is entitled to possess nuclear weapons as one of five states (the UK, USA, France, Russia, and China) recognised as a “Nuclear Weapon States” in the NPT because it had detonated a nuclear weapons prior to 1 January 1967 at the time the NPT was negotiated.<sup>iiii</sup>

43. The UK and other nuclear weapon states argue that the distinction drawn in the NPT between nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states represents a legal, and therefore legitimate, entitlement to possess and deploy nuclear weapons. The problem with this legal argument is that it appropriates the logic of nuclear deterrence for just those five Nuclear Weapon States and no others. Yet the logic of nuclear deterrence as an abstract process of strategic reasoning can be objectively applied to and appropriated by any state that feels sufficiently threatened irrespective of legal obligations and legal designation as a non-nuclear party to the NPT.

44. The UK and other nuclear weapons states proceed *as if* the logic of nuclear deterrence is not applicable to non-nuclear weapon states *because* they have accepted the legal designation of “non-nuclear weapon state”. The danger is that the nuclear weapon states feel free to extol the virtues of nuclear deterrence secure in the knowledge that this will no adverse persuasive effect on the non-nuclear community of NPT states because the logic of nuclear deterrence cannot be appropriated by them. It is this legal argument that is used to justify the nuclear weapon states’ “do as I say, not as I do” approach to their continued possession of nuclear weapons.

45. The problem is that extolling the virtues of nuclear deterrence does have a persuasive effect precisely because the logic is universally applicable on its own strategic political-military grounds and non-nuclear weapon states recognise this. They recognise that this logic can only lead, eventually, to a much more dangerous world of many more nuclear armed states. Regular advocacy of the benefits of nuclear deterrence for a select view increases the attractiveness of nuclear weapons and undermines the legitimacy of the NPT and efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. UK nuclear weapons expert William Walker sums it up well: “to pay open homage to nuclear deterrence is to jeopardize the non-proliferation norms and regime”.<sup>iv</sup> Politically the UK can do little else; it cannot recognise the general legitimacy of the logic of nuclear deterrence for all states because to do so would be to openly legitimise nuclear proliferation—an approach recognised as “an extraordinarily dangerous proposition” by Foreign Minister Bill Rammell in 2009.<sup>iv</sup> Instead it adopts a duplicitous legal argument to legitimise its nuclear weapons that fools no one.

46. Possession of nuclear weapons and advocacy of nuclear deterrence become part of the problem of managing international nuclear relations and further proliferation, not the solution. Framing nuclear weapons as a currency of power in international politics and eulogising the practice of nuclear deterrence exerts what Jonathan Schell calls a “proliferance” effect. Proliferance is a political effect that frames nuclear weapons an attractive, if not essential, national asset. It is the outcome of policies that frame nuclear weapons as a necessary solution to national security threats and a source of prestige.<sup>lvi</sup> As former UK Ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament, David Broucher argued in 2006 that “In the longer term the danger is that the UK’s decision [to replace Trident] will be taken as one of a number of factors indicating that nuclear weapons are now a permanent feature of the international security environment. They are no longer a response to a specific security need, but an insurance policy against all comers. This will signal that efforts to eradicate nuclear weapons have effectively been shelved, which could combine with other factors that are already eroding confidence in the Non-proliferation Treaty and contribute to a seismic shift in international security postures.”<sup>lvii</sup>



## SUMMARY

47. This submission has argued the following:

- (i) Nuclear deterrence is a political process subject to the uncertainties that plague all political processes.
- (ii) Nuclear weapons do not infallibly deter. The deployment of nuclear weapons provides only the *possibility* of successfully deterring aggression through the threat of nuclear violence in a very narrow set of circumstances.
- (iii) The relevance and efficacy of the nuclear deterrence rationales set out in the 2006 Defence White Paper are questionable.
- (iv) The conflation of general future uncertainty with the necessity of a nuclear capability is problematic and misleading given the formal restrictions on UK's use of nuclear weapons and the type of threats the UK is likely to face over the coming decades.
- (v) Advocacy of the benefits of nuclear deterrence forms part of the problem of achieving a sustainable international nuclear order rather than part of the solution.
- (vi) The utility of the UK's nuclear weapons in the deterrence of threats to its vital interests is extremely limited.

