Subject: Trident replacement and the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty Review Conference

1. Introduction

This NFLA Policy Briefing provides members with an overview on current thinking on the UK’s nuclear weapon policy and the proposed upgrade of the Trident nuclear weapons programme. It also notes the wider policy context with President Obama’s April 2009 speech on nuclear disarmament in Prague and actions on worldwide nuclear disarmament, the response of the UK Government to these initiatives and the opportunities to influence debate. NFLA’s work in this area is conducted in association with the International Mayors for Peace – led by the Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – and will focus on the forthcoming Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Conference at the United Nations in May 2010.

The Briefing suggests a number of ways the Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) can influence this debate, including:

- highlighting the economic costs of Trident upgrade, in the midst of one of the worst financial recessions in recent history – and the positive alternatives the billions can be spent on;
- encouraging the growing political consensus amongst major political figures to not go ahead with Trident replacement;
- raising concerns over the nuclear safety regime at the Faslane and Devonport nuclear submarine bases;
- organising NFLA seminars to provide further information on Trident replacement;
- arranging a Mayors for Peace Working Group meeting to lobby the Minister responsible for nuclear counter-proliferation measures.

2. The Trident decision

In 2006 the UK Government announced in a White Paper that it would be seeking to develop a new generation of the Trident nuclear submarine weapon system, given that the current submarines and missiles system would be reaching the end of their operation in the next decade. A heated debate was held in Parliament on the White Paper in March 2007 and, despite one of the largest backbench rebellions of the current Parliamentary session, was carried by the Government with support from the Conservative opposition.
Since the decision was approved by the UK Parliament some limited initial preparatory work defining the concept of the submarine launch platform has been undertaken. Substantial investment work is underway at the Atomic Weapons Establishments (AWE) at Aldermaston and Burghfield to develop the infrastructure needed to build and maintain nuclear warheads. However, in general major decisions on funding and future development are still to be made.

3. Obama and the ‘Road to 2010’

The election of President Barack Obama has led to a major change in US disarmament policy, which has had a dramatic effect on the wider debate. In a keynote speech in Prague on 5th April 2009, President Obama declared: “So today, 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.'”

The speech also provided specific commitments that the United States would seek to negotiate a Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty with Russia, ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and seek a new Treaty to verify a ban on fissile materials capable of being used in a nuclear weapon. The President also pledged to seek a strengthening of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

This significant shift in US foreign policy has set a marker to other nuclear weapons states. It clearly helped to create a much more positive atmosphere at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Preparatory Conference in May 2009 - attended by members of the Nuclear Free Local Authorities within an International Mayors for Peace delegation – which set a distinctive agenda for the formal 2010 Conference and had more substantive discussion on reducing nuclear weapons proliferation.

It also challenged other nuclear weapons states to respond. The UK Government’s response has come in a number of speeches from Prime Minister Gordon Brown and the policy documents ‘Lifting the Nuclear Shadow’ and ‘The Road to 2010 – Addressing the nuclear question in the 21st century’. Prime Minister Brown said: “Britain has cut the number of its nuclear warheads by 50% since 1997 ... If it is possible to reduce the number of UK warheads further, consistent with our national deterrence requirements and with the progress of multilateral discussions, Britain will be ready to do so”. (2) Ministers have also confirmed that they share the longer term goal of a world without nuclear weapons. (3)

The key points of the ‘Road to 2010’ strategy in reference to nuclear weapons are to (4):

- ensure that nuclear material is held securely, to prevent it falling into the hands of terrorist groups or hostile states;
- take urgent action to address the proliferation of nuclear weapons; and
- make progress in building the international partnerships needed to deliver a world free from nuclear weapons.

