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UK NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT: FINISHING WHAT THEY STARTED

Lt Cdr J.R. Millard

JCSP 42

Exercise *Solo Flight*

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Lt Cdr J.R. Millard

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UK NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT: FINISHING WHAT THEY STARTED

The United Kingdom played a pivotal role in the development of the first atomic weapon during the Second World War and subsequently, with varying degrees of cooperation and support from the United States, has continued to maintain its own nuclear capability to date. At the height of the Cold War the global arsenal of nuclear warheads topped 60,000, the majority being held by the United States and the USSR/Russia, with the United Kingdom, France, China and Israel also possessing a capability. India and Pakistan followed towards the end of the last century and North Korea are in the process of conducting testing.[1] South Africa has been the only country to have independently owned nuclear weapons and subsequently destroyed them.[2] In the seventy years since their inception, the world has experienced a number of radical changes; the rise and fall of a bipolar society ending with the breakup of the USSR, a technological revolution which has seen unthinkable development of weapon systems, and for the first time with any real success the creation of a global alliance, the United Nations (UN).

Throughout the existence of nuclear weapons there has always been criticism and objection to their possession, primarily brought about following the devastating effects of the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which to this day remain as the comparison for the magnitude of modern day weapons. Since the end of World War 2 their justification has always been based on the argument of deterrence. The debate over nuclear weapons has gained much momentum recently within the United Kingdom as decisions are required concerning the renewal of the current British nuclear deterrent system, Trident, which is expected to go out of service towards the end of the next decade.

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[1] Robert S. Norris, and Hans M. Kristensen. "Global Nuclear Weapons Inventories, 1945–2013. "*Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 69, no. 5 (2013): 78.

[2] Walter C. Ladwig III. "The Future of the British Nuclear Deterrent: An Assessment of Decision Factors" *Strategic Insights*, Volume VI, Issue 1 (January 2007): 48.

Since 1969 the United Kingdom's independent strategic nuclear deterrent has been maintained by a Continuous At Sea Deterrent (CASD), consisting of four Ship Submersible Ballistic Nuclear (SSBN) submarines, one of which has always been at sea. From 1962 until 1992 the Resolution class submarines carried the Polaris missiles, which were then replaced by the Vanguard class submarines carrying the Trident missiles. During the 1980s and 1990s Britain made significant reductions in their nuclear arsenal, also ending the RAF's nuclear role, and relying solely on a single submarine at sea as the delivery system.[3] As part of the *Successor* programme to replace Trident, the UK government have recently announced an additional £642M of further spending, bringing the total spend to date of £3.9B. Later this year "decisions will be made on taking the programme forward, including the size of the deterrent fleet."[4] Current government estimates predict the final cost of this programme to be £31B,[5] which will see four new submarines enter service around 2030 with an end of life of approximately 2070.[6]

If the UK proceed with the replacement of the Trident system, they are effectively committing themselves to the possession of a nuclear deterrent for another 50 years, which, although it could be disarmed sooner, would then increase the through life costs. However, it is not the purpose of this paper to establish the cost effectiveness of a nuclear deterrent for the UK as it is believed that the decision to have such a capability should not be financial but be based upon the efficacy of the deterrent within the global security situation, and the moral acceptance of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

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[3] Malcolm Chalmers. "Britain's New Nuclear Debate: A Credible Road Map for Disarmament." *The RUSI Journal* 154, no. 2 (2009): 35.

[4] United Kingdom Parliament, "Replacing Trident: Key issues for the 2015 Parliament," last accessed 11 April 2016, www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/key-issues-parliament-2015/defence and security/trident/.

[5] United Kingdom Parliament, "UK nuclear deterrence: what you need to know," last accessed 22 April 2016, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-nuclear-deterrence-factsheet/uk-nuclear-deterrence-what-you-need-to-know.

[6] Unofficial estimates reported by Reuters are in excess of £100Bn, which includes the build, test and commissioning cost of £31B, along with a through life cost of 6% of the total UK Defence Budget.