48. The Committee is urged to consider to implications of the extremely limited utility of UK nuclear deterrence threats for UK defence and security policy when the country has limited defence resources with which to confront and deter the challenges it is likely to face.

49. The Committee is urged to acknowledge that investing in nuclear weapons in the name of nuclear deterrence is a political choice resting on a political judgement. Furthermore, all of the nuclear choices open to the UK come with uncertainty and risk. This includes risks associated with the retention of nuclear weapons in terms of opportunity costs, the impact on the NPT, and the risk of nuclear conflict based on the uncertainties and dangers of practicing nuclear deterrence. There are no risk-free nuclear choices for the UK.

50. To be clear: the hope, or assertion, of deterrence advocates is that the incontestable enormity of nuclear violence will always, permanently, induce sufficient a level of caution into nuclear relations as to preclude international nuclear relations tipping over into a nuclear violence. This hope rests on a reductionist belief in a basic level of rationality innate to human beings such that all political leaders recognise and understand the implications of thermonuclear war to the extent that executive nuclear lunacy is forever held in check. For some, an international nuclear order that rests on this belief carries some risk that history might negate it, but it is a small risk and one that is worth the posited benefits of safety and security. For others, a nuclear order based on this belief represents a dangerous high-risk strategy and a progressively less risky system of international nuclear relations needs to be constructed before history calls nuclear time.

51. In that context the Committee is urged to consider the opportunity costs of retaining a strategic nuclear weapons capability. Recapitalising the current Trident system is currently estimated to cost £25 billion in outturn prices for the submarines alone. On top of that are the costs of a new warhead, support infrastructure at HMNB Clyde, the massive works programme at AWE, eventually a new missile from the US Navy, plus £2–3 billion per annum in operating costs for the nuclear complex. This represents a significant proportion of MoD's procurement budget and operating costs at a time of sustained downward pressure on the defence budget. It is therefore vitally important that the country fully understand what it seeks to gain from such significant expenditure. It is essential to question whether procuring another generation of strategic nuclear weaponry is an appropriate investment given the types of security threats the UK is likely to face over the coming decade.

September 2013

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**Written evidence from Ward Wilson, Senior Fellow, British American Security Information Council (BASIC)**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Nuclear deterrence has clear limits that are not well understood.
2. A careful review of facts from the Cold War seems to point to numerous nuclear deterrence failures. The evidence from neuroscience raises doubts about how sensible it is to rely on rational thought in a crisis.
3. Nuclear deterrence does not appear to be reliable or safe over the long run.

## INTRODUCTION

4. I am a Senior Fellow at the British American Security Information Council (BASIC) where I direct the Rethinking Nuclear Weapons Project. Trained as a historian, I have thirty years of experience with nuclear weapons issues. My recent book, *Five Myths About Nuclear Weapons* poses pragmatic challenges to fundamental ideas about nuclear weapons. BASIC is a think tank based in London and Washington focused on nuclear weapons issues. Its most recent work includes the Trident Commission. I have presented before the All Party Parliamentary Group on Weapons and Protection of Civilians, the Top Level Group, and recently debated Sir Laurence Freedman at Chatham House.

## COMMENTARY

5. Deterrence is persuading an adversary (usually by threat) not to take action.

6. Deterrence is different from defense, no matter what some theorists may say about “deterrence by denial.” Defence is placing a physical barrier between your adversary and his goal. A castle wall defends. A shield defends. A threat to burn down your adversary’s village deters. The difference between defense and deterrence is that defence is physical while deterrence is mental. For deterrence to work you have to get inside your adversary’s head.

7. This is why deterrence fails against madmen and people overwhelmed by emotion. A wall can stop a madman. A threat to burn down the madman’s village may not. Throughout history leaders have preferred defence over deterrence, because defence works against all comers, while deterrence only works against some. Deterrence is limited in its application: it only works with those who stop and consider rationally the costs of what they’re about to do. This means that from the outset, deterrence cannot be expected to cover all situations.

8. And this limitation is an important one, since one of the defining features of war is that during the course of war people—including leaders—often feel overwhelming emotion. Deterrence does not work reliably against adversaries overwhelmed by emotion. Therefore, deterrence cannot be expected to work reliably in war.