The ‘Road to 2010’ document has no specific comments to make on Trident replacement – indeed the word ‘Trident’ does not appear once in the document. The Government has said very little about concrete steps on the Trident replacement programme in 2009. As the Foreign Affairs Committee has noted: “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”. (5)

4. Initial Gate decision postponed – the election debate

On 17th July 2009, ‘The Daily Telegraph’ reported that the first crucial decision to build a new generation of Trident nuclear submarines, which had been due in September, had been delayed until after the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty Conference in May 2010. This would allow very little time to make the decision before a general election has to be called. This ‘Initial Gate’
decision would commit £3 billion for 6 years of technical assessments and detailed designs with the goal of launching a new Trident system when the existing submarines go out of action in the 2020s. (6)

In a response to a question on this decision, the Defence Minister, Bob Ainsworth, has said it would be made ‘later this year’ (7) but no specific timing on the announcement has been provided. Although deferral of the Initial Gate decision until after the 2010 NPT Review Conference would be a welcome sign of positive intent from the UK to the Conference, it is worth noting that the Ministry of Defence has never given an on-the-record statement that this will happen, and there are believed to be deep differences within government on this issue between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which is generally supportive of such a move, and the Ministry of Defence, which is more sceptical.

This is likely to mean Trident replacement could be a significant issue in the 2010 general election, surrounded by the wider context of how the next Government will deal with the UK’s huge public debt and the requirements to consider cuts in public spending. Can the UK really afford Trident replacement?

The Conservatives have made statements suggesting that the cost of Trident will have to be carefully reviewed in line with other spending commitments. As Shadow Defence Minister, Liam Fox said: “We are in favour of the replacement of the nuclear deterrent, we voted for it in Parliament. But like all other projects we have, we have to review them for value for money for the taxpayer”. (8) Mr Fox is also said to be considering delaying a decision on replacing Trident by extending the life of the current Vanguard class submarines (9). Interestingly, former Conservative Shadow Home Office Minister, David Davis, has said “there is no firmer advocate of nuclear deterrence than me, but even I have some difficulty seeing the justification for a wholesale upgrade of Trident.” (10)

The Liberal Democrats have come out formally against Trident replacement. Liberal Democrat Leader, Nick Clegg announced: “New leadership in Russia, new leadership obviously in the White House and a wider geopolitical appreciation means that a cold war missile system designed to penetrate Soviet defences and land in Moscow and St Petersburg at any time, in any weather, from any location anywhere round the planet, is not our foremost security challenge now. We have got to be grown-up and honest about it. Given that we need to ask ourselves big questions about what our priorities are, we have arrived at the view that a like-for-like Trident replacement is not the right thing to do.” (11) Mr Clegg has suggested that submarine launched cruise missiles might be favoured by the Liberal Democrats as an alternative to the replacement of Trident.

The SNP, Plaid Cymru and the SDLP are also opposed to Trident replacement. In the Republic of Ireland the Government has a legal non-nuclear policy and has been a leading member of the ‘New Agenda Coalition’ at the United Nations which is encouraging nuclear weapons states to make firmer commitments on reducing nuclear weapon stockpiles.

5. The costs of Trident

The financial costs of Trident are likely to be as important an element in the debate in deciding its replacement as the long-held UK foreign policy commitment of maintaining an independent nuclear deterrent.

In the Nuclear Information Service (NIS) report ‘A Replacement for Trident: Can We Afford It?’ (12) it is noted that the Government has estimated Trident replacement is estimated to cost between £15 and £20 billion. Total operating costs over the life of the programme will amount to around £37.5 billion. The graph below shows the Government’s spending profile for Trident replacement (13):
As the NIS report highlights: “The costs of replacing Trident would add a heavy load to the already stretched defence procurement budget. Competing equipment demands from the armed forces, high cost inflation driven by rapid technological advances in the defence sector, and the demands of UK military involvement in Afghanistan and Iraq have placed considerable strains on the procurement budget, which is currently said to be underfunded by a sum of £15 billion”.

With Government debt standing at £805 billion, the Institute of Fiscal Studies has predicted ‘2 Parliaments of Pain’ and that the next Comprehensive Public Spending Review will be less generous than at any time of the last 30 years (10). A five-year real freeze in total public spending from 2011 – 2016 is a strong possibility, which due to rising real spending on debt interest payments, tax credits and social security payments; would require real cuts in most areas of public spending. The graph above shows that costs on Trident replacement start to increase towards the end of the next Parliament and significantly in the second Parliament. Whichever party gets elected in 2010 has very difficult decisions to make on Trident replacement in a wider policy context of potential public spending cuts in local government, transport and other areas of spending.

