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## Written Evidence for the House of Commons Defence Select Committee On Deterrence and the changing role and requirements for security

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### 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 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;

- 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): e.g. 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 or won 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 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 compellance (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 21<sup>st</sup> 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, de-mated, 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 20<sup>th</sup> century notions of nuclear deterrence and legitimising the recognition of a spectrum of tools in addition to nuclear weapons for deterring the 21<sup>st</sup> 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;
    - 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.

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<sup>1</sup> See Commander Robert Green (Royal Navy, retired), Security Without Nuclear Deterrence, including Rebecca Johnson’s Introduction, ‘Turning Back from Doomsday’, Astron Media, NZ, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> See Ward Wilson, Five Myths about Nuclear Weapons, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012