9. In addition there is considerable confusion about why we currently rely on and talk so much about nuclear deterrence. Most experts assert that nuclear deterrence is necessary because of the characteristics of nuclear weapons. This is false. We currently rely so much on deterrence because of the characteristics of missiles, not nuclear weapons. Missiles are relatively unstoppable, which means your only option is to deter them.

10. Consider the following imaginary world in which nuclear weapons do not exist but missiles do. In such a world it is still possible to launch a bolt from the blue attack against your adversary’s capitol and leadership. Such an attack would require more missiles, it would be more expensive, but it would still be possible. Since missiles are relatively unstoppable, the only way you have to prevent an adversary from launching such an attack is to threaten a counterattack of some sort. To deter, in other words.

11. Now imagine the opposite world. A world in which nuclear weapons exist but missiles do not. Or perhaps nuclear weapons are so large that they cannot be carried by missiles. They must be carried to coastal targets by giant freighters or carried inland targets by tractor-trailer trucks. In such a world it would only necessary to defend against freighters and tractor-trailer trucks. To construct barriers in your harbors or coastal waters. Freighters and tractor-trailer trucks (unlike missiles) can be stopped. Nuclear weapons could still be used to harm your troops along the front lines, but they could not be used to destroy cities far removed from the front lines.

12. It would be possible to build physical barriers against the delivery systems of nuclear weapons and thus defend against them. In a world without missiles, defence would be the preferred method of stopping nuclear weapons.

13. It is the unstoppable of missiles that forces us to rely on deterrence, not the size of the explosions the warheads produce. And we rely on deterrence reluctantly: it is always the second best choice.

14. One of the crucial differences between nuclear deterrence and ordinary deterrence is that the bar for effective nuclear deterrence is set much higher. A harsh law that deters some murderers, can be said to be working. It can be counted as a deterrence success. But since any failure of nuclear deterrence runs the risk of catastrophic nuclear war, even one failure of nuclear deterrence is too many. You could say that for nuclear deterrence, “failure is not an option.”

15. Because the consequences of failure are so high, nuclear deterrence must be perfect. That is a difficult standard to meet in perpetuity for a method that is so dependent on something so subject to human frailty—the mind.

16. Nuclear weapons proponents often say that nuclear deterrence worked perfectly during the Cold War. And it is certainly true that no Cold War crisis ended in nuclear war. But the claim that nuclear deterrence worked perfectly—or at least demonstrated an admirable reliability—can only be sustained if you pick and choose the evidence selectively.

17. Take the Berlin crisis of 1948. Proponents of nuclear weapons talk about Truman’s shifting B-29 bombers to the United Kingdom. They claim that this implicit nuclear threat was the reason that Stalin did not escalate

the crisis. They claim it, in other words, as a success for nuclear deterrence. But they do not ask how Stalin was able to begin the crisis in the first place. In 1948 the United States had a monopoly on nuclear weapons. Any crisis that brought the military forces of the Soviet Union and the United States, United Kingdom, and France into close proximity risked escalating to war and potentially nuclear war. If nuclear deterrence means that a leader sees the danger of nuclear war and pulls back, why wasn't Stalin deterred from initiating the crisis in the first place?

18. Take the Korean War. Proponents of nuclear weapons point out that Truman again shifted B-29 bombers close to the point of conflict—in this case to the island of Guam. They claim this implicit nuclear threat deterred the Soviet Union from becoming involved in the Korean War. They don't ask, however, why this threat of nuclear war failed to deter the Chinese from becoming involved in the Korean War.

19. Take the Cuban missile crisis. Proponents of nuclear weapons claim this as the classic instance of nuclear deterrence succeeding. After all, the Soviets put the missiles into Cuba, there was a risk of nuclear war, and they took them out. What clearer demonstration of the power of nuclear deterrence could you ask for? But they don't ask, "What about President Kennedy?" Kennedy knew that if he blockaded Cuba he ran the risk of nuclear war. In the week of secret deliberations during which US strategy was mapped out, they mentioned the risk of nuclear war 60 times. (And in the event they were right to be concerned. The United States and Soviet Union came within a hairsbreadth of nuclear war at least three separate times during the crisis. They were preserved from disaster by luck, not the perfect functioning of nuclear deterrence. See Michael Dobbs, *One Minute to Midnight*.) If nuclear deterrence means that a leader sees a risk of nuclear war and then pulls back from risky and aggressive action, how can we explain Kennedy's action?