Alternatives that may be pursued by the next Government may include looking at a scaled-down version of Trident replacement or extending the life of the current system. However, the financial challenges of the economic recession, coupled with the UK’s continuing military commitments in Afghanistan means that any decision on Trident replacement are likely to be controversial and face considerable public scrutiny.

6. The growing consensus on Trident cancellation

An increasing element of the debate on Trident in 2009 has been the ever-increasing group of senior political and military figures advocating changes to the UK nuclear weapons policy.

Field Marshal Lord Bramall, General Lord Ramsbotham and General Sir Hugh Beach wrote to The Times (14) stating that the UK nuclear deterrent does not protect the UK from the key threats to national security, such as terrorist attacks, and are diverting funds from conventional military forces.

The letter was one of a number from senior Parliamentarians in the USA and in the UK suggesting that nuclear disarmament needed to be dealt with as a matter of urgency. This has culminated in the creation of a cross-party group of ex-ministers and former generals to lobby for multilateral nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

The ‘Top Level Group of UK Parliamentarians for Multilateral Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation’ includes former Defence Minister Des Browne and former Labour ministers Margaret
Beckett, John Reid and Lord Robertson; senior former Conservative ministers including Malcolm Rifkind and Michael Ancram; and three former chiefs of the defence staff, General Lord Guthrie, Field Marshal Lord Inge and Admiral Lord Boyce. It also includes Lady Williams, the prime minister's adviser on nuclear proliferation. (15) Such figures suggest growing political commitment to the cause of nuclear disarmament after years of disinterest and logjam.

Public opinion polls also show a clear majority of the public now oppose Trident replacement. A poll in July 2009 in The Guardian found 54% of the public supported nuclear disarmament rather than Trident replacement (16). A similar poll in The Independent in September 2009 showed a majority of 58% to 35% opposed Trident replacement and believed it should be abandoned due to the state of UK public finances. In this poll 63% of Liberal Democrat voters, 61% of Labour voters and 48% of Conservative voters favoured ditching Trident replacement (17).

7. **Problems at Faslane and Devonport**

The four Vanguard class submarines which carry the Trident nuclear weapons system are based at HM Naval Base Clyde at Faslane on the west coast of Scotland. They undergo refit and long term maintenance at Devonport in Plymouth. The Ministry of Defence has announced that from 2014 all submarines in its fleet will be centralised at the Faslane base.

Continuing concern remains over the safety regimes at both bases. In May 2009 Channel 4 News reported that there had been radiation leaks into the Clyde Estuary from nuclear powered submarines in 2004, 2007 and 2008. The Scottish Environmental Protection Agency noted on the programme that, had Faslane been a civil nuclear site, they would have closed it until proper safety checks had taken place (18). The same month the MOD admitted that radioactive waste had been leaking out of nuclear submarines for at least 12 years.

The most recent case was at the Devonport site on the 25th March when radioactive water from HMS Turbulent, a nuclear powered hunter-killer submarine, escaped while the reactor’s system was being flushed onto the submarine coolant. In addition, the MOD admitted that a leak of radioactive coolant took place at sea on HMS Trafalgar on 30th January 2006. The admission states that no environmental or crew contamination occurred from the incident (19). Further concerns about submarine safety arose in February 2009 when HMS Vanguard collided underwater while on patrol with Le Triomphant, a French submarine carrying strategic nuclear weapons. (20)

The decision to centralise submarines at Faslane is likely to heighten discontent to Trident in Scotland, where the current Scottish Government has publicly stated its opposition to this decision in favour of Trident cancellation. Opposition to Trident in Scotland is widespread including political parties, senior Church figures (such as the Catholic Primate of Scotland and the Moderator of the Church of Scotland) and the Scottish TUC.

