



APRIL 2003

CND BRIEFING

Britain and the NPT

Memorandum from the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament to delegates to the NPT PrepCom

Summary

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament is concerned that Britain has made no significant progress on implementing Article VI or the 2000 NPT Final Document since the last Review Conference. Instead Britain is collaborating closely with the United States on projects that undermine or breach the 13 points in the NPT Final Document, such as missile defence, nuclear weapons research and development, and nuclear strategy.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament calls on Tony Blair to make an unequivocal commitment to accomplish the elimination of Britain's nuclear weapons and to demonstrate this commitment by taking steps to phase out the UK Trident programme and rule out plans for future nuclear weapon systems.

Britain has made no significant progress on nuclear disarmament since the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

Last year, Britain's representative at the NPT PrepCom Ambassador Peter Jenkins announced that the UK had:

“unilaterally reduced our operationally available stockpile to fewer than 200 warheads, which represents a reduction of more than 70% in the potential explosive power of our deterrent since the end of the Cold War.”^[1]

The 70% reduction in explosive power of British nuclear weapons has been largely achieved by replacing older, higher yield warheads such as Polaris and WE-177 with the lower yield, but more flexible Trident warhead.

Ambassador Jenkins said:

“we have reduced the readiness of our nuclear forces. Only a single Trident submarine is now on deterrent patrol, carrying 48 warheads. The submarine on patrol is normally on several days 'notice to fire' and its missiles are de-targeted.”^[2]

The UK has only had a single nuclear-armed submarine on patrol dating back to the introduction

of Polaris in the 1980s. Polaris is believed to have carried between 32 and 48 warheads per submarine, so in what way is the deployment of the more capable Trident submarines a reduction?

“and we have withdrawn the UK's freefall nuclear bomb, leaving Trident as our only nuclear system.”^[3]

The retirement of the UK's freefall nuclear bomb, the WE-177, was announced prior to the NPT Review Conference in 1995.

None of these UK 'achievements' of the 'last few years' are new – all were included in the UK's 1998 Strategic Defence Review. Some date back to 1995. The UK has made it clear that it intends to do little more in the run up to the 2005 Review Conference.

According to Ambassador Jenkins:

“Having reduced our nuclear weapons to a single system at the minimum level necessary for the UK's national security, further unilateral steps we can take now without compromising that security are limited.”

Britain is collaborating closely with US on nuclear policy

Far from making an unequivocal commitment to eliminate British nuclear weapons, Prime Minister Tony Blair's number one foreign policy goal is “to remain the closest ally of the United States”.^[4] British collaboration with the United States includes:

• Nuclear Posture

Although the UK agreed to pursue “a diminishing role for nuclear weapons in security policies”, along with the United States, the UK has refused to rule out the use of nuclear weapons in the current conflict with Iraq.^[5]

According to Secretary of State for Defence Geoff Hoon:

“the long standing British government policy that if our forces – if our people – were threatened by weapons of mass destruction we would reserve the right to use appropriate proportionate

responses which might... in extreme circumstances include the use of nuclear weapons.”[6]

• Nuclear weapons cooperation

Although the UK is supposed to be engaging in the process leading to elimination of its nuclear weapons, it is still pursuing the option to develop new nuclear weapons in future. The UK Ministry of Defence has submitted plans to develop a “state-of-the-art nuclear weapons plant” at the UK’s Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston.[7]

Joint US-UK Working Groups cover all aspects of nuclear weapons policy and in recent years hundreds of meetings have taken place.[8] The UK has participated in US sub-critical tests at the Nevada Test Site and scientists at Aldermaston cooperate closely with their counterparts at Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories in the United States.

• Missile Defence

Despite the fact that the UK agreed to preserve and strengthen the ABM Treaty in the 2000 NPT Final Document, the UK Government has given full backing to US missile defence plans including allowing the US to use British bases at Menwith Hill and Fylingdales as part of the missile defence system.

Recommendations

Tony Blair claims that tackling weapons of mass destruction is one of the key aims of British foreign

policy. If Britain really believes that the NPT is the cornerstone of the non-proliferation regime, it must take action to implement and strengthen the Treaty. CND calls on Tony Blair to:

- Give an unequivocal commitment to accomplish the total elimination of the UK’s nuclear arsenal and to demonstrate this commitment by taking steps to phase out the UK Trident programme and rule out plans for future nuclear weapon systems.
- Implement Labour’s manifesto commitment to work for the global elimination of nuclear weapons by supporting efforts to achieve a Nuclear Weapons Convention.

CND calls on the British delegation to the NPT PrepCom to:

- Reaffirm Britain’s support for the 2000 NPT Final Document and the 13 practical steps identified for systematic and progressive efforts to implement Article VI of the Treaty.
- Provide clear and factual reporting on steps taken by Britain to implement these steps since the last PrepCom meeting.
- Indicate further actions that Britain is planning to take to make progress on the 13 steps by the 2005 Review Conference.

[1] Opening Statements, United Kingdom: Ambassador Peter Jenkins, NPT PrepCom, 9 April 2002.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Tony Blair, “Britain’s Place in the World”, speech to Foreign Office Conference in London, 7 January 2003.

[5] Secretary of State for Defence Geoff Hoon MP, House of Commons, Official Report, 3 March 2003, Column 578.

[6] Secretary of State for Defence Geoff Hoon MP, speaking on the Jonathan Dimbleby programme, ITV, 24 March 2002.

[7] Mark Townsend, “Secret Plan for N-bomb factory”, The Observer, 16 June 2002.

[8] House of Commons, Official Report, 25 Jan 2002, Column 1116W