20. Consider the Middle East war of 1973. Proponents of nuclear weapons point to Henry Kissinger putting US nuclear forces on alert in order to warn the Russians not to send troops to Egypt. And the Russians didn't send troops to the Middle East. "See?" they say. "Nuclear deterrence worked." But this overlooks a far more important failure of nuclear deterrence. It doesn't address the question, "What were Sadat and Assad thinking?" Everyone knew Israel had nuclear weapons, it had been reported in the *New York Times*. If nuclear deterrence stops leaders from taking risky and aggressive action how do we explain the fact that Egypt and Syria's leaders made war against the Israelis?

21. Consider the Falkland Islands war of 1982. Why didn't the United Kingdom's nuclear weapons deter Argentina's leaders from launching a risky and aggressive war?

22. Finally, consider the Gulf War. General Kevin Chilton, at one time commander of all US nuclear forces, in an article in strategic studies quarterly, claims that the Gulf War is proof that nuclear deterrence works. Secretary of State James Baker delivered a letter to the Iraqis which said that if they used chemical or biological weapons the United States would "make the strongest response possible." And the Iraqis didn't use chemical or biological weapons. Chilton points to this as evidence that deterrence works. But if you read the letter closely, it actually draws three red lines in the sand: don't use chemical or biological weapons, don't set the oil wells on fire, and don't make terroristic attacks against our friends and allies (in other words, Israel). And as we all know, the Iraqis crossed two of those red lines. They set the oil wells on fire, and they fired SCUD missiles at Israeli civilians. Does this mean that nuclear deterrence only works one third of the time?

23. Sir Laurence Freedman claims that "everyone knew" that this was not a nuclear threat. If you examine the transcripts of the meeting, he says, it is clear that this was not a nuclear threat. I'm not sure I'm persuaded. But even if Freedman is right, it's a useful commentary on how the "success" record of nuclear deterrence has been assembled. Gen. Chilton claims this episode as proof that deterrence works. If the rest of the proof that deterrence works is as reliable as this piece of evidence, it is time to make a wholesale reassessment of the historical record of nuclear deterrence.

4. Some scholars claim that deterrence ought to be easy, after all, you can deter a dog from getting up on your favorite chair. If you can teach a dumb animal not to do something, why wouldn't deterrence work? The problem here is that two different types of brain function are at work: fast and slow thinking. (See Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow*.) Fast thinking happens so fast it seems instinctive. It is our subconscious taking care of tasks for us. Information about hot stoves, for example, gets stored in our brains. Past experiences are tucked away for quick retrieval. When our hands get near a hot stove, it isn't necessary for us to think about the danger, to make a rational assessment of the costs and benefits. Our subconscious reacts—pulling our hand back—before our conscious mind has even considered the danger.

25. The mental process involved with nuclear war and deterrence, however, is quite different. The hot stove response is built out of experience. Our fast brains know to be careful of hot stoves because our fingers have been burned in the past.

26. Nuclear deterrence, however, cannot be based on experience. No one has ever experienced a nuclear war (although hibakusha have experienced nuclear attack). Nuclear deterrence cannot rely on fast thinking. It must rely on slow thinking—the thinking that goes on when we deliberate. This is the kind of thinking that is especially prone to being short-circuited by emotion, prejudice, and other unnoticed influences. And a further difficulty arises. Since no one has experienced a nuclear war, nuclear deterrence must rely on imagination. In order to be deterred, an adversary has to be able to imagine a nuclear war.

27. Nuclear deterrence has three vulnerabilities. 1) It relies on deliberative thinking. People who are out of their minds or emotionally overwhelmed cannot be deterred. 2) Deliberative thinking can be easily be undermined or influenced by emotion. 3) Your adversary must be able to imagine a nuclear war.

