



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

information

NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 24th November 2014

NFLA questions why the Ministry of Defence is making so many deals to develop Trident replacement a year before Parliament discusses it

The Nuclear Free Local Authorities (NFLA) questions today UK nuclear weapons policy and the primary role of the UK Parliament in discussing a full replacement of the Trident nuclear weapons programme, given recent media reports of ongoing deals to develop the programme without public or Parliamentary discussion.

A report in the 'Sunday Herald' noted that the Ministry of Defence (MoD) had agreed a £37 million deal with the United States Government to purchase a dozen new Trident missile launchers. This is around a year before the UK Parliament is due to discuss whether the Trident programme should be renewed and replaced. In the NFLA's view the development of a new Trident programme is occurring by stealth, making it very difficult for the next Government / Parliament to say 'no' to it. (1)

According to reports by the US Navy, the defence utility, General Dynamics, has been contracted to construct 12 launch tubes for new UK nuclear submarines that could start to replace those currently at Faslane and Coulport over the next decade. General Dynamics could end up making a total of 48 missile tubes for the proposed four new UK nuclear submarines.

The NFLA is also concerned that the deal is at odds with the UK Government's oft-repeated disarmament promise that it would only have the capability to fire eight missiles, when the deal is for 12 launch tubes. NFLA is concerned that a future UK Government could decide to load the four additional tubes with missiles and significantly expand the UK's nuclear weapons capability, clearly against the spirit of its commitments under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. The UK Government has to explain this discrepancy to Parliament and the United Nations, and explain why so much technology is being developed for Trident replacement before Parliament formally discusses the matter in 2016.

An unpredictable UK general election is still six months away. It is possible that the result could have a direct impact on the 2016 Trident replacement decision, so it is quite wrong for the Ministry of Defence to be developing programme after programme to develop Trident submarines and assorted technology for it, without either full public debate on this matter, or the next Parliament to discuss it as promised. As the Sunday Herald note, with this £37 million deal now signed, almost £120 million has already been committed to a project Parliament has not formally agreed to. In what other part of the UK national budget are such early financial decisions made? And, as local government budgets get cut for the fifth and sixth year in a row, why is the Government making such decisions when critical services in other areas are being so badly degraded?

NFLA Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

"This new Trident replacement deal beggars belief. It also shows how the UK's 'independent' nuclear weapons programme is dependent on US control. I think it is quite wrong for the Ministry of Defence to be spending such money on a programme for which the public and Parliament has not fully made its mind up on. With conventional defences being cut to the bone, and local government services incurring cut after cut, I believe our priorities are completely wrong. We should be supporting our public services, not building more weapons of mass destruction. Defence ministers must also account for the increase in the UK's nuclear weapons potential if it is planning to buy more missile launchers than it actually needs."

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES



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For more information please contact Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary on 0161 234 3244.

Notes for editors:

(1) Sunday Herald, 23rd November 2014

<http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/home-news/revealed-mods-new-multi-million-pound-trident-deal-with-america.25941179>

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