

THE FUTURE OF TRIDENT

**A REPORT BY THE MISSION AND
PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL**

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Introduction

1. The Government has indicated that initial decisions about the long-term future of the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent capability are required within the lifetime of the present Parliament, which could extend to 2010. Although the Government made clear in past statements that it favoured retaining this capability, a capability which Britain has possessed since the 1950s, it promised to set out its thinking on this matter in a White Paper by the end of 2006. This White Paper, *The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent*, was published on 4 December 2006.
2. The White Paper is the first time that a British Government has initiated a public debate on these decisions. Since the Attlee Government committed itself to a nuclear programme, decisions about nuclear weapons have been taken by the Prime Minister and key Cabinet colleagues (often not even by the full Cabinet).
3. The White Paper sets out the parameters within which the Government hopes Parliamentary and public debate will take place over the coming months before a decision is taken in March 2007. The decision falls to be taken against an international and political and strategic background that is both uncertain and much changed not merely since the end of the Cold War, but even since the 1988 Strategic Defence Review. In addition, the domestic political environment remains fluid given the increasing public scepticism about the direction and shape of British foreign policy.
4. The decision regarding the future of the UK's nuclear deterrent is a serious matter requiring the widest possible public consultation. As the Archbishop of Canterbury made clear in his statement following the White Paper's publication: "We need a genuine debate in which Christians ... will want to play a full part."
5. This report is aimed at assisting the General Synod in making a contribution to the wider public and political debate on the future of Trident. It provides an introduction to Britain's nuclear deterrent and surveys past Church thinking on this matter. It presents a critical analysis of the White Paper as well as an evaluation of the initial reaction to the White Paper both inside and outside Parliament. Much of this report's analysis informed the Mission and Public Affairs Council's submission to the House of Commons Defence Committee's inquiry on the future of the UK's nuclear deterrent. A copy of this submission as well as the text of the Archbishop of Canterbury's statement to the publication of the White Paper can be found in the two Appendices (pp16 and 22).

Britain's current nuclear capability

6. The UK's current nuclear capability was ordered in the early 1980s and progressively came into service from 1994. It comprises four Vanguard-class nuclear powered submarines, each with 16 launch tubes for Trident D.5 missiles carrying multiple independently targetable entry vehicles. Successive Governments have declared reductions in the total holding of operational

warheads and in the number of missiles carried in each submarine. The 1998 Strategic Defence Review said that the holding would not exceed 200 with a maximum of 48 per submarine.

7. Details regarding the destructive capability of the size of the warhead carried by each missile have not been disclosed. It is widely conjectured that some missiles may carry only one live warhead, and that this warhead may have an explosive yield well below that of a normal warhead (80-100 kiloton range).
8. There is always one submarine at sea, but operational readiness has been much reduced since the end of the Cold War: the submarine is not necessarily on patrol; the notice to fire is no longer of the 15-minute order; and missiles are not held ready-programmed for delivery to pre-determined targets. The submarines are based at Faslane and Coulport in Western Scotland. Missiles undergo periodic servicing at Kings Bay on the US Atlantic coast as part of a common US-UK stock. The UK share is owned, not leased.

An Independent Nuclear Capability

9. Britain has possessed a strategic nuclear weapons capability since the 1950s. From 1958 onwards, however, there has been increasing co-operation with the United States in warhead design. Final responsibility for design remains with the UK, with expertise centred at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) at Aldermaston in Berkshire. From 1960 onwards Britain decided to buy American missiles for its strategic capability. After some early US help over propulsion, submarines have been fully designed and built in the UK.
10. Operational decisions on the use of the capability remain entirely with the UK government. Neither the US nor NATO has either a legal or physical power to override such authority. Britain has decided to accept dependence on US supply for some key elements of its capability, and the US would be able, if it went back on its commitments, to pose over a period of years increasingly severe difficulty for the maintenance of Britain's capability. France, by contrast has chosen to maintain national independence in procurement, as well as in operation, at a longer-term cost several times higher than the UK.

The Political Logic of a Nuclear Deterrent

11. The UK's nuclear arsenal is small in comparison with other established powers. It provides the UK with a strategy of minimum nuclear deterrence. The Government has consistently argued that it sees Trident as having a fundamentally political role in deterring aggression, not as a weapons system for fighting wars. The Government would only ever contemplate its use in extreme circumstances of self-defence.
12. Trident was developed during the final decade of the Cold War, as a successor to an earlier capability. It was designed to counter the threat posed by the size and technical capabilities of the Soviet strategic nuclear arsenal. Following the end of the Cold War discussion has centred on whether the retention of even a minimum nuclear deterrence is necessary.
13. The 1998 Strategic Defence Review considered this matter carefully. It concluded: "The continuing risk from the proliferation of nuclear weapons,

and the certainty that a number of other countries will retain substantial nuclear arsenals, means that our minimum nuclear deterrent capability, currently represented by Trident, is likely to remain a necessary element of our security". This review did however lead to a reduction in the scale of Britain's nuclear capabilities

Past and Future Disarmament

14. Since the end of the Cold War the UK has progressively sought to meet its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It has withdrawn and dismantled the RAF's WE177 nuclear bomb without replacement so making Trident the UK's only nuclear weapons system. In this respect the UK is the only state with nuclear weapons to have reduced its capability to a single platform, single delivery system and a single warhead design.
15. Similarly, the UK has dismantled all of its remaining Chevaline (Polaris) warheads. The UK has reduced its operationally available stockpile of nuclear weapons to fewer than 200 warheads, which amounts to a 70% reduction in the potential explosive power of its nuclear forces since the end of the Cold War. It has also reduced the readiness of its current nuclear forces.

Why the Debate?