28. In this connection, the failure of capital punishment to deter murder is not encouraging. Capital punishment relies on the same sort of event as nuclear war. Capital punishment requires the person you are trying to deter to imagine his own death—a horrible state he has never experienced. This is just like nuclear deterrence: you must imagine a horrible state you've never experienced. People sometimes say that nuclear deterrence is sure to work because the idea of nuclear war is so horrible. It would be, many people say, "The end of everything." Capital punishment threatens an equally final result. It is, literally, the end of everything for the individual who is put to death. Yet capital punishment regularly fails. This is worth examining more closely. We can expect that people who tend toward wishful thinking—that is, whose imagination is strongly shaped by their desires—will not be strongly affected by nuclear deterrence.

29. Nuclear deterrence calls on unique characteristics and mental faculties. It is not like training a dog. It involved imagination, forethought, rational deliberation, and clarity. Conventional deterrence threatens an action that your adversary is familiar with, may even have experienced personally. Conventional deterrence has a much higher chance of working reliably than nuclear deterrence.

#### Conclusions

30. The evidence seems quite persuasive that nuclear deterrence is not very reliable. Other forms of deterrence (criminal deterrence, for example) fail regularly. Since even a single failure could result in a catastrophic nuclear war, it makes sense to demand a somewhat higher standard of effectiveness from nuclear deterrence.

31. Cold War crisis review. In order to insure that nuclear deterrence is very reliable—as reliable as some advocates for the weapons claim, it seems prudent to re-examine the record of the Cold War quite closely. Did leaders clearly discern a danger of nuclear war and yet press ahead with reckless and aggressive actions?

32. Criminal deterrence review. What is the evidence from capital punishment? Does it show that nuclear deterrence is likely to be reliable? A careful review of various kinds of criminal deterrence should be conducted, with implications for nuclear deterrence highlighted.

33. Neuroscience review. The latest science about how we think has interesting and important evidence to offer about the potential reliability of rational thought during periods of high stress. A full study of the latest neuroscience research should be conducted, keeping in mind its implications for nuclear deterrence.

34. Relying for security on nuclear deterrence appears to be a strategy with a high level of risk.

September 2013

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#### Written evidence from Paul Bell, Director of Albany Associates

##### THE CASE FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL OPERATIONS AS A KEY UK DEFENCE CAPABILITY

*"At its heart (of the problems confronting the British military in contemporary and future conflict) is the belief that future campaigns will need to focus on altering the behaviours of others, either in advance—and therefore deterring conflict—or as a coupled component in the process of combat and post combat operations."*

*The Shrivenham Papers—Defence Academy of the United Kingdom: "Behavioural Conflict"—Andrew McKay and Steve Tatham*

#### SUMMARY

In the new security environment, warfare will become increasingly psychological. Militaries will be forced to focus increasingly on the ability to identify, understand and influence how people think and feel. Success in conflict—and deterrence—will depend increasingly on competent psychological operations, influence, strategic communications campaigns and key psychological insights gained through counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism and attempts at nation-building over the past decade. Establishing or paving the way for legitimacy in any conflict situation will eventually count more than raw military power itself.

Behind the military threat posed by every potential enemy state and non-state actor there lies a more fundamental state—their state of mind and the states of mind of those they depend upon for support, or regard as their enemies. In an increasingly volatile, unpredictable and information-fuelled world, dealing with emotional and highly opinionated states of mind will emerge as the key battle-ground; states of mind may even come to eclipse the role or relevance of recognized sovereign states.

This short paper argues that the UK needs to prioritise investment and develop its expertise in this extraordinarily cost-effective and essential element of national defence. The UK is uniquely positioned to develop this capability and become a centre of worldwide military excellence in this sphere. Key components

of the resource already exist in the UK through specialist contractors and globally recognized experts in the field of information operations.

## INTRODUCTION

Asymmetric adversaries will become the norm. However, even when facing sovereign state threats, the mobile phone, tablet, PC or TV screen have become the new “front line” in a battle of competing “narratives” and the quest for legitimacy. Prevention as a strategy has shifted beyond the traditional deterrent of mutually assured destruction between state actors, to a more complex scenario involving a multitude of actors with a range of actions, in which the principal task is to be able “*to interrupt the narratives of those who threaten our values and interests and to support those who champion them*”.

### 1. *The meaning and role of strategic communications*

The average person in any conflict or potential conflict zone lives in an environment characterised by some degree of fear, deprivation, disorder, uncertainty, perhaps chronic violence, and has probably done so for years. There will almost certainly be other critical cultural and psycho-social issues around prejudice, discrimination, revenge, hatred and mistrust. To launch a military campaign into such a theatre without some kind of plan and competence to stabilize, isolate or unite certain key factions would likely place the entire mission at risk.