Since the 1960s the *super-powers* of the USA and the then USSR have been in discourse over the control and limitations of nuclear warheads which has led to agreement on their reduction bringing the global total down to approximately 10,000.[7] Following increased efforts by the United Nations the most recent negotiations, which took place in 2010, looked at reducing this further. The stance that the United Kingdom have taken regarding arms control negotiations, along with France and China, has been that they will enter into discussions once the two primary nuclear armed states have reduced their holdings substantially, (in the region of 1000 warheads apiece),[8] however these three countries have abided by the majority of the articles within the UN treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The argument put forward in this paper is that if the United Kingdom were to conform to the requirements laid down in the UN Security Council Resolution 1540 (which reaffirms the UN's commitment to non-proliferation and disarmament) and to fulfill its obligations for nuclear disarmament, then it could actually strengthen its position within the global security arena, improve its international influence, and make a positive contribution towards total nuclear disarmament.

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

Exiled European scientists working in the United Kingdom were amongst the first to identify the potential of atomic bombs, and possess the required expertise and government backing to develop the idea back in the late 1930s and early 1940s.[9] At the time, prior to the United States entering the war, the Americans showed little interest in such technology with their researchers doubting the possibility of building such a weapon.[10] It was not until 1941 that the

[7] Robert S. Norris, and Hans M. Kristensen. "Global Nuclear Weapons Inventories ..., 76.

[8] William Walker. "The UK, Threshold Status and Responsible Nuclear Sovereignty." International Affairs 86, no. 2 (2010): 452.

[9] Hugh Beach and Nadine Gurr. *Flattering the Passions: Or, the Bomb and Britain's Bid for a World Role*. (British Academic Press, 1999), 8-9.

[10] Walter C. Ladwig III. "The Future of the British Nuclear Deterrent: ..., 33.

Americans started to become aware of the potential of nuclear technology and, conscious of the advances that the British had made, President Roosevelt wrote to the British Prime Minister, Churchill, to suggest an exchange of experience.[11] Up until this point Churchill had kept very tight control over the project, with only his inner circle of policy makers aware, however the UK economy was struggling through the Second World War, and with research resources limited, Churchill agreed to join efforts with the United States. The Quebec Agreement of 1943 paved the way for the British team to join the American's Manhattan Project, in what saw a sharing of technical expertise. Following the end of the Second World War, brought about by the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Japan, continued cooperation with America was abruptly ended when the US McMahon Act of 1946 "banned the sharing of information on nuclear weapon design with other countries."[12] The UK were subsequently forced to go it alone, not wishing to be left behind by the US on such matters, and aware that the Soviet Union were also developing their own nuclear expertise. This led to a period of uncertainty for Britain, unsure of their relationship with either the US or Europe, and aspiring to rejuvenate its political influence "in the face of imperial decline."[13]

With the world having been ravaged by war twice in thirty years, the United Nations (UN) was created in an attempt to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."[14] Conscious of the potential global threat to *international peace and security* that atomic weapons could bring, in 1946 the UN General Assembly established the Atomic Energy Commission, (later to become the Disarmament Commission), in an endeavor "to ensure that such energy

[11] Hugh Beach and Nadine Gurr. *Flattering the Passions:* ..., 13.
[12] *Ibid.*, 19.
[13] Walter C. Ladwig III. "The Future of the British Nuclear Deterrent: ..., 34.
[14] United Nations. Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice. United Nations Department of Public Information, March 1994, 2.

would only be used for peaceful purposes."[15] Around the same time, the Soviet Union was making moves on Eastern Europe with the communist coup in Czechoslovakia and the blockade of Berlin. In an attempt to establish security confidence across Europe the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was created in April 1949.[16] Shortly afterwards in May, Prime Minister Atlee announced to the House of Commons the decision to develop an atomic bomb, the first such announcement to the public.[17]

OUT OF CONTROL

On 19 September 1949 the Americans announced that the Soviets had conducted their first nuclear weapon test[18] and so began the arms race. "By the early 1950s nuclear weapons moved from being a weapon of last resort to the primary tool of British defense under a doctrine of deterrence."[19] America, determined to capitalize on their advantage, once again turned to the United Kingdom to bolster their own position by seeking to forward base nuclear weapon components and B-29 nuclear bombers on British soil. "The success of the first Soviet nuclear test had brought with it the certainty that Britain would eventually be in the front line of any attack by the Soviets,"[20] and due to its size and location "the British state, society and people would be annihilated in a nuclear war of any scale."[21] By 1957 the British had successfully tested their own hydrogen bomb regaining the interest of the US to revive nuclear cooperation[22]