Furthermore, the NFLA endorsed the 2007 Scottish TUC / Scottish CND report that asserted that Trident replacement would cost Scotland more jobs than it will provide. The report suggested that few jobs resulting in Trident replacement would come to Scotland and that the savings made on Trident cancellation could be used on defence diversification and productive technologies in the Scottish economy – such as energy efficiency, energy conservation and renewable energy – where similar skills exist (21).

8. **Trident and the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty**

The main reason for Trident replacement still remains the UK Government policy that it must retain an independent nuclear deterrent as long as other states possess them. The current interest in this policy, and of many of the initiatives mentioned above, is due to the major review conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) at the United Nations in May 2010, which is widely considered to be a window of opportunity where significant steps can be taken towards the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. The NPT is the main internationally agreed treaty on nuclear weapons which puts commitments on nuclear weapons states to reduce their stockpiles of such weapons in good faith, while in return non-nuclear weapons states undertake not to develop a nuclear arsenal.
With the positive statements of President Obama, President Medvedev and Prime Minister Brown there does exist a much greater sense of goodwill than at the last conference in 2005. The continuing worries over the proliferation of nuclear weapons to North Korea and Iran also seem to be concentrating minds over the need for progress in the NPT. However, the government's commitment to Trident replacement risks undermining many of the positive steps being made by the UK in support of the international disarmament process.

Trident replacement could also derail many of the positive commitments being made by the UK Government. As former International Atomic Energy Authority Chair Hans Blix has said: “Many non-nuclear-weapon states, on the other hand, feel cheated that while they have consented to remain without nuclear weapons indefinitely, the nuclear-weapon states have not. …The UK and US plans to develop a new generation of nuclear weapons is a defiance of the NPT. Their preaching non-proliferation to the world sounds hollow when they, themselves develop new weapons.” (22)

Local Government is playing a key role in this debate through the NFLA's close association with the International Mayors for Peace. Led by the Mayors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Mayors for Peace (with 3104 member cities) are lobbying UN members to adopt the 'Hiroshima – Nagasaki Protocol' (19 – see Appendix 1). This document tries to significantly firm up the commitments to reduce stockpiles of nuclear weapons by developing a Nuclear Weapons Convention by 2015 and a timetable to eliminate all nuclear weapons by 2020 – the Mayors for Peace '2020 Vision'. The NFLA work closely with the Mayors for Peace to achieve this aim and emphasise the strong support of the civilian population behind the desire to have a nuclear-weapon free world. Mayors for Peace is working to arrange a meeting between UK members and the UK’s Counter-proliferation Minister, Ivan Lewis MP.

8. Actions to be taken

The NFLA Annual Policy Briefing in June 2009 in Manchester partially concentrated on nuclear weapons proliferation with speakers including the Chair of the Mayors for Peace 2020 Vision, Mayor Luc Dehaene of Ypres, Belgium; UK Mayors for Peace Development Adviser, Peter Burt; Policy Advisor of the Acronym Institute, Carol Naughton; and Research Associate at Bradford University Peace Studies Department, Nick Ritchie. All the presentations from the briefing can be found on the NFLA website – http://www.nuclearpolicy.info.

Further actions that can be taken by NFLA member and non member authorities include:

- Attend the NFLA Scotland seminar on October 23rd in Glasgow, which will include presentations on Trident replacement.
- Further seminars on Trident replacement will be held in early 2010 in the run-up to the NPT Review Conference and to coincide with the 30th anniversary of the NFLA.
- Continue to draw comparisons with the cost of Trident replacement in comparison to potential cuts in public spending, and in particular highlight the implications for local government and local services.
- If not already a member, join the International Mayors for Peace (go to http://www.mayorsforpeace.org) and the NFLA (http://www.nuclearpolicy.info).
- Individual elected members – who do not have to be Mayors – are invited to sign the Mayors for Peace 'Cities Declaration' in support of the Hiroshima – Nagasaki Protocol. An increasing number of mayors and local councillors – including Boris Johnson, Mayor of London – are giving their support to the Declaration. Details can be found at http://www.2020visioncampaign.org/pages/448/Campaign_Priority_Signature_Drive_in_support_of_the_Hiroshima-Nagasaki_Protocol.
- Consider involvement in a NFLA / Mayors for Peace delegation to the UK Government Foreign Office Minister responsible for counter-proliferation issues, Ivan Lewis MP.
• Consider involvement in a NFLA / Mayors for Peace delegation to the Irish Government Foreign Minister, Michael Martin TD.