The role of strategic communications is to help people, and groups, avoid the wrong choices, and enable enough to make the right choice that the coalition that supports us ultimately succeeds. When Petraeus said, “*people are the decisive terrain*” that is what he meant. Without popular support, no solution is sustainable, and popular support means people must *repeatedly* make the right choice, day after day after day. Not a single vote, or a single act, but repeatedly and in very difficult circumstances. Our challenge is helping them choose wisely.

The central focus of all campaign planning therefore must be the task of shaping the loyalties, beliefs, narratives, and behaviours of the local population. Strategic communications isn’t just a “war fighting” tool but the heart of campaign planning for all tools—kinetic and non-kinetic. *It’s the piece that comes first*. Our core task is to transform a conflict dynamic to one of peaceful political engagement. All else follows from that goal.

As part of the conflict transformation effort, strategic communications has two key jobs to do: first, to undermine the ability of obstructionists to mobilize violence and achieve their strategic goals through force. We need to systematically challenge and deconstruct the loyalties, narratives, and justifications which are critical to widespread violence—to deny them both voice and the appearance of legitimacy.

The second job is equally important—to reconstitute the social and political structures that enable peaceful and orderly daily life. To build a “coalition for peace.” “Coalition”, because it’s political, something that must be built. “Peace”, because that’s what we’re building: a just, inclusive, productive, and therefore enduring, peace.

The vocabulary of conflict transformation is nothing new, but its practical application is still in its infancy as a systematic, incremental, theorized, pragmatic, strategic, social and political process. Understanding the dynamics of any conflict (military, psychological, social, political) is challenging enough; intervening in, and shaping, those dynamics is something else altogether, particularly if we’re not to break the golden rule: *do no harm*.

### 2. *Some lessons learned*

Hard lessons in strategic communications have been learned in recent years from front-line conflict environments such as Iraq and Afghanistan, such as:

- *It’s not about us*. It’s about our target audiences, and more specifically their relationships with each other. We’re not selling a product to a single target audience, we’re shaping their mutual relationships—how they see each other, and their circumstances. As a corollary to this, it’s not about the facts per se; it’s about the underlying narrative framework which makes sense of people’s lives and experiences. That’s what needs to be tapped into, with compelling stories that help reshape the narratives that polarize and divide—not just change how people feel and think, but the framework for their perception and judgments.
- *It’s not about messaging, it’s about effects*. Any messaging needs to be rooted in the “ground truth” and aspirations of ordinary people. It should speak in their own voice, not in ours. The key to achieving those effects is to engage people’s emotions. We’re not winning an argument; we’re moving people. We put emotional resonance at the core of the creative process, so our target audience “takes ownership” of the message.

- ***It's not about a one-off message, it's about sustained engagement.*** Strategic communications is a “deep battle” effort to shape the long-term environment. Campaigns take time and repetition to deliver cumulative effects, and people need time to reason, and feel, and practice new behaviours. The process needs to unfold in time. So it's not about any single message or media channel. We need to create a long-term presence in every media format, touching the target audience in multiple aspects of their daily lives. It's also not just about media, but about finding ways to catalyse and shape the activities of the population—initiating and sponsoring events that give people a chance to get involved, that magnify voices supportive of settlement and generate a sense of public engagement and common purpose.

### 3. *The application of strategic communications to prevention and the New Security Environment.*

What we've learned about shaping conflict environments can be applied elsewhere—to the many fragile or failing states which pose a growing security threat. As asymmetric warfare becomes the global mode of violent engagement, increasingly the psychological and sociological domain is becoming the real “battle space.” These conflicts are promoted, amplified, judged and, as a result, effectively fought through the media. To quote the MoD's recent paper on the future character of conflict: “*A battle of narratives will take place in a decentralised, networked and free-market of ideas, opinions, and even raw data—amplified by modern technology and at a much higher tempo.*”

For example, al Qaeda understands this, and seeks to use the media to inflict a series of psychologically debilitating information operations on its various audiences. Operational success for al Qaeda could never come through achieving its formally stated objective of establishing a Caliphate by military means, or inflicting anything remotely resembling a military victory against the West. Their objectives are more psychological than kinetic: to induce a disproportionate and irrational psychological impact which has the effect of making those audiences more aware of their presence.