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[15] United Nations. *The United Nations and Disarmament: 1945-1985.* New York: United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs, 1985, 1.
[16] Hugh Beach and Nadine Gurr. *Flattering the Passions:* ..., 24.
[17] Walter C. Ladwig III. "The Future of the British Nuclear Deterrent: ..., 34.
[18] Hugh Beach and Nadine Gurr. *Flattering the Passions:* ..., 25.
[19] Walter C. Ladwig III. "The Future of the British Nuclear Deterrent: ..., 34.
[20] Hugh Beach and Nadine Gurr. *Flattering the Passions:* ..., 26.
[21] William Walker. "The UK, Threshold Status and Responsible Nuclear Sovereignty..., 451.
[22] Walter C. Ladwig III. "The Future of the British Nuclear Deterrent: ..., 35.

resulting in both countries sharing warhead technology, and the British ultimately adopting an American design for their hydrogen bomb.[23]

The 1960s saw the British government commit their nuclear weapons to NATO for the protection of the alliance, however the rapid growth in the American arsenal reduced the impact of the British contribution significantly. This led to the UK government justifying their arsenal's existence by the enhanced deterrence it brought to Europe with an "additional, independent, command authority that the Soviet Union would have to contend with."[24]

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the Cold War took hold. The United States and the Soviet Union made rapid progress with nuclear technology and conducted uncontrolled testing, often with unexpected results. In addition to advances in nuclear technology, both sides were also developing different delivery methods, and coupled with corresponding developments in the space race, missile technology brought about the Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) giving both sides global reach. Although the United States were leading the way on the numbers game the Soviet Union were starting to catch up and it was not long before both sides had sufficient nuclear arsenals to obliterate the other, even in a second strike scenario, leading to the coining of the phrase *Mutual Assured Destruction* (MAD)[25]. By this stage it was beginning to become apparent that the proliferation of nuclear weapons was out of control and something had to be done. Clearly the main players were the United States and the Soviet Union, and when the Americans discovered that the Soviets were developing a missile defense system that could negate the benefits of the larger American arsenal President Johnson was left with no alternative but to open direct negotiations with the USSR. This triggered the start of a series of bilateral

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[23] *Ibid.*
[24] *Ibid.*
[25] Sverre Lodgaard. *Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation: Towards a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World?* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 48.

talks aimed initially at reducing missile defense systems before progressing to agreements over deliver systems and warheads. The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) between the USA and the Soviet Union began in 1969 leading to the rather sporadic Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (SART). The UN was asked to facilitate the effectiveness of these negotiations, and similarly both parties of the talks were requested to keep the UN fully engaged.[26]

Conscious of the threat to peace and security brought about by the escalation of nuclear weapons the United Nations were compelled to take additional action. The Disarmament Commission had failed to deliver any consensus; a different approach was required. By the end of the 1960s the United Nations represented approximately 65% of the world's states with a membership of 123, yet only six possessed nuclear weapons, of which the United States and the Soviet Union held over 96%. However what was alarming to the UN was that during the 1960s three additional states had acquired a nuclear weapon capability. With a tangible risk of this increasing further the UN felt that the first step must be to curtail the proliferation of nuclear weapons within more states, thus the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) was negotiated in 1969.[27] (The majority of UN members signed the NPT during the 1970s, today there are 188 signatories with India, Israel, Pakistan and South Sudan never having signed, and North Korea although initially signing, withdrew in 2003.)