• Lobby Councils to consider participation in the Mayors for Peace delegation attending the May 2010 NPT at the United Nations.

• Promote the opinion polls that show a clear majority of the public do not wish to see Trident replacement.

• Co-operate in the ‘Beyond Trident’ initiative – which includes the Come Clean Campaign, CND and the Acronym Institute – to seek an alternative defence policy.

• Highlight the continuing safety issues of regular nuclear convoys from the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston to Faslane and Devonport, and radiation incidents at both naval bases. For more information see http://www.nukewatch.org.

• Support the involvement of the NFLA in the decommissioning of nuclear submarines as part of the Submarine Dismantling Project organised by the MOD.

9. References


(3) Speech by Bill Rammell, Minister for the Armed Forces, to the Institute of Law, Accountability, and Peace, London, 2nd September 2009.


(15) Letter to The Times, 16th January 2009


This policy briefing was prepared by the NFLA Secretary, Sean Morris, in association with the Mayors for Peace Development Adviser, Peter Burt.
Protocol complementary to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons for achieving a nuclear-weapon-free world by the year 2020.

Desiring to establish an over-arching means of addressing nuclear disarmament in all its aspects so as to facilitate the fulfilment by States Parties of their obligations under Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and with a view to all states fulfilling the nuclear disarmament obligation found by the International Court of Justice in their 1996 advisory opinion on the legality of the use or threat of nuclear weapons;

Considering that continued exploitation of the discriminatory nature of the Treaty, wherein nuclear weapon States Parties are exempted from the prohibition on the acquisition of nuclear weapons, is incompatible with the pursuit in good faith of nuclear disarmament in all its aspects;

Considering further that full equality under international law must be re-established by the elimination of all nuclear arsenals as agreed in the 1995 Extension Conference decision on “Principles and Objectives”;

Article I
1. The nuclear-weapon States Parties to this Protocol shall cease forthwith:
   (a) all activities related to the acquisition of nuclear weapon which non-nuclear-weapon States Parties are prohibited from pursuing under the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons;
   (b) all activities which incorporate nuclear weapons into their military doctrines and practices; and shall place all nuclear weapons and weapon-usable fissile materials in safe and secure storage at the earliest possible date.
2. All other States Parties to this Protocol possessing weapons-usable fissile material shall take those steps required of the nuclear-weapon States in paragraph 1 which apply to their circumstances.

Article II
1. The States Parties to this Protocol shall pursue in good faith negotiations on achieving nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under the following two main sections:
   Section One negotiations will standardize and legally codify the measures taken under Article I, paragraph 1, (a) and (b).
   Section Two negotiations will address:
   (c) the elimination of all nuclear weapons and related deployment systems, including delivery vehicles, launch platforms, and command and control systems.
   (d) the elimination of all infrastructure associated with the acquisition of nuclear-weapon system, including production and testing facilities, and of all weapon-usable fissile material stocks.
2. The negotiations called for in paragraph 1 shall have as their objective a Nuclear Weapons Convention or a comparable Framework Agreement. Negotiations shall begin forthwith and be pursued without interruption by all States Parties until this objective is achieved. A Secretariat for the negotiations shall be established that remains in operation until negotiations are concluded.
3. Every good faith effort shall be made to ensure that all measures related to Section One are agreed and implemented before or by 2015 and that all measures related to Section Two are agreed and implemented before or by 2020.
4. All measures contained or foreseen in the Nuclear Weapons Convention or Framework Agreement shall be subject to strict and effective international control and shall provide for international institutions capable of ensuring that the nuclear-weapon free world which is achieved can be maintained indefinitely.

Article III
Nothing in this Protocol shall be interpreted as diminishing in anyway the non-proliferation obligations of any State Party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons; including each State’s obligation to cooperate in the establishment and operation of the international institutions of Article II, paragraph 4.