The New Security Environment means that successful, sustainable intervention outcomes depend on more than our ability to inflict military defeat on our enemies—or at least those who actually stand up to fight. Of much greater importance is how to deal with their cause, ideology and levels of support in their communities, since that is at the heart of their ability to recruit and continue their war. Sustainable success must *inter alia* be rooted in a critical mass of popular disapproval of our opponents.

The logic of the New Security Environment also suggests that a confrontation with another state may see the latter employ a sophisticated mix of regular and irregular forces including proxies, conventional and guerrilla tactics, information operations and high-end technologies such as the cyber domain to avoid our conventional strengths. This enemy too will need to be countered in the critical psycho-social space—employing effective strategic communications campaigns to minimize the impact of their actions and messages on the wider population and maximize pressure on their organization, ideology and supporters. It's not really “warfare” in the classic sense, but about social change, not so much the “long war” as the “long change.”

Ultimately two key insights emerge. Firstly, that our success is dependent on the ability to know, understand and influence how people think and feel about key issues. Secondly, that the best way to fight an asymmetric opponent is to intervene in his environment before he can degrade, shape and control it to his requirements.

This is seldom easy. It will require different modes of thought on our part, and new modes of action. But we're adapting our means of force, our kinetic operations, and we need to adapt our non-kinetic means. All will agree that effective persuasion is to be preferred to effective violence, if at all possible.

The need for Stabilisation and Development Operations in pre or post-conflict situations, or in fragile or failing states, is not in itself a new idea but it has come strongly into focus since 9/11. A strong military role is often essential in such operations, but the spectrum of tasks involved is frequently wider than those for which the military are trained and require civilian skills and input from other public and private sector organisations. Hence the so-called Comprehensive Approach.

Both UK and US governments recognise this. To quote former US Defense Secretary Bob Gates: “...having robust civilian capabilities available—diplomacy, strategic communication, foreign assistance, civic action, and economic reconstruction and development—could make it less likely that military force will have to be used in the first place, as local problems might be dealt with before they become crises.”

The operational challenges of applying this approach across all agencies are well known to all with recent operational experience, but the impetus remains. As with the US, the UK's national (security) interest will best be served by a Comprehensive Approach to conflict, conflict resolution, stabilisation operations and counter-insurgency/anti-terrorist campaigns, but only if it can be supported by world-class strategic communications.

Finally it is worth noting that the conflict dynamics of the New Security Environment also have implications for the “home front”. When defence and security operations at home and abroad are conducted in the glare of the media, a loss of confidence or failure of the collective nerve can become the greatest vulnerability. Strategic communications can assist the government in presenting a compelling and coherent narrative about what we are trying to achieve in the interests of national security. This is a distinct line of operation from those which are conducted in operational theatres abroad, but it is nonetheless integral to the overall effort.



4. *A call for leadership by the UK*

Our final point is perhaps more of a challenge: that the UK has the potential to become the world's pre-eminent exponent and practitioner of strategic communications and psychological operations in the domain of national security interests.

Most state militaries have developed dedicated strategic communications and PSYOP capabilities. Most, however, are still mired in derivatives of Cold-War propaganda thinking and often look crude and ineffective when put alongside the psychological and sociological nuance and allure of contemporary terrorist products. The understanding of human emotions is at a premium. The US has struggled greatly in this department. Donald Rumsfeld criticised what he called the “five and dime store mentality” of US strategic communications, awarding it no more than a “*Grade D or D+*” in its performance in the so-called “war of ideas”. For Britain, the resource to establish a centre of excellence already exists. We need to be able to understand and change our enemy's mind-set without necessarily getting him to like us.

Experience teaches that there is a multiplicative effect that well-executed strategic communications has in proportion to relative spend—as defined by positive influence on the attitudes and behaviours of the given target audiences. A relatively insignificant investment in the UK's defence capability in this area—less than 1%—could pay massive dividends, and indeed make us the envy of the world in terms of our ability to influence the various theatres in which we operate.

*March 2014*

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