Meanwhile the United Kingdom was being left behind by the economic capacity and political ambition of the *super-powers*. Despite their status as a nuclear weapon state, their best card on the table was a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. However, they were now constrained by their reliance upon American cooperation. Previously, during the "1950s and 1960s there were moments of doubt that the [British] deterrent could be sustained

[26] Dimitris Bourantonis. *The United Nations and the Quest for Nuclear Disarmament*. (Aldershot: Dartmouth Pub Co, 1993),113.
[27] *Ibid.,* 83.

given the economy's weakness."[28] The cooperation between Britain and America had reached a new high following the "US-UK Mutual Defence Agreement of 1958"[29] which had led to the Kennedy administration agreeing to allow the UK to purchase their Polaris submarine-launched missile system. This system would allow the British to fit their own warheads[30] and was subsequently to become the sole nuclear delivery system for the UK.[31] From this point it fell to subsequent British Prime Ministers to maintain constructive dialogue with future American administrations to ensure their continued support. The 1970s saw Prime Minister Callaghan and President Carter agree to the successor to Polaris, Trident, under a similar agreement which would see the continued use of UK warheads on an American missile system.[32]

Despite possessing a nuclear capability the UK is now "locked into an unusually restricted political and military usage of its nuclear weapons by knowledge that US operational and developmental assistance could be withdrawn if it step[s] out of line."[33] The most critical time for Britain regarding her nuclear deterrent will always be the time when the government is required to make decisions on any replacement system, this is the time when the UK needs full nuclear cooperation from the United States, with the "consent of the president and congress."[34]

The UK having chosen to limit their nuclear delivery system to submarine launched missiles means that experience of alternative systems is lacking and will therefore require substantial investment of resources to resurrect them.[35] Realistically the only option open to the UK to remain a nuclear capable state is to continue negotiations with the United States and

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[28] William Walker. "The UK, Threshold Status and Responsible Nuclear Sovereignty..., 453.
[29] *Ibid.*
[30] Walter C. Ladwig III. "The Future of the British Nuclear Deterrent: ..., 36.
[31] Douglas Holdstock and Frank Barnaby. *The British Nuclear Weapons Programme, 1952-2002*. (London: Frank Cass, 2003),146. 1996 saw the end of the RAF WE177 nuclear weapon deployment.
[32] Walter C. Ladwig III. "The Future of the British Nuclear Deterrent: ..., 36.
[33] William Walker. "The UK, Threshold Status and Responsible Nuclear Sovereignty..., 453.
[34] *Ibid.,* 454.
[35] Michael Codner, Gavin Ireland, and Lee Willett. *The United Kingdom's Independent Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: Observations on the 2006 White Paper and Issues for the Parliamentary Debate*. (RUSI, 2007),10.

progress with the design and procurement of the Trident replacement. This is clearly a government decision that requires extensive deliberation and strategic consideration, which is perhaps why there has been so much procrastination.

BRITAIN WITHIN THE GLOBAL SECURITY ARENA

When establishing how the United Kingdom would actually strengthen its position within the global security arena if it were to disarm its nuclear weapons, one must look at the bearing Britain currently has whilst possessing such capability. At the moment the UK is one of eight countries that are known to possess nuclear weapons, referred to by the United Nations as Nuclear Weapon States (NWS). In addition to the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, India, Pakistan and Israel are also known to have nuclear weapons and North Korea have conducted several tests recently as they strive towards a capability. Of the total global warheads the UK have 2%, USA 45% and Russia 44%.[36]

The first point to question is that despite the British Government regularly referring to it as the "UK's independent nuclear deterrent,"[37] it is actually not that independent in the sense that the UK are totally reliant on the United States for the system. Although the UK have complete control over the launch and destination of their missiles, they depend upon the United States for testing, ongoing logistics support and maintenance, and elements of the intelligence required to facilitate the targeting process.[38] Although the impact of the US withdrawing support would not be felt immediately, it would risk creating a gap in capability until alternative mechanisms could be put in place. In today's political climate this scenario is unlikely, however the consequences of such a breakdown in relations with the US manifest themselves elsewhere. Being so reliant

[36] Robert S. Norris, and Hans M. Kristensen. "Global Nuclear Weapons Inventories ..., 78.
[37] United Kingdom Parliament. "National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015." (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, November 2015), 34.
[38] Freedman, Lawrence. *Britain and Nuclear Weapons.* (London: Macmillan Pub Limited, 1980), 137.

on another state for such a critical element of a country's security has arguably led to a "significant loss of independence in foreign policy stemming from London's anxiety that American nuclear assistance would be withheld if it opposed Washington on issues of high importance."[39] The obvious example here is the UK support for the US war in Iraq in 2003, coincidently followed in 2004 by the US-UK *Mutual Defence Agreement*, paving the way for Britain's inclusion in the Trident replacement.[40] As alluded to earlier the UK deterrent does provide an "independent center of decision making"[41] for any adversary to contend with, however the scale of such reliance on the US clearly reduces Britain's ability to make independent decisions on matters of global security. Within "a political environment where a large majority of the British public claims to want the government to pursue a foreign policy that is more independent of America,"[42] this could only be achieved by the UK government if it severed the US ties of nuclear possession.