16. The Government announced in its 2003 Defence White Paper that a decision would need to be taken in this Parliament about the continuation of the UK's deterrent capability.
17. The current Trident missiles have a design life extending at least until 2020. The US intends to undertake a life extension programme to maintain the D.5 system in operation into the 2040s. This will entail a slightly improved missile (D.5A). More significantly, the four British submarines that entered service over the period 1994-2001 have a design life of 25 years. The submarines could be sustained into the mid-2020s but given that some 14 years elapsed between the initial decision to acquire a Trident based force and the entry of the first submarine into service a decision as to Trident's future is pressing.
18. Using the Whitehall language of Smart Acquisition, the Government would need to commit to a Development and Manufacturing Phase for a replacement platform at least eight years beforehand – i.e. around 2015. A decision to embark on an Assessment Phase of a very small and specific number of options would need to be taken some five years before this – i.e. around 2010. In view of this the Government needs to decide fairly soon whether to embark on a Concept Phase, during which the specific options to be addressed during the Assessment Phase can be derived.
19. A commitment to maintaining a nuclear deterrent was included in the Labour Party manifesto in 2005. The Government nevertheless promised a full and open debate in Parliament and in the country at large before a decision on Trident replacement is taken. The Government set out in its White Paper, *The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent*, in December 2007 the means by which it intends to consult Parliament prior to a decision being taken in March 2007. The decision to hold such a debate has been widely welcomed,

although some have questioned whether the consultation period is unduly short given the gravity of the subject matter.

The Church and the bomb: reflections past and present

20. In the past, the Church has given considerable thought and reflection to the question of Britain's nuclear capability, most notably in the early 1980s when the Government first decided in favour of Trident.
21. *The Church and The Bomb*, a report commissioned by the then Board for Social Responsibility, was debated in February 1983 amidst wide publicity, in view of its recommendation for the UK unilaterally to renounce its deterrent. The recommendation was criticised by Archbishop Runcie and rejected by the Synod. Instead the Synod passed an amended motion that said it was not the task of the Church to determine the country's defence strategy, but rather to give a moral lead to the nation by asking those moral and ethical questions that needed to be addressed before a decision was taken.
22. The Synod did however recognise that it is the duty of the Government and her allies to maintain adequate forces to guard against nuclear blackmail and to deter nuclear and non-nuclear aggression. These forces, it suggested, should be "unmistakably defensive" since even a small-scale first use of nuclear weapons could never be morally justified in view of the high risk that this would lead to full-scale nuclear warfare.
23. The Synod therefore pressed all countries publicly to foreswear the first use of nuclear weapons in any form (a cornerstone of NATO's then strategy, given the overwhelming Soviet conventional superiority). It called on the Government to take steps in conjunction with her allies to reduce progressively NATO's dependence on nuclear weapons and to decrease nuclear arsenals throughout the world.
24. On the eve of the end of the Cold War the Synod again debated the issue. The focus of the debate in November 1988 was a report published by a Working Party of the Board for Social Responsibility, *Peacemaking in a Nuclear Age*. The motion passed by the Synod welcomed the more helpful relationship between East and West and urged the Government to take initiatives necessary to achieve major reductions in nuclear and conventional armaments, including working for agreement between the nuclear nations on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.
25. Following the 2003 Iraq War the House of Bishops set up a Working Party to consider the issue of international security. The Working Party's reflections on what peace and security means in a post 9/11 world was published in September 2005 with a report titled, *Countering Terrorism: Power: Violence and Democracy Post 9/11*. Although the report did not specifically address the question of the UK's nuclear capability it did consider the deteriorating relationship between Iran and the wider international community.
26. In its concluding section the 2003 report noted: "The debate on nuclear weapons needs to be conducted with much greater honesty and consistency. If

certain countries retain their nuclear weapons on the basis of the uncertainty and potentially violent volatility of international relations, on what basis are the same weapons denied to other states? The non-nuclear weapon states need to be presented with rather more convincing arguments and incentives than they have been up to now as to why it might be in their best, long-term interests not to go nuclear.”

27. As part of its task of enabling churches and Christians to participate in the debate regarding the future of Trident, the Mission and Public Affairs Division has worked with its ecumenical colleagues to produce a briefing paper setting out the case both for and against Trident. This briefing paper, which is available on the CTBI’s website (www.ctbi.org.uk), was released in June 2006. A number of churches have subsequently come out in opposition to renewing or replacing Trident, including most recently the Roman Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales.

The White Paper: ‘The Future of the UK’s Nuclear Deterrent’

28. The White Paper consists of 40 pages comprising an executive summary and seven sections setting out the rationale for the maintenance of an independent minimum nuclear deterrence in the twenty first century and the financial costs of doing so. Its main features are its commitment to maintaining the UK’s current Trident based nuclear deterrent by procuring a new class of submarines. It sets out that the UK will participate in the US-life extension programme for the Trident D5 Missile. Significantly, however, the White Paper heralds a further 20% reduction in the UK warhead stockpile and keeps open the option of reducing from 4 to 3 the number of submarines needed. In so doing the Government argues that its decision to replace the Vanguard submarines, that are Trident’s platform, is based on the need to retain a nuclear deterrent capability while at the same time setting an international example by further reducing its nuclear capability.

The logic of nuclear deterrence in the 21st Century?

