



An Urgent Need for Arms Conversion

A CND response to the Defence Select Committee Report

The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent:

The Manufacturing and Skills Base

Introduction

The recent report of the Defence Select Committee raises serious questions about the future of employment in UK submarine production but makes clear that the employment issue should not be the deciding factor in any decision to replace the current Vanguard submarines - the launch platform for the Trident nuclear weapons system.

Indeed the Report stated:

"The fact that this inquiry has focused on the submarine manufacturing and skills base should not be taken as an endorsement of the existing submarine-based nuclear deterrent, or as an indication of our collective support for, or opposition to, the renewal of that deterrent, submarine-based or otherwise. Nor should it be taken to mean that we think industrial and employment factors should be decisive in the debate on the future of the deterrent ... we believe that employment factors should not be decisive in the debate on the future of the deterrent."

CND welcomes this statement and fully agrees that a decision on a replacement for Trident, having both national and international implications, should be made on the basis of national security interests.

Concerns about the effect of the gap between the commissioning of the Vanguard and Astute submarine programmes having a serious and debilitating impact on the UK's submarine industry are understandable but are not in themselves an argument in favour of the UK developing a new weapons of mass destruction capability.

CND is concerned that statements in the report, including;

"Without a regular build "drumbeat", the UK skills base will erode and it may prove impossible or prohibitively expensive to recreate,"

have the effect of elevating the question of current employment and skills above that of the strategic political decision regarding the UK's future possession of nuclear weapons.

Arms Conversion and Re-employment

CND is fully aware of the question of employment and localized dependence on submarine manufacturing and maintenance. CND has historically worked with national trade unions and local workplace organizations to discuss viable alternative employment strategies and has already begun a new research study into future arms conversion possibilities with Dr Steven Schofield.

We note the statement from the report:

“We share our witnesses concerns about the shortage of science and engineering graduates, project managers and skilled and experienced technical staff, but this raises questions which go far beyond the scope of this report.”

And would argue this significant trend of loss of jobs dependent on military expenditure over the last two decades has been a result of the end of the Cold War and cuts in military spending. This is a long term trend which will not be resolved by a decision either for or against Trident replacement and raises the question of how to make use of the skills of those leaving military-dependent employment.

CND believes the question of such skills shortages do indeed go beyond the scope of the Trident replacement decision. Employment reliant on the Ministry of Defence has been falling for the past two decades whilst new science and engineering employment opportunities are appearing elsewhere.

CND stated in its own submission to the Defence Select Committee Inquiry that:

“Employment dependent on MoD expenditure and defence exports has more than halved from 740,000 in 1980 to around 305,000 jobs being currently supported by MoD expenditure and defence exports providing just over 1% of all employment.”¹

Government investment in new industries and in the teaching of science and engineering will stimulate an increased number of graduates entering this sector.

Trident replacement: UK jobs in a global market?

In noting the following paragraph from the Defence Select Committee report:

“Industry looked to the Government to provide certainty over the future of the submarine programme. With that certainty, industry could determine the optimum size of its workforce and plan for the long term, thereby helping it to control costs and delivery on affordability.”

CND would highlight that defence employment is heavily dependent on market forces and ensuing MoD contracts. The UK Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS) was launched in December 2005 and was consequently criticised by Dr Steven Schofield in a BASIC paper.² Schofield highlighted the significant internationalisation and privatisation of the military-industrial sector during the 1980s and 90s with the emergence of BAE Systems as a ‘global military-industrial giant’ being given over 50% of the major MoD contracts. The DIS drives ‘for ever-more sophisticated and expensive military platforms’ and does nothing to reduce BAE’s ‘stranglehold’ on defence procurement. The role of the market

¹ UK Defence Statistics 2005 Table 1.9 at <http://www.dasa.mod.uk/natstats/ukds/2005/c1/table19.html>

² Dr Steven Schofield, *The UK Defence Industrial Strategy and Alternative Approaches*, Occasional Papers on International Security Policy Number 50, March 2006 at <http://www.basicint.org/pubs/Papers/BP50.htm>

has been such that since BAE took over GEC in 1999 there was a decrease in jobs at the company from 115,600 to 68,100 in 2002.

CND would also highlight the statement in the recent government White Paper, which maintains the possibility of overseas manufacturing with regard to a replacement for Trident.

The government warned:

“It would be our intention to build the new SSBNs in the UK ... but this is dependent on proposals from industry that provide the right capability at the right time and offer value for money.”