Within the global security arena Britain's primary defense alliance is NATO, to whom Britain has formally committed her nuclear arsenal.[43] Although it is unclear exactly what this means in practice it can be anticipated that in the event of an attack on a NATO ally, the UK would contemplate placing her nuclear assets "under the command of Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and targeted in accordance with a joint (largely American) operational plan."[44] Although this appears to be a most magnanimous offer from the UK, it fits inherently under the NATO expectations of Article 5, "an armed attack against one or more of them [NATO members] in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them

[39] William Walker. "The UK, Threshold Status and Responsible Nuclear Sovereignty..., 454.
[40] *Ibid.*
[41] Michael Codner, Gavin Ireland, and Lee Willett. *The United Kingdom's Independent* ..., 10.
[42] Walter C. Ladwig III. "The Future of the British Nuclear Deterrent: ..., 42.
[43] Ritchie, Nick. *A Nuclear Weapons-Free World?: Britain, Trident and the Challenges Ahead* . (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 96.
[44] William Walker. "The UK, Threshold Status and Responsible Nuclear Sovereignty..., 452.

all"[45] and as such NATO members will assist those countries attacked, by taking "such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force."[46] The USA and France have not made such specific statements on the utilization of their nuclear arsenals in a similar situation, although *Article 5* does place a similar obligation on them, which rather negates the intensity of the UK NATO statement.

Within NATO, the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) provides the forum for consultation on NATO's nuclear deterrence, membership of which is not limited to those countries possessing the capability but actually includes all 28 members with the exception of France, who choose not to participate.[47] Taking these factors into consideration, if the United Kingdom were to decide not to renew their nuclear deterrent, it would have minimal impact on the effectiveness and capability of the NATO nuclear deterrent, the UK would remain a beneficiary of the deterrent provided by the alliance, and like all other members (except France), the UK would remain a member of the NPG. The financial savings of such an endeavor would also create tolerance to additional conventional defence spending. Although the United Kingdom's defence expenditure is already the second largest in NATO, behind the United States,[48] there would be scope to strengthen the UK's military, particularly in specialized areas such as anti-submarine warfare, where knowledge and experienced has been gained from the prior possession of SSBNs.

THE UNITED KINGDOM'S INTERNATIONAL INFLUENCE

Much has been said about how the possession of nuclear weapons brings with it a certain amount of international influence.[49] The fact that all five permanent members (P5) of the UN

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[45] North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. *The North Atlantic Treaty.* (Washington: 1949), Article 5.
[46] *Ibid.*
[47] North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, "NATO's nuclear deterrence policy and forces." Last accessed 22 April 2016, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50068.htm.
[48] North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, "Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2008-2015)." Last accessed 6 May 2016, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_127537.htm.
[49] Walter C. Ladwig III. "The Future of the British Nuclear Deterrent: ..., 32.

Security Council are NWS would seem to cement this, however at the time that the United Nations was formed only three countries were striving for such a capability, and there has certainly been no move towards expanding the P5 to include all NWS today. It is also fair to say that Great Britain can no longer rest on her laurels from the colonial era, but must work at preserving and forging international relations, whether they are for economic, political or military benefit. Britain's *special relationship* with the United States remains very much one of convenience for America, whereas it is far more significant for the UK. Whilst there is considerable value for Britain in maintaining this *special relationship*, she must be sure not to inadvertently reduce her international influence for the sake of this alliance. As with most relationships, it is very much based on trust, mutual respect and personal collaboration, which will fluctuate depending on the political leadership at the time. With regard to nuclear disarmament it may be surprising to hear that during the Reykjavik summit in 1986 President Reagan actually proposed to Mikhail Gorbachev "the total abolition of nuclear weapons,"[50] however it was Prime Minister Thatcher who expressed horror at such a suggestion prompting the American President to back down. Examples of such close relationship and influence across the Atlantic have not been seen since, however there are still many shared visions by both the UK and US, not least a long term desire to achieve nuclear disarmament. If the United Kingdom were to free themselves from the American ties that come with nuclear weapons, they would have greater capacity and autonomy to pursue the issues more pertinent to them.