29. The judgment reached in the White Paper is consistent with the Government’s own long term thinking on this issue, as set out in the 1998 Strategic Defence Review and the 2003 Defence White Paper. The White Paper accepts that the security environment has changed significantly since the end of the Cold War, but it argues that while it is not possible accurately to predict the global security environment over the next 20 to 50 years there are worrying and emerging trends in international security that legitimate the retention of a minimum nuclear deterrence.
30. The White Paper identifies three such trends: the existence of large nuclear arsenals that are being enlarged and modernised; continued trends towards nuclear proliferation and the potential risk from state-sponsored terrorists armed with nuclear weapons. The White Paper recognises that no state has both a nuclear capability and the ability and intent to threaten the UK’s vital national interests. But, it argues, there are risks that over the period 2020 to 2050 capability and intent will become more dangerously aligned. In view of this risk assessment the White Paper argues that it is necessary to maintain a

minimum nuclear deterrent to ensure future generations are properly insured against nuclear blackmail and aggression.

31. The White Paper acknowledges that given their destructive power, nuclear weapons pose a “uniquely terrible threat”. Given this destructive capability the White Paper spells out the “five enduring principles” that underpin the UK’s approach to nuclear deterrence. First, the focus is on preventing nuclear attack, from which it follows that nuclear weapons have no role to play in conventional warfare. Second, the UK will retain only the minimum amount of destructive power required to achieve the UK’s deterrence objectives. Third, it is necessary deliberately to maintain ambiguity about precisely when and how and at what scale a Government would contemplate the use of its nuclear deterrence, including the first use of nuclear weapons. Fourth, the UK’s nuclear deterrent plays a vital role in supporting collective security through NATO for the Euro-Atlantic area. Fifth, an independent centre of nuclear decision-making enhances the overall deterrent effect of allied nuclear forces.
32. In the debate that follows the Government will be pressed on how these “enduring principles” will help to deter the threats that it envisages. Much of the analysis in this area amounts to little more than crystal ball gazing which by its very nature is imperfect and hazardous. As the Prime Minister made clear in his statement to the House of Commons: “... in the end it comes down to a judgement. The difficulty is that we cannot predict the precise circumstances in which the relevance of our nuclear deterrent will arise; we can only make a judgement about that. The truth is – I think we all struggle with this when coming to a decision - that although the world in which we live has changed dramatically since the 1940s, there is still a threat out there. Indeed, that threat can change, and even be extended in certain dimensions”.
33. Faced with such uncertainty the Government argues that since the financial cost of retaining a minimum nuclear deterrent is limited, it makes little strategic sense not to maintain a minimum nuclear deterrent against future threats that might or might not materialise. In other words that taking the risk of not retaining this potential leverage over the ‘mad’ or the ‘bad’ would be irresponsible.
34. These are important considerations that need to be addressed not least since the decision not to renew or replace Trident would be irrevocable. However, the logic of this argument would appear to imply that given the uncertainty of international relations the UK will continue to hold a nuclear deterrent in perpetuity. During the debate on 4 December the Prime Minister appeared at times to argue this case: “When I was reflecting on the decision, I reflected on this: What would it be like if I were to come to the Dispatch Box as Prime Minister and say, ‘We have decided that we are going to give up our independent nuclear deterrent’? I cannot see that; I just cannot see it”.
35. The Government needs to clarify whether it can envisage a situation in which Britain would give up its nuclear deterrent. Does the government believe that the possession of an independent nuclear deterrent is a temporary or a permanent feature of Britain’s strategic capabilities? If the former, then it would be helpful to have further details as to the conditions under which such

a capability would be surrendered. If the latter, it would be preferable if the government was more transparent in its thinking.

36. There are also moral and legal dimensions to this debate. The Advisory Opinion delivered in 1996 by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) confirmed that the use, or threat of use, of nuclear weapons is subject to the laws of armed conflict. The ICJ rejected the argument that their use would necessarily be unlawful, but it clearly stipulated that the threshold for the legitimate use of nuclear weapons is very high. As previously noted, the Government acknowledges that it would only use nuclear weapons in self-defence and in the defence of its NATO allies, and even then only in “extreme circumstances”. It argues that the legality of any such use would depend upon the application of the general rules of international law.
37. The Government’s reasoning in this respect will carry little favour with those who argue that given the destructive capability of nuclear weapons the use of and very possession of nuclear weapons can never be justified. In this respect there is much within the White Paper that needs further clarification. In addressing the threat posed by state sponsored terrorism the White Paper sets out that “any state that we can hold responsible for assisting a nuclear attack on our vital interests can expect that this would lead to a proportionate attack”.
38. Critics might legitimately ask what a “proportionate attack” might look like and indeed whether any response that entails “a uniquely terrible threat” can ever be proportionate or satisfy the criteria of international law regulating the use of force and the conduct of hostilities. For an assessment to be made of that criticism, more detail of what the Government means by ‘proportionate’ is required than the White Paper provides. Part of the problem here is that one of the enduring principles underpinning the UK’s deterrence policy is the deliberate ‘creative ambiguity’ in the Government’s thinking on precisely when, how and at what scale it would contemplate the use of its nuclear deterrent.
39. Successive Governments have shied away from making public this information on the grounds that this would unduly simplify the calculations of a potential aggressor and in turn reduce the credibility of the UK deterrent. As the Prime Minister expressed it during the Trident debate, 4 December 2006: “... the whole principle of deterrence is that we do not state the precise circumstances in which we might use that deterrent, since that very uncertainty is part of the concept of deterrence, but we all have to make a judgment about that”. That uncertainty extends to the Government refusing to rule in or out the first use its nuclear weapons.
40. This creative ambiguity is unhelpful in stimulating a wider debate as to the utility of the UK’s deterrent. Undoubtedly there is merit in keeping potential enemies guessing. Nevertheless, given the grave ethical issues involved with any use or threat of use of nuclear weapons, it is legitimate to ask in a democracy, bearing in mind our obligations under international law, in what sorts of circumstances their use might be justified and proportionate in the terms of the just war doctrine. The White Paper gives inadequate treatment of that legitimate question which must be asked if the public debate is to be

meaningful. If the Government is unwilling to specify the terms under which it might use its deterrent then how are Parliament and the wider public meant to evaluate the efficacy and utility of such an instrument.