And further stated:

The government “will seek to bear down on the costs by sourcing some sub-system elements from overseas.”

CND believes that in today’s global economy, despite government statements supporting UK manufacturing of a replacement for reasons of national sovereignty, no workforce can expect guaranteed or long-term employment as a result of a government decision to replace Trident.

Decommissioning

The Defence Select Committee reported:

“If there were no successor to the Vanguard-class submarine, there would be an ongoing need to retain onshore a capability to support and, ultimately, to decommission the current SSBN and SSN fleet. We call upon the MoD to state in its response to this report how much it would cost to sustain that capability.”

CND welcomes this statement and similarly calls on the Ministry of Defence to publish its analysis on the possibility of long-term science and engineering employment that would continue to be necessary following a possible decision not to order a replacement for the Vanguard submarines.

MPs should also note that, according to the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) which is responsible for ‘cleaning up’ Dounreay nuclear plant, the decline in employment there following the end of the Dounreay research programme has been reversed, with 1,200 people now employed in engineering, radiological protection, planning, environmental and waste management.

More recently, a report in the *East Anglian Daily Times* of 1st January 2007 on the decommissioning of Sizewell A power station announced that the workforce would increase by up to 25% in the first few years of decommissioning. The Nuclear Decommissioning Authority hopes to complete the work within 25 years but present plans envisage work for 110 years.

CND believes if Trident was not replaced and some of the Trident facilities were closed down, then dealing with the waste and the decommissioning process from these facilities, other nuclear-powered submarines and all of our old nuclear power stations would provide crucial alternative and regional employment for many years to come. An example of this is at the Dounreay nuclear plant where, according to the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA), responsible for ‘cleaning up’ this site, the decline in employment at the end of the Dounreay research programme has been reversed, with 1,200 people now employed in engineering, radiological protection, planning, environmental and waste management.

Other employment areas

There are many areas which would benefit from increased investment and employment of skilled science, engineering and technical staff.

Many believe that renewable sources can realistically and effectively provide sustainable and low-carbon energy, and major job opportunities also exist in these sectors should the government effectively encourage investment. According to the British Wind Energy Association, 'To date, over 4,000 jobs are sustained by companies working in the wind sector, and this is projected to increase as the industry grows. The Department of Trade and Industry has estimated that Round Two of offshore wind developments alone could bring a further 20,000 jobs for Britain.'³

The recent announcement of planning permission for the London Array Wind Farm in the North Sea is likely to create 800 new construction jobs.

The urgency of the decision

Many MPs, particularly Labour MPs, have raised their concerns with the rushed nature of the government White Paper and timetable for decision making.

In introducing the government White Paper the Prime Minister stated, "The best evidence we have is that it will take us 17 years to design, build and deploy a new submarine."

However the recent White Paper suggests that a new generation of submarines would be based largely on the Vanguard design, perhaps incorporating some of the technological advances of Astute, but calling into question the need for such a long lead-in period. The White Paper stated:

"We envisage that the design of the new SSBNs will maximize the degree of commonality with other in-service submarines where this can be done in a cost-effective manner. The scope for this will be determined during the next phase of work. However, some changes to the design of the Vanguard-class will be required."

Such a long lead-in period is also questioned in the recent paper by the British American Security Information Council, 'Decisions Over the Future of British Nuclear Weapons' which suggested an appropriate lead time could be as little as eight years.

CND continues to maintain that a decision is not immediately necessary on technical grounds and a decision is being rushed for political reasons.

³ British Wind Energy Association website at <http://www.bwea.com/ref/econ.html>

Conclusion: A Need for Arms Conversion

Having now launched its White Paper and announced its view on the future of the UK's nuclear weapons, the government is now attempting to whip a motion through Parliament with little time for debate.

CND has long argued for the fullest public debate and, whilst welcoming a Commons debate and vote on the matter, believes the decision should include a real consultation, which considers contributions from all sectors of society.

CND welcomed the debate at the Trades Union Congress in September 2006 - allowing different opinions to be heard - and we welcomed the delegates' decision to oppose a replacement of Trident.

We note the real concerns of the workforces at locations such as Barrow, Devonport, Faslane and Derby and would therefore like to work closely with the Trades Union Congress and trade unions to research how we can campaign together for a world of peace and nuclear disarmament, allowing billions of pounds in the UK to be spent on pensions, health, education and other vital sectors whilst also engaging with emerging industries where scientists, engineers and technicians could be re-employed using the specialist skills they already have.