As explicitly mentioned in the United Nations Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), all signatories (which includes all permanent members of the security council) have declared their intent to "achieve at the earliest possible date the cessation of the nuclear

[50] Malcolm Chalmers. "Britain's New Nuclear Debate:..., 37.

arms race and to undertake effective measures in the direction of nuclear disarmament."[51] In relation to the United Kingdom's prominent position as a permanent member of the Security Council, Article 26 of the UN Charter places responsibility on all Security Council members for the "establishment and maintenance of international peace and security" and goes on to state their responsibility for "the establishment of a system for the regulation of armaments."[52] No Security Council member to date has taken the step towards nuclear disarmament despite numerous statements of such intent. Of all P5 members, the United Kingdom arguably have the least to lose if they were to disarm due to their membership of NATO, membership of the G-8 and close relationship with both the United States and France. Therefore if they were to make serious efforts towards disarmament it "would place [them] as a leader among the growing band of *middle powers* campaigning for a nuclear weapon-free world."[53] There are arguments to suggest that Britain's influence in international negotiations is enhanced by having nuclear weapons, however they are hard to substantiate[54] and go further to suggest that the UK's "international co-operation in defence matters goes well beyond nuclear weapons . . . and readiness to contribute conventional military assistance far outweighs the relatively very small nuclear-weapon contribution from the UK."[55] If the UK were to enhance their conventional military rather than renew its nuclear arsenal then it would be in a position to strengthen its contribution to NATO as well as improve its international influence.

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[51] United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons." Last accessed 6 April 2016, http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/NPTtext.shtml.

[52] United Nations. Charter of the United Nations..., Article 26.

[53] Tom Milne. "British Nuclear Weapons Policy." *The British Nuclear Weapons Programme* 2002 (London: Frank Cass, 1952): 20.

[54] RS Pease. "An End to British Nuclear Weapons." *The British Nuclear Weapons Programme* 2002 (London: Frank Cass, 1952): 134.

[55] *Ibid.*

THE UK'S CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS TOTAL NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT

> *Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.*
>
> - Article VI, United Nations Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

Having discussed some of the international issues concerning how the United Kingdom would strengthen its position and influence in the security arena if they were to decide not to replace their current nuclear weapons, the subsequent topic of discussion must be how such actions could facilitate a global nuclear disarmament. Without doubt there exists a global political appetite to reduce nuclear arsenals to zero. From the end of the 1960s the leaders of the principal nuclear states have held negotiations and talks concerning the reduction of their holdings. More recently President Obama, during his first speech at the United Nations stated that a nuclear weapon free world was his "number one priority."[56] The UK further affirmed their commitment to global disarmament in their National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) 2015,[57] and across the globe 188 UN member states have signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. With so much documented evidence of disarmament aspirations why has there been so little action?

Britain has always been at the forefront of disarmament negotiations, knowing full well that in the event that the *super-powers* ever resorted to the use of nuclear weapons, it would have dire consequences for the UK. Back in 1950 Prime Minister Attlee visited America "to persuade President Truman not to authorize the use of nuclear weapons in the Korean War."[58] More recently, "in 1994 the UK reached an agreement with Russia to de-target its nuclear weapons to

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[56] Sverre Lodgaard. *Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation:...*, 10.
[57] United Kingdom Parliament. "National Security Strategy..., 36.
[58] William Walker. "The UK, Threshold Status and Responsible Nuclear Sovereignty..., 451.

empty ocean zones to mitigate the consequences of accidental launch."[59] Similar agreements between Russia, China and the US were negotiated later that same year, proof that the United Kingdom is able to independently influence global action towards a safer world. As stated in the UK SDSR 2015, "we will work with our international partners to tackle proliferation and to make progress on multilateral disarmament."[60] As previously mentioned the United Kingdom already have influence within the international arena through the UN Security Council, NATO, the European Union and the G8. Regarding disarmament, Britain "has the potential to take a major leadership role as the most progressive of the nuclear weapon states,"[61] having already taken steps to reduce their arsenal, end nuclear testing and declare their commitment to a nuclear weapons free world.[62]