41. As the Archbishop of Canterbury argued in his statement on 4 December:
“The ethical questions around the manufacture and use of nuclear weapons are no less grave now than in the days of the Cold War. Then, as now, these are weapons that are intrinsically indiscriminate in their legal effects and their long-term impact on a whole physical environment would be horrendous. While there is evidently disagreement – among Christians as well as others – over whether the mere threat or use is morally acceptable, we should not lose sight of what the government itself has called the terrifying power of these weapons.”

Maintaining a ‘minimum’ nuclear deterrent?

42. The White Paper suggests that for the UK nuclear forces to provide an effective deterrent such a deterrent must be credible in that it must be invulnerable to attack, fully operationally independent and have the range to cover all potential threats. Financial considerations, however, dominate the White Paper. After having evaluated the other options, the White Paper concludes that a submarine platform is the most cost effective solution and that retaining the Trident D5 ballistic missile is far cheaper than developing any new delivery system.
43. The White Paper has signalled a redefinition of what the Government believes an acceptable minimum deterrence constitutes. It envisages a reduction in the number of operationally available warheads from fewer than 200 to fewer than 160, and a corresponding reduction in the size of the UK’s overall stockpile. This amounts to a 20% reduction in the UK warhead stockpile. It also promised to investigate fully whether there is scope to make sufficiently radical changes to the design of the new submarines and their operating, manning, training and support arrangements, to enable the UK to maintain continuous deterrent patrols at sea with a fleet of only three submarines.
44. The Government is thus committed to reduce further its nuclear arsenal and it has expressed willingness to consider a reduction in the number of submarines needed. Unfortunately, the White Paper gives no explanation as to how the 20% reduction was reached. The figure appears to have been plucked from thin air without further explanation. This leaves open the challenge that further cuts say of 25%, 35% or even 50% might be possible without necessarily undermining the credibility of the UK’s deterrence.
45. The debate on the White Paper provides the opportunity to press the Government to explain the proposed reduction and to explore whether further cuts are possible on strategic, financial and moral grounds. Are the 20% cuts at the upper or lower end of the spectrum of what constitutes a minimum nuclear deterrent? Is it possible to retain a minimum deterrence with a cut of 50%? What criteria were used to reach the 20% figure?
46. A number of organisations, such as Greenpeace, have also argued that the Government should take steps provided by the review to place the UK’s

nuclear deterrence on a purely defensive footing. This would entail confining the submarines to harbour except at times of crisis. The Government has argued against this move on the grounds that continuous deterrent patrolling ensures that the submarine on patrol is invulnerable to attack. It also believes that if this ceased the UK could actually be deterred or prevented from deploying its submarines at times of crisis thereby reducing the credibility of its deterrent capability. The White Paper therefore leaves unchanged the operational readiness of the UK nuclear capability.

Compatibility with international obligations?

47. Those opposed to replacing Trident sometimes argue that a decision to renew or replace Trident would breach Article VI of the 1968 Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT). This Treaty commits the recognised nuclear weapon states, including Britain, to an ultimate goal of abolishing all nuclear armouries. This goal has been reaffirmed by various Treaty review conferences and in the 1996 Advisory Opinion of the ICJ.
48. The White Paper addresses this concern head on: “Maintaining a minimum nuclear deterrent is fully consistent with all the UK’s international legal obligations including those under the NPT”. The Government argues: “Article VI of the NPT does not establish any timetable for nuclear disarmament, nor for the general and complete disarmament which provides the context for total nuclear disarmament. Nor does it prohibit maintenance or updating of existing capabilities.”
49. The White Paper sets out the Government’s record of meeting its commitments under the NPT. It documents that it is the only nuclear weapons state recognised under the NPT to have a deterrent based on a single platform, delivery system and warhead design and to have significantly reduced the scale and readiness of its Trident system. The decision to reduce by a further 20% the UK’s operational warhead stockpile and the option to reduce from 4 to 3 the number of submarines at its disposal is given as evidence that in the absence of a multilateral solution to a nuclear free world the UK is consistently and progressively meeting its NPT obligations.
50. The Government’s thinking is consistent with a strict legal interpretation of the NPT, but the question arises as to whether this interpretation is sufficiently in sympathy with the spirit of the NPT. The Government needs to give further evidence to support its claim that it is actively working multilaterally to help and encourage others to reduce their nuclear stockpiles. Indeed, a number of civil society agencies, such as Greenpeace, remain sceptical of the Government’s claim that sufficient progress has been made and continues to be made on the ‘13 practical steps’ towards nuclear disarmament that were agreed at the 2000 NPT Review Conference. They judge that the decision to modernise the UK’s nuclear deterrent will make it more difficult to make progress in this important area.
51. The Archbishop of Canterbury in his press release on the Government’s White Paper echoed these concerns: “The White Paper recognises quite explicitly the need to justify any programme of modernisation in the context of Britain’s obligations under various non-proliferation agreements to which it is

committed. Is the proposed programme compatible with these obligations? And even if it is technically not in breach what message does the programme give? Will it restrain or intensify proliferation elsewhere.”

What will this cost?

