



Nuclear Free Local Authorities Steering Committee

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NFLA Media release - for immediate release, 3rd February 2014

Trident replacement – is it time for a change to UK policy at last?

The NFLA broadly welcomes the report of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) that the UK Government could cut back its Trident force and save billions of pounds “without sacrificing” its nuclear deterrent value. (1)

This comes at a time when media reports suggest the Defence Minister Philip Hammond is calling on his defence team to lobby the shipbuilding unions because of fears that Labour’s policy on a ‘like for like’ Trident replacement could be scaled back significantly. (2)

The RUSI report by Hugh Chalmers argues that the UK does not always need to have at least one nuclear submarine at sea all the time to be sure of deterring an attack. This could amend the UK’s ‘continuous at-sea deterrence’ (CASD) policy of Trident submarines which has been in place since the early 1980s. Such a change could chime with emerging Liberal Democrat thinking, which was amended somewhat after the publication of a Cabinet Office review of alternatives to Trident ‘like for like’ replacement. (3)

Both the Conservative and Labour policies currently advocate a ‘like for like’ Trident replacement and the maintenance of the CASD policy. However, a number of senior figures in both parties are now advocating a dilution of this policy given the huge cost of the programme at a time of severe cuts to conventional UK military forces. A final ‘Main Gate’ decision to go ahead with the programme will be made in the next Parliament, around 2016. The cost of Trident replacement ranges from around £70 billion - £80 billion, a substantial strain on future defence spending over the next two decades. (4)

Major political figures like the former Conservative Defence Minister James Arbuthnot, the former Labour Defence Minister Lord Des Browne and the former Liberal Democrat Defence Minister Sir Nick Harvey have all come out publically to question the need for a ‘like for like’ replacement of Trident and call for a change with the CASD doctrine. (5)

Though it is unlikely either the Conservative or Labour Parties are seeking to make Trident replacement an issue in the 2015 general election, in the NFLA’s view it is essential they should. The NFLA broadly welcomes the RUSI report as amongst a large swathe of evidence that the UK Government should not be spending anywhere near as much as £80 billion on a new generation of nuclear weapon armed submarines. With local government spending threatened to be cut by another 10% in 2015, after over 230,000 jobs have been cut in the sector alone since 2010, it beggars belief that Trident replacement is not also cut back. (6) NFLA would go further and argue Trident replacement should be completely withdrawn and active moves for significant nuclear disarmament take place. At the very least a serious debate should take place over the next 12 months on what will be a key part of future public spending.

This is why the NFLA will be present at Portcullis House on the 11th February to debate such matters at the launch of a Nuclear Education Trust (NET) report on Trident replacement and the UK’s disarmament responsibilities. This meeting will be chaired by former Foreign Minister Dame Margaret Beckett and will include the likes of James Arbuthnot, Sir Nick Harvey and CND General Secretary Kate Hudson. (7) The NFLA Chair will reiterate its submission to the NET inquiry to move away from Trident ‘like for like’ replacement, urge a full reform of the United Nations and develop a defence policy fit for purpose to deal with current international trends. (8)

NFLA Chair Councillor Mark Hackett said:

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“The RUSI report confirms a growing body of expert opinion that now is the time for radical change of UK nuclear weapons policy. In a post Cold War world where cyber attacks and non state terrorism are likely to be the greatest threats to UK security, what purpose or value do Trident nuclear missiles actually provide? In my own view, little to no purpose at all. I look forward to attending next week’s NET meeting in Westminster and I urge Labour and Conservative politicians and activists to join with those in the Liberal Democrats and other parties who have started to engage fully with changed defence needs and responsibilities. Now really is time to consider the substantial benefits of a nuclear weapons free world.”

Ends

For more information please contact Sean Morris, NFLA Secretary on 07771 930196.

Notes for editors:

- (1) Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), ‘A disturbance in the force – the debate on continuous at-sea deterrence’, January 2014
http://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/2014_OP_A_Disturbance_in_the_Force.pdf
- (2) BBC News Online <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-25968141>
- (2) Guardian, 2nd February <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/feb/02/lobby-ship-unions-trident-hammond>
- (3) BBC News Online, 15th September 2014 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-24099425>
- (4) RUSI, ‘Towards the UK’s nuclear century’ December 2013
http://www.rusi.org/downloads/assets/RUSI_Jnl_158_6_Chalmers_low_res.pdf
- (5) See Guardian report, reference (2)
- (6) Guardian, 26th March 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/mar/25/council-cuts-local-government-knees>
- (7) Nuclear Education Trust <http://www.nucleareducationtrust.org>. The NET launch of its report ‘The UK’s national defence needs and international disarmament responsibilities: survey findings and final inquiry report’ takes place from 11.30am to 1pm, Attlee Suite, Portcullis House, Tuesday February 11th 2014. For further details contact Kiran Nagendran on 020 7222 3533 or via k.nagendran@connectpa.co.uk
- (8) NFLA Policy Briefing 117, Response to the NET inquiry, November 2013
[http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/briefings/A231_\(NB117\)_Nuclear_weapons_policy.pdf](http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/docs/briefings/A231_(NB117)_Nuclear_weapons_policy.pdf)

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