Clearly we live in an uncertain world. Although the end of the cold war initially brought hope, the international community failed to capitalize on this with regards to nuclear disarmament, and now there are new threats to contend with. There are arguments on both sides regarding how effective nuclear weapons were during the cold war in preventing aggression amongst the major powers,[63] one thing that is undisputable is that the cold war led to the massive escalation of nuclear weapons, after which there was a sharp decline.[64] Of far more relevance today is the effectiveness of nuclear weapons against the current threats of international terrorism and intrastate insurgency,[65] versus the risk of nuclear proliferation into the *wrong hands*. As the former US Assistant Secretary of Defence and Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, Joseph Nye Jr. stated:

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[59] Ritchie, Nick. *A Nuclear Weapons-Free World?...*, 17.
[60] United Kingdom Parliament. "National Security Strategy..., 36.
[61] Ritchie, Nick. *A Nuclear Weapons-Free World?...*, 193.
[62] *Ibid.*
[63] RS Pease. "An End to British Nuclear Weapons..., 134.
[64] Robert S. Norris, and Hans M. Kristensen. "Global Nuclear Weapons Inventories ..., 78.
[65] Desmond Bowen. "Deterrence and Disarmament in the UK." *Survival* 52, no. 1 (2010): 11.

> Probably the greatest danger to [our] way of life would be the intersection of terrorism with nuclear materials. Preventing this requires policies for countering terrorism, achieving nonproliferation [and] ensuring better protection of foreign nuclear materials.[66]

In order to reduce this threat the nuclear weapon states must make a concerted effort to reduce the global stockpile and improve the subsequent verification, accounting and safety of all nuclear material. This is an area where the United Kingdom's Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) have already demonstrated their expertise and capability when they assisted in the "rundown and future safety of the former Soviet armoury."[67] What is missing now is the political will to take the next step towards disarmament. On a number of occasions Britain has shown its willingness and ability to make a stance towards disarmament, positioning itself as "the most responsible of all nuclear-armed states."[68] The last decade has seen an increase in the number of politicians and statesmen pursuing disarmament, now is the time for the UK to capitalize on this "momentum behind the goal of zero"[69] which was reaffirmed by UN resolution 1887. The UK prides itself on how it has exercised its responsibility towards nuclear weapons, their current holdings are such that the task of complete decommissioning and dismantling would be insubstantial.[70] This would have negligible impact on the global security situation yet would substantiate Britain's renewed endorsement and influence towards further disarmament.

United Nations resolution 1540 highlights the threat of nuclear proliferation to international peace and security, and goes on to stress the obligation of member states to control, disarm and prevent the proliferation of WMD.[71] Likewise the UN Non-Proliferation Treaty, which was extended indefinitely in 1995, calls on states to prevent nuclear proliferation and

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[66] Joseph S Nye. "Smart Power." *The Future of Power*. (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), 232.
[67] Michael Quinlan. "Thinking about Nuclear Weapons." *The RUSI Journal* 142, no. 6 (1997): 3.
[68] William Walker. "The UK, Threshold Status and Responsible Nuclear Sovereignty..., 450.
[69] Desmond Bowen. "Deterrence and Disarmament in the UK..., 12.
[70] William Walker. "The UK, Threshold Status and Responsible Nuclear Sovereignty..., 452.
[71] United Nations Security Council, "Resolution 1540 (2004)," last accessed 6 May 2016, http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1540(2004).

pursue nuclear disarmament. Of all NWS the UK have the least to lose and the most to gain from disarmament, and in disarming as a state would make the utmost contribution towards total nuclear disarmament.