52. The Government estimates that the procurement costs will be in the region of £15-20 billion (at today's prices) for four submarines and the associated equipment and infrastructure. It accepts this costing is purely an estimate and the true figure will become clearer as it engages in further detailed discussions with industry. The cost will reduce significantly if the decision is made to procure 3 rather than 4 submarines. The Government estimates that the procurement costs are likely on average to be the equivalent of around 3% of the current defence budget over the main period of expenditure. How much confidence can be placed in these estimates? Evidence from the past is not encouraging: since Trident became operational in 1994, annual expenditure for capital and operating costs, including the costs for the Atomic Weapons Establishment, ranged between 3 and 5.5% of the annual defence budget.
53. The procurement and running costs will be met from the existing defence budget rather than from any Treasury contingency fund. The Government reasons that the investment needed to maintain the UK deterrent will not come at the expense of the conventional capabilities of the UK's armed forces. The White Paper makes much of the fact that since 1997 the Government has made significant additional resources available to the armed forces, providing many new capabilities to enable the UK to undertake those military tasks that cannot be achieved by nuclear deterrence.
54. Opinion polls suggest that the electorate is probably comfortable with the relatively low level of expenditure necessary to sustain a minimum capability. However, this sentiment is not shared by those concerned at the ever-shrinking size of the defence budget, and the impact that a decision to replace Trident would have on the budget which currently stands at 2.2% of GDP. This figure contrasts with 10% in the 1950s, 5% in 1985 and 2.5% in 2001. It is estimated that defence spending will fall further probably to about 1.7% by 2020.
55. At a time when British armed forces appear increasingly stretched and over committed in various peacekeeping operations, many believe that the changed international climate following the end of the Cold War necessitates a further investment in Britain's conventional armed forces, rather than a reinvestment in a deterrent capability that has limited utility in combating present security threats. A number of defence analysts argue that Britain's international influence rests on its ability to project military force around the world and they suggest that Britain's influence is being consistently eroded by an ever-shrinking defence budget.
56. At the very least, they argue, since Trident has political rather than military value the Ministry of Defence should not have to meet the cost of any replacement programme from the defence budget. As General Sir Mike Jackson, the former head of the British Army, stated in an interview on BBC Radio 4's 'Today' Programme: "It will be a matter for the Ministry of Defence

to ensure that the initial costs of the deterrent do not have to be met from the current defence budget because that would be robbing Peter to pay Paul”.

57. This is a concern shared by a number of religious leaders including the Archbishop of Canterbury. In his 4 December statement, the Archbishop made clear, that while “this is not an area where religious commentators can claim any expertise ... many people who are not convinced by the moral arguments against renewing and improving Trident and who would be agnostic about the legal question would still be anxious about substantial expenditure on a weapons system ... given the current acute pressures on the Armed Services of the UK who are actively engaged in the containment of conflict in a number of settings across the world.”

Provoking debate?

58. The Government maintains that the aim of the White Paper is to create “a substantial period of public and Parliamentary debate in which the issues can be aired freely”. However, given the already declared position of Ministers, how likely is it that public and Parliamentary will have a significant effect? The result of the debate appears to be declared before it has even started.

Parliamentary debate

59. A broad cross party consensus exists in Parliament on Trident. The White Paper sets out the Government’s arguments for renewing Trident. Both David Cameron, the Conservative Party leader, and Sir Menzies Campbell, the Liberal Democrat Party leader, used their responses to the Prime Minister’s statement on 4 December to underline their support for replacing Trident. Both spelt out that a replacement for Trident was essential for the country’s security. Despite this broad consensus between the three parties significant differences are likely to emerge as the debate proceeds over the coming months.
60. Although David Cameron made clear that his party agreed with the substance and the timing of the decision he pressed the Prime Minister not to rule out the option of a fourth submarine. He drew attention to the fact that the French deterrent requires four submarines and urged that any decision on the size of the UK submarine fleet should be made strictly on the grounds of strategic interest rather than cost. Similarly, he sought reassurance that the reduction in the stockpile of the UK’s nuclear arsenal was sufficient to maintain a credible minimum deterrent.
61. In contrast, Sir Menzies Campbell suggested that while the current Trident system should be retained, there should be a 50% cut rather than a mere 20% cut in the UK’s nuclear weapon arsenal. This would reduce the number of missiles to less than 100. He also voiced his concerns regarding the timing of the decision arguing that a decision could be delayed until 2014 to enable a clearer view of the threats to the UK.
62. Despite such differences the broad consensus between the three parties means the Government has the necessary Parliamentary support to secure a positive vote in March 2007. MPs and Peers opposed to Trident are likely to side with

the SNP and the Green Party, both of which have adopted hostile positions, arguing that Trident is immoral, illegal and a waste of tax-payer's money.

Public debate

63. Most of the statements issued by campaign and pressure groups, including those from churches, have been critical of the White Paper both in terms of its content and the proposed process of consultation. John Sauven, the acting Director of Greenpeace, described the plans to replace Trident as a “monstrous waste of money”, while Kate Hudson, Chair of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, argued: “This decision will promote proliferation and a new nuclear arms race which will ultimately lead to nuclear weapons use.” The RMT General Secretary, Bob Crow, called for the cash earmarked for replacing Trident to be ploughed instead into helping to reduce carbon emissions, improving transport infrastructure and generally bolstering public services. Similar arguments are used by Oxfam to argue that money earmarked for replacing Trident should be redirected to Britain's international development budget and the fight against global poverty.
64. The case made by Oxfam and the RMT against Trident on ground of cost has been criticised by the defence expert Sir Michael Quinlan who writing in an article in *The Tablet*, in June 2006 noted: “Security from major war is not a luxury to be foregone in a spirit of Christian self-denial but a precondition of most social goods, including aid to the poor; does nuclear deterrence contribute to it? British capability currently costs about one pound in every thousand of gross domestic product, and would be unlikely to exceed perhaps two or three even at a temporary peak of any replacement investment; should we regard such expenditure, rather than anything else in the other nine-hundred-and-ninety-odd, as the crucial bar to our devoting as much as we ought to the relief of world poverty.”
65. A concern running through much of the public debate has been the view that there has been insufficient public consultation on this matter. The three-month period of consultation envisaged by the White Paper has led to the complaint that the outcome of the consultation has been predetermined by the Government to be in favour of its own position. As the TUC General Secretary, Brendan Barber, stated: “It is right that such a major decision on national defence strategy – with its major public expenditure implications – should be subject to full and genuine consultation. The TUC will begin its consultation with affiliates immediately, but three months is an unduly tight time for this debate on a decision that will have repercussions for decades to come”. Similar concerns were voiced by the Archbishop of Canterbury who argued in his statement following the report's publication that “the White Paper must not close down discussion.”

