

Submission by Commander R Forsyth RN (Ret'd) to the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy

Relevant experience:

- 1961-1971 Served in three conventional powered submarines (SSK) and commanded a fourth, HMS Alliance.
- 1972-74 Executive Officer (2nd in command) of the Polaris missile equipped nuclear powered submarine (SSBN) HMS Repulse (Starboard Crew). This period included a test missile firing in Florida and 4 patrols. The incapacity of the Commanding officer (CO) at the start of one patrol required me to assume command for part of it and later again between patrols.
- 1975-76 Selected for Commander and appointed as CO (Teacher) of the Submarine Command Qualifying Course ('Perisher').
- 1976-79 Commanded HMS Sceptre, a nuclear powered attack submarine (SSN).
- 1980-81 MoD, Operational Requirements (ASW)
- 1981-99 Voluntarily retired to pursue a successful career in industry culminating as Sales & Marketing Director of Westland Group plc for 11 years.
- 1999- Military & civil business Consultant for 10 years then full retirement.

Response to Questions 5 & 6

1. In common with many of my peers, I am concerned about the state into which the Royal Navy has declined. This has unquestionably been caused by successive cuts in public spending. Yet it is noticeable that there is one part of the defence budget that is not only protected but continues to grow - the proportion devoted to the Continuous at Sea Deterrent (CASD). The UK's conventional war-fighting capability would seem to have been sacrificed in order to preserve its nuclear one. Some £150Bn+ will be needed over the next 30 years to maintain CASD and replace the four *Vanguard* class SSBNs with the *Dreadnought* class. This is sucking the life blood out of the Navy. Some serious questions therefore need to be asked about the requirement for, and affordability of, the deterrent; particularly in the light of the substantial national debt the UK has incurred combatting Covid-19.

2. The UK's Trident missiles have not been targeted and have been at 2-3 days' notice to fire since the mid-1990s. This indicates neither any nuclear threat in that period; nor, according to Sir Roderic Braithwaite (UK Ambassador to the USSR 1991-92), was there ever a Soviet intention to occupy any part of Western Europe.¹ This undermines the justification for the Western allies to plan for nuclear retaliation. It seems reasonable to assume that President Putin's nuclear posturing is just that. Rogue States such as Iran, North Korea and Syria do not pose a nuclear threat to UK/NATO and Trident is not an appropriate weapon with which to oppose a terrorist threat.

3. The rest of the world is turning against the dominance of the five nuclear weapon State signatories (P5) to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) because the P5 have not actively pursued the disarmament the NPT commits them to. Instead, they are modernising their nuclear weapon systems.

¹ Braithwaite, Rodric, *Armageddon & Paranoia: The Nuclear Confrontation* (Profile Books, 2017) p.355

4. As a consequence, in 2017 122 States negotiated a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW): to date, 84 States have signed and 44 (out of the 50 required for it to enter into force) have ratified it. Although the P5 are refusing to support it, this growing overwhelming stigmatisation of nuclear weapons will have a major impact when it inevitably comes into force.

5. Furthermore, UK Government nuclear deterrence policy – described as one of ‘deliberate ambiguity’ – apparently encompasses first use against a non-nuclear attack on forces deployed abroad as described by the Secretary of State in 2002.² This would not comply with international law.

6. The UK Government’s determination to sustain nuclear weapon capability has much to do with retaining its status as a P5 member and Tier 1 military power. The reality is that this requires a credible conventional military capability; and the UK clearly cannot afford both. Vice Admiral Sir Jeremy Blackham – a former Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Capability) expressed this very clearly “...in order to be credible, nuclear deterrence must be underpinned by strong conventional deterrence...Nuclear deterrence is not strong defence on the cheap...‘Big bang’ is not ‘big defence’.”³

Conclusion

7. Trident was designed for the last (Cold) war and is unusable in present or future conflicts. The *Dreadnought* programme should be cancelled and the savings re-invested to provide UK/NATO with much improved conventional and cyber capability.

8. Political reality may require a transition period to move from one national defence posture to another; in which case a two-phased process is proposed.

Phase 1

- Cancel CASD. The Trident weapon system is currently not targeted and is at 2-3 days’ notice to fire. CASD could be restored within this period at any sign of rising tension or threat.
- Decommission *HMS Vanguard*. This submarine is effectively out of commission anyway with unresolved refuelling problems.

These two actions would also:

- Much reduce manning requirement which is a major problem.
- Improve quality of life for crews now on regular 120 day patrols.
- Change UK policy to be a genuinely defensive second strike (retaliatory) posture. i.e.
 - No first (pre-emptive) use in any circumstance and only to be used if UK/NATO is attacked with nuclear weapons.

² Secretary of State for Defence Rt Hon G Hoon MP in evidence to the Parliamentary Defence Select Committee, 20 March 2002

³ V. Adm Sir Jeremy Blackham KCB MA *Deterrence is not only about Nuclear Weapons*. Canadian Naval Review. May 2017

- Revoke the UK Reservation to Protocol 1 to the Geneva Conventions by which UK does not recognise that it applies to nuclear weapons.
- Recognise the authority of the International Court of Justice on all matters relating to the use of nuclear weapons.
- Establish the present reduced levels of Trident missile and warhead load-outs as a binding commitment under the NPT.
- Cancel the joint US/UK Trident warhead programme. The existing warhead has a 100 year design life according to its designer.⁴
- Sign and ratify the TPNW.

Phase 2 – to be completed by 2030

- Cancel *Dreadnought* 3 & 4.
- Convert *Dreadnought* 1 & 2 to conventionally armed cruise missile firing submarines (SSGNs).
- Divert the remainder of the *Dreadnought* programme budget to a next generation SSN.
- Re-introduce lower cost, highly capable, conventionally powered submarines. This will boost hull numbers, provide a much needed inshore operational capability (e.g. for the Baltic) and be good platforms for future SSN COs to gain experience on a lower cost/risk class of submarine.

9. These actions would enable the UK to become a world leader in nuclear disarmament and improve the UK's capability to defend itself and NATO against current and future real security threats.

10 September 2020

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⁴ http://www.lasg.org/CMRR/Litigation/Peurifoy_Bob_1Nov2010.pdf

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