CONCLUSION

> *There remains a grave moral duty both to take seriously as a long-term vision the possibility of eventual complete escape from [the shadow of nuclear weapons] and meanwhile to manage their continuance with as little risk and at low a cost as possible.*
>
> - Sir Michael Quinlan, *Thinking about Nuclear Weapons*

As Prime Minister Blair admitted, when he was discussing the replacement for Trident back in 2006, "the UK would not choose to acquire a nuclear deterrent if starting from here."[72] Although there were compelling reasons for developing nuclear weapons during the middle of the last century, today the security rationale behind the UK deterrent is "draining away"[73] and Britain are preserving their nuclear status "more out of pride and inertia than in response to compelling security logics."[74] This would appear to be a rather brash philosophical argument when debating the security of a nation and expending such a substantial financial outlay in a time of increased economic pressures. From a political perspective it would also appear to be the easier option for the government,[75] rather than trying to justify what has changed in the security environment to pursue disarmament now, and to show that UK security would not be adversely effected by such a decision.

Although the UK government argue that the replacement of Trident does not breach the NPT as they are merely upgrading an existing system, and the treaty makes no mention of a

[72] William Walker. "The UK, Threshold Status and Responsible Nuclear Sovereignty..., 459.
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] *Ibid.*
[75] Walter C. Ladwig III. "The Future of the British Nuclear Deterrent: ..., 47.

timeframe,[76] the treaty does clearly place an obligation on states to declare "their intention to achieve at the earliest possible date the cessation of the nuclear arms race and to undertake effective measures in the direction of nuclear disarmament."[77]

With regards to their international influence, a United Kingdom without nuclear weapons would still remain a permanent member of the UN Security Council, with as much *power* as the United States or any of the other permanent members. Being so reliant on America has "undermined national independence."[78] Freeing itself from such ties would enable Britain to pursue concerns of global security that are important to them. Likewise they would have greater scope to enhance their conventional forces and augment their NATO contributions with more relevant capabilities for today's security threats.

Having already proved themselves as a *leader* regarding non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament, if Britain were to decide not to replace Trident "it would set a strong example that nuclear weapons are not necessary for either political status or national security."[79] It would also provide greater manifestation of their conviction in the NPT and disarmament process when involved in international negotiations with non-nuclear states, such as the Iran nuclear deal in 2016, a view endorsed by the former UN weapons inspector Hans Blix.[80]

In addition to the current leadership of the UK, USA and France all supporting a world free of nuclear weapons, over two-thirds of all living former US secretaries of state, secretaries of defense, and national security advisors also support this endeavor.[81] It is therefore rather disappointing that more concrete steps have not been taken. Coupled with their increased

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[76] United Kingdom Parliament, "Replacing Trident: Key issues for the 2015 Parliament," last accessed 11 April 2016, www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/key-issues-parliament-2015/defence and security/trident/.

[77] United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, "Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons." Last accessed 6 April 2016, http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/NPTtext.shtml.

[78] Malcolm Chalmers. "Britain's New Nuclear Debate:..., 34.

[79] Walter C. Ladwig III. "The Future of the British Nuclear Deterrent: ..., 40.

[80] *Ibid.*

[81] Ivo Daalder and Jan Lodal. "The Logic of Zero." *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 6 (2008): 80.

international influence and commitment to nuclear disarmament the United Kingdom, as a non-nuclear state, would be well placed to further promote global disarmament. Despite the nuclear arms race being very much determined by America and the Soviets, the UK has already played an important role in international disarmament and the prohibition of nuclear testing[82] and is well poised to take this forward. Demonstrating the UK's commitment to article VI of the NPT would keep the treaty alive and increase pressure on other nations to follow suit.[83] The UK would then be in a strong position to utilize its experience at the AWE to assist in developing techniques for the verification and disposal of redundant nuclear materials from NWS.[84] This contribution to disarmament is comparable to the part the UK played in 1956, when they decided to cease research and development of chemical weapons and concentrate their efforts on the enforcement of the relevant treaties.[85]

If the West is intent on preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons, then they themselves must demonstrate that such weapons are not critical to national security. Nuclear policies must change to reflect the current security threats[86] and the United Kingdom are in a position to be able to take the lead, ending what they initiated nearly 70 years ago.

[82] Tom Milne. "British Nuclear Weapons Policy..., 20.
[83] RS Pease. "An End to British Nuclear Weapons..., 135.
[84] Michael Quinlan. "Thinking about Nuclear Weapons..., 3.
[85] RS Pease. "An End to British Nuclear Weapons..., 136.
[86] Ivo Daalder and Jan Lodal. "The Logic of Zero..., 82.

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