Final reflections

66. The Government's White Paper confirms what many already knew, namely that the Government was unwilling to break with existing policy by jettisoning the UK's nuclear deterrent. The Government argues that while some old threats have disappeared, others remain and new ones continue to emerge. Proliferation continues while bilateral and multilateral arms control processes

remain stalled and other countries are actively pursuing nuclear weapons programmes. The most cost effective option, the Government argues, is more of the same.

67. The Government has anticipated some of the public and Parliamentary criticism on this matter by proposing a 20% cut in its stockpile of nuclear warheads and by keeping open the option of reducing the size of its submarine fleet. This has enabled it to argue that its actions remain consistent with its international obligations.
68. Given that the Government's proposals are broadly supported by the leaders of the major political parties the debate, especially in Parliament, is likely to focus on what constitutes a minimum nuclear deterrence rather than whether the UK should possess such a deterrent. However, the debate does provide an opportunity to press the questions set out by the Archbishop of Canterbury in his statement on the White Paper as well as those which the Mission and Public Affairs Council has raised in its submission to the House of Commons Defence Committee [See Appendices 1 and 2]. Drawing on the well-established ethical teaching of the Just War tradition, these questions include how the 'enduring principles' that govern the UK's approach to nuclear deterrence are compatible with international law as well as the issues of the logic of deterrence, the size of the deterrent capability and its operational readiness.
69. It is perhaps striking that although the strategic landscape has been transformed by the end of the Cold War and 9/11, the arguments being rehearsed today echo much of what was said in the 1980s. Many of the underlying ethical and moral arguments articulated in the 1983 Synod debate remain relevant. The Archbishop of Canterbury's own statement points to the moral and legal dimensions to the current debate. Raising the issues set out in this paper is therefore consistent with the approach adopted by the General Synod in 1983 when it argued that, whilst it was not the task of the Church to attempt to determine the country's defence policy, it was appropriate to offer a moral lead to the nation by asking those moral and ethical questions that need to be addressed before a decision on these weapons of terrifying power are taken.

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APPENDIX 1

CHURCH OF ENGLAND

MISSION AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL

SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS' DEFENCE COMMITTEE'S INQUIRY INTO THE GOVERNMENT'S WHITE PAPER ON "THE FUTURE OF THE UK'S NUCLEAR DETERRENT"

1. The Church of England welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Defence Committee's inquiry on the Government's White Paper on "The Future of the UK's Nuclear Deterrent". The Mission and Public Affairs Council of the Church of England is the body responsible for overseeing research and comment on social and political issues on behalf of the Church. The Council comprises a representative group of bishops, clergy and lay people with interest and expertise in the relevant areas, and reports to the General Synod through the Archbishops' Council.

Executive Summary

2. We agree that it is a fundamental responsibility of any Government to provide for the security of the UK and its citizens now and for the future, against both real and potential threats, including nuclear aggression and blackmail. Security is the good that makes possible all other goods and the defence of the United Kingdom remains the first duty of the Government. Yet, since nuclear weapons belong by virtue of their terrifying power in a different category to any other weapons' system it is important to ask what kind of security they offer us and in what circumstances, if any, their use or threat of use can be ethically justified.
3. There is much in the White Paper that is to be welcomed. The White Paper is in our view right to seek to confine its arguments for the retention of a nuclear capability solely to the case for deterring nuclear threats and to resist the temptation to broaden its use to counter lesser threats such as chemical and biological weapons. We welcome the proposed reductions in the stockpile of the UK's nuclear arsenal. These, and a readiness to reduce the number of submarines necessary to maintain this deterrent capability underline the UK's track record in progressively reducing its capability in line with its international obligations under the Non Proliferation Treaty. We also agree that the question of what constitutes a reasonable insurance policy in a dangerous and uncertain world is important and difficult. It is right that Governments should err on the side of caution.
4. The White Paper does not adequately address the ethical concerns that many Christians and people of other faiths and none have around the manufacture and use of nuclear weapons. These concerns are no less grave now than in the days of the Cold War. There are three issues here. First, it is essential in our view that ethical issues concerning the manufacture and use of nuclear weapons are fully considered in the debate which the Government has invited

on its proposals. Second, in addition to the issue of the moral legitimacy of a nuclear deterrent, it is also necessary that the public debate address the White Paper's deliberate ambiguity as to what might constitute a minimum nuclear deterrence. That deliberate ambiguity may be justified, but it must not be allowed to foreclose the debate. Third, in the debate the Government also needs, in our view, to demonstrate more convincingly than in the White Paper how the proposed deterrent would add to the security of the UK and to the UK's ability to act effectively in the service of peace, justice and prosperity in the wider world. These concerns and questions must be examined vigorously over the coming months. The Government has a solemn obligation to ensure that all the facts necessary for an informed debate are made available.

