

## **Nuclear Security Briefings**

This is the first in a series of periodic briefings on aspects of nuclear weapons policy and gives an update on the current ‘state of play’ with regard to the UK’s nuclear weapons.

We appreciate that MPs receive substantial mail and need to deal with a wide range of topics. As such, this concise briefing is designed to be of use in correspondence with constituents and in preparation for debates or Questions.

### **Nuclear Weapons: The State of Play in 2011**

#### **The Global Context**

In a 2009 speech in Prague, President Obama set out the future of US Nuclear Weapons policy:

“I state clearly and with conviction America's commitment to seek the peace and security of a world without nuclear weapons. I'm not naive. This goal will not be reached quickly - perhaps not in my lifetime. It will take patience and persistence. But now we too must ignore the voices who tell us that the world cannot change. We have to insist, yes, we can.”<sup>i</sup>

This vision has the support of all of the UK’s main political parties, and governments and distinguished foreign and defence policy experts from across the political spectrum around the world.<sup>ii</sup> NATO endorsed this aspiration in its new Strategic Concept (overarching policy) in November 2010.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) states held their five-yearly review conference in May of 2010, and a programme of action was unanimously agreed. This was followed by the recent ratification and entry into force of the ‘New START’ treaty between the US and Russia, reducing the number of warheads and launchers and establishing a new inspection and verification regime. This could open up space for more steps in the direction of Obama’s vision, but will require concerted international efforts.

As well as negotiating New Start, President Obama has initiated Nuclear Security Conferences and committed to ‘aggressively pursuing’ ratification of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), though recent changes in the US Senate could make early progress problematic.

#### **The British Situation**

Both the Conservative and Labour 2010 manifestos voiced support for the decision to renew the Trident system whilst the Liberal Democrats did not support a ‘like for like’ replacement. The Coalition agreement stated that:

“The renewal of Trident should be scrutinised to ensure value for money. Liberal Democrats will continue to make the case for alternatives. We will immediately play a strong role in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference, and press for continued progress on multilateral disarmament.”<sup>iii</sup>

The value for money review was conducted and its conclusions published alongside the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) last October. Overall the changes announced were estimated to save £1.2bn and defer £2bn of spend. This included:

- a delay to the start of the principal construction phase ('Main Gate', the most expensive part of the process) until 2016, after the next election.
- a deferral of any decision on whether a new warhead is required until at least 2019.
- reducing the number of warheads onboard each submarine from 48 to 40.
- reducing the maximum number of operationally available warheads from 160 to 120.
- reducing the UK's overall maximum nuclear weapon stockpile from 225 to 180.
- reducing the number of missiles deployed on each submarine, and a decision that the new submarines would have only 8 missile tubes, rather than the current 16.
- a deferral and possible removal of spend on infrastructure of £1bn over the next 10 years.
- retaining 'continuous-at-sea deterrence' – having a submarine on patrol at all times.

In November 2010 the UK and France signed a treaty agreeing cooperation on nuclear safety and security that paves the way for the building of joint research and testing facilities in France and the UK, and potentially more cooperation in future.

Throughout 2011, the cross-party BASIC Trident Commission, co-chaired by Sir Malcolm Rifkind MP, Lord Des Browne of Ladyton and Sir Menzies Campbell MP will consider many of the issues surrounding British nuclear weapons policy, reporting in early 2012.<sup>iv</sup>

## 2011: Key Questions

As we enter 2011, the Initial Gate decision is imminently due but the full value for money report has not been published. This leaves a number of important questions unanswered:

- What are the implications of committing significant spending to the procurement of long-lead items during this phase of the process prior to the next election?
- Are there plans to publish the value for money report in full?
- What are the implications of the treaty to share nuclear facilities with France for the UK's efforts to reduce its nuclear arsenal and fully engage in disarmament diplomacy?
- Is the commitment to continuous-at-sea deterrence appropriate to UK security today?

## About Us

The Nuclear Weapons Policy Liaison Group (NWPLG) is an informal group of independent experts in nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament convened to address the technical and political issues in taking realistic steps towards reducing the threats associated with nuclear weapons. For more information please e-mail us at [NWpolicygroup@gmail.com](mailto:NWpolicygroup@gmail.com)

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<sup>i</sup> Speech by Barack Obama available online at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7984353.stm>

<sup>ii</sup> The list of supporters ranges from Henry Kissinger and George Schultz: <http://www.nuclearsecurityproject.org/> to Hans Blix and Lech Walesa: <http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org>

<sup>iii</sup> The Coalition Agreement is available online at:

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dg/groups/dg\\_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg\\_187876.pdf](http://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_187876.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.basicint.org/news/2011/week-time-new-cross-party-examination-trident-renewal>