Nuclear Deterrence in the 21st Century

5. The White Paper accepts that the security environment has changed significantly since the end of the Cold War, but it argues that while it is not possible accurately to predict the global security environment over the next 20 to 50 years there are worrying trends in international security that legitimate the retention of a minimum nuclear deterrence, namely nuclear proliferation and state-sponsored terrorists armed with nuclear weapons. This raises three key questions. The key question, even for those who accept the legitimacy of nuclear deterrence, is whether this is meant to imply that given the inherent unpredictability of international relations the UK will continue to require a nuclear deterrent *in perpetuity*.
6. Other than para 2.12, the White Paper provides inadequate evidence as to whether the Government can envisage a situation where Britain does give up its nuclear deterrent. Does the Government believe that the possession of an independent nuclear deterrent is a temporary or a permanent feature of Britain's strategic capabilities? If it is temporary, then what are the conditions under which such a capability would be surrendered? If it is permanent, then the case needs to be made, particularly given Britain's Treaty obligations under international law.
7. The second key question is whether, post Cold War, deterrence will work: can those states and non-state actors that threaten UK security actually be deterred from undertaking acts of aggression by either existing or new approaches to nuclear deterrence? This needs to be much more fully argued than in the current White Paper. Beyond the acknowledgement that nuclear weapons pose "a uniquely terrible threat" and should only be used in "extreme circumstances", and only then in a way "consistent with the application of the general rules of international law", the White Paper offers only the pronouncement in para 3.4 that: "We deliberately maintain ambiguity about precisely when, how, and at what scale we would contemplate use of our nuclear deterrent. We will not simplify the calculations of a potential aggressor by defining more precisely the circumstances in which we might consider the use of nuclear capabilities. Hence we will not rule in or out the first use of nuclear weapons."
8. This deliberate ambiguity at the heart of the Government's thinking is further spelled out in para 3.11 when the White Paper notes: "Any state that we can

hold responsible for assisting a nuclear attack on our vital interests can expect that this would lead to a proportionate attack.”

9. We acknowledge that there is merit in keeping potential enemies guessing. Nevertheless, given the grave ethical issues involved with any use or threat of use of nuclear weapons, it is legitimate to ask in a democracy, bearing in mind our obligations under international law, in what sorts of circumstances their use might be justified and proportionate in the terms of the just war doctrine. The White Paper gives inadequate treatment of that legitimate question which must be asked if the public debate is to be meaningful.
10. In our view the fear that making any further information about this publicly available would reduce the credibility of the UK's deterrent is overstated. Such reticence might have been excusable at the height of the Cold War when the UK faced the massive Soviet nuclear arsenal, but is it acceptable in today's circumstances? This position is not necessarily shared by other comparably sized nuclear powers, as evidenced by the readiness of President Chirac openly to discuss these issues. The modernisation and adaptation of the French nuclear arsenal to strike at a potential aggressor's political, economic and military power centres in a comparatively discriminate way marks a significant departure from the 'anti-cities' strategy of the Cold War. It is disappointing that a similar shift in strategy and a move towards greater public transparency is not reflected in the UK's White Paper.
11. The third question left unasked and unanswered by the White Paper concerns the targeting strategy for these weapons. Can we be assured that the war plan for Trident, and any successor, will be based only and wholly on an explicit counter combatant targeting strategy, holding at risk military and related assets, and keeping non-combatant casualties to a proportionate minimum? This is a crucial question in the context of the ethical arguments against nuclear weapons which are strikingly omitted from the interesting essay BOX 3.1 setting out the government's response to various counter-arguments. Since this is probably the most widely held objection to nuclear deterrence the omission is very curious.
12. The Government may wish to argue that the ethical challenge can be ignored on the grounds that deterrence has worked and will work, and so we do not need to enquire how. But that misses the key point. For deterrence to work there must be at least a possibility that the weapons might be used: that possibility, however remote, underpins the effectiveness of deterrence. If there were no circumstances in which the use of nuclear weapons would be morally permissible then there can be *no* ethically acceptable deterrence. To assess the validity of the deterrence argument, therefore, there must be some indication of the circumstances in which the weapons *might* be used.
13. Addressing this ethical concern would not require the Government to disclose details of targeting plans or precise details of the envisaged circumstances of use. All it would require is for the Government to indicate what is its overall strategy, including the parameters for the weapons' use and any limits within which any targeting policy would be set. That would enable the Government to explain how their use would be consistent with the UK's obligations in

international law, as well as with ethical principles, in particular the just war requirements that any use of weapons should be proportionate to the objective to be achieved and discriminate in order to minimise non-combatant casualties.

14. In our view it would be extremely difficult – many in the Church would say impossible – to reconcile with just war requirements of *jus in bello* an ‘anti-city’ strategy of the kind that was fashionable at the height of the Cold War. Now other more discriminate targeting options are in theory available and technically feasible in a way they were not in the early days of deterrence. Are they part of the Government’s thinking? It is crucial to know, if the debate on Britain’s nuclear deterrent policy is to be meaningful.
15. If the Government is not willing to engage in such discussions it leaves itself vulnerable to the charge from those opposed to nuclear deterrence that the use or very possession of nuclear weapons is immoral and somehow coarsens the moral fabric of the nation. If it is unwilling to say anything further about the terms under which it might use its deterrent, then how are Parliament and the wider public meant to evaluate the efficacy and utility of such an instrument, even assuming that they are prepared to accept the principle of nuclear deterrence? The Government therefore should set out the parameters for the use of the weapons and explain how they meet the UK’s obligations in international law and the ethical principles that underpin them. It is important to remember that the credibility of the national deterrence strategy depends to a significant extent on public backing since an assessment of that will itself play into the calculations of potential aggressors.

Ensuring Effective Deterrence

16. The White Paper signals a redefinition of what the Government believes constitutes an acceptable minimum deterrence. The envisaged reduction in the numbers of operationally available warheads from fewer than 200 to fewer than 160 and a corresponding reduction in the size of the UK’s overall stockpile is to be welcomed as is the option of reducing from four to three the number of submarines. These developments underline the UK’s good track record – better than that of the other existing nuclear powers – in progressively reducing its capability in line with its NPT obligations.
17. However, the White Paper gives no explanation as to how this further 20% reduction in the UK’s warhead stockpile was reached. The figure appears to have been plucked out of the air with no indication given as to the criteria used and calculations involved. Would further cuts say of 25%, 35% or even 50% be possible without undermining the credibility of the UK’s deterrence?
18. What is missing from the White Paper is any definition of what constitutes an acceptable minimum deterrence and any explanation as to how this definition was reached. The Government needs to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the debate on the White Paper to explain the proposed reduction and to explore whether further cuts are possible. Are the 20% cuts at the upper or bottom end of the spectrum of what constitutes a minimum nuclear

deterrent? Is it possible to retain a minimum deterrence with a cut of 50%? What criteria did the Government use to reach the proposed 20% reduction?

Deterrent Options, Solutions and Costs

19. We fear that the White Paper paints an unduly optimistic picture of the potential procurement costs for replacing Trident and the impact that this might have on either the annual defence budget or the UK's conventional military capability.
20. In Section 5 of the White Paper it is estimated that the procurement costs for replacing Trident will be in the region of £15-20 billion (at 2006 prices) for four submarines and the associated equipment and infrastructure. It calculates that the procurement costs are likely on average to be the equivalent of around 3% of the current defence budget. How much confidence can be placed in these estimates? Evidence from the past is not encouraging: since Trident became operational in 1994, annual expenditure for capital and operating costs, including the costs for the Atomic Weapons Establishment, ranged between 3 and 5.5% of the annual defence budget.
21. The White Paper correctly points out in para 5.12 that it is not possible to be sure what the size of the defence budget will be over the timescale involved. However, most defence analysts believe the long term reduction in the defence budget is very unlikely to be reversed, and many believe that defence spending could well fall further, probably to about 1.7% of GDP by 2020. If they are correct, then the procurement costs for replacing Trident seem bound to consume a larger proportion of the defence budget than predicted by the White Paper with the consequent knock on effect on the UK's capacity to undertake other operations, including peace-keeping and stabilisation.
22. Any decision on the long-term future of Britain's nuclear deterrence needs to take into account both the possible threats to our security and the capability of the British armed forces to respond effectively to those threats. The publication of the White Paper has occurred at a time when British armed forces appear increasingly stretched and over-committed in various peacekeeping operations. Public confidence has been shaken by media coverage that makes much of the perceived lack of basic equipment issued to those members of the UK's armed services currently deployed overseas. Recent stories have also drawn attention to the inadequate quality of much military accommodation. All this has raised the question whether, rather than committing resources to replacing Trident to meet an uncertain future threat, the Government would do better strengthening and renewing Britain's conventional armed forces for the threats and challenges that they are already facing.
23. Against this volatile background it is not sufficient for the White Paper merely to assert as it does in para 5.15 that: "The investment required to maintain our deterrent will not come at the expense of the conventional capabilities our armed forces need". The Government needs to provide more substantial argument and evidence that a decision to renew Trident will not put at risk the capability and capacity of Britain's armed forces to undertake demanding

military responsibilities outside its immediate neighbourhood, both now and in the future. At the very least, it should consider whether the initial costs of replacing Britain's minimum nuclear deterrent could be met from a separately identified vote rather than from the current defence budget.

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APPENDIX 2

Statement by the Archbishop of Canterbury on the Trident White Paper 4 December 2006

1. “ I am very glad that we now have the Government’s White Paper on the updating of Trident available for discussion. This is a serious matter which requires the widest possible public consultation. The Prime Minister accepted in his statement today in the House of Commons that there are perfectly respectable arguments against the judgements the Government has made and that he both understood them and appreciated their force.
2. It is essential that careful consideration be given to three distinct levels of concern about these proposals.
3. First and foremost is the moral dimension. The ethical questions around the manufacture and use of nuclear weapons are no less grave now than in the days of the Cold War. Then, as now, these are weapons that are intrinsically indiscriminate in their lethal effects and their long-term impact on a whole physical environment would be horrendous. While there is evidently disagreement – among Christians as well as others – over whether the mere threat of use is morally acceptable, we should not lose sight of what the Government itself has called the “terrifying power” of these weapons.
4. Second there is the legal dimension. The White Paper recognises quite explicitly the need to justify any programme of modernisation in the context of Britain’s obligations under the various non-proliferation agreements to which it is committed. Is the proposed programme compatible with these obligations? And even if it is technically not in breach, what message does the programme give? Will it restrain or intensify proliferation elsewhere?
5. Thirdly, though this is not an area where religious commentators can claim any expertise, there is the issue of the tactical or strategic purpose of the programme. Many people who are not convinced by the moral arguments against renewing and improving Trident and who would be agnostic about the legal question would still be anxious about substantial expenditure on a weapons system that had no clear strategic pointing the present global context. They would be particularly unhappy about this against the background of reductions in the resourcing of conventional forces, given the current acute pressures on the Armed Services of the UK who are actively engaged in the containment of conflict in a number of settings across the world
6. Many will never be persuaded of the morality of a nuclear deterrent; many more will feel that the case needs to be very strongly made for a programme of modernisation at this point if we are to avoid the suspicion that this is about reinforcing national status, at a very high cost to our actual military and strategic commitments at the present moment.
7. The White Paper must not close down discussion. We need a genuine debate in which Christians, and others whose consciences are disturbed by these proposals, will want to play a full part.”