

*This consultation paper is presented as the first stage in the development of Party policy on the Future of the Trident System. It does not represent agreed Party policy. It is designed to stimulate debate and discussion within the Party and outside; based on the responses generated and on the deliberations of the group a background paper and motion on the Future of the Trident System will be drawn up and presented to Conference for debate.*

*A group appointed by the Federal Policy Committee and chaired by Lord Roper has drawn up the paper. Members of the group are prepared to speak on the paper to outside bodies and to discussion meetings organised within the Party.*

*Comments on the paper, and requests for speakers, should be addressed to: Lord Roper, The Future of the Trident System group, Policy Projects Team, Liberal Democrats, 4 Cowley Street, London SW1P 3NB. Email [h.banks@libdems.org.uk](mailto:h.banks@libdems.org.uk)*

*Comments should reach us as soon as possible, and in any event no later than Monday 2nd October 2006.*

### **Federal Policy Consultation Paper No. 83**

ISBN 1 85187 757 6

© July 2006

Further copies of this paper can be obtained, price £2.00 inc. p&p, from:

Liberal Democrat Image, 61a Cove Road, Cove, Farnborough, Hampshire, GU14 0EX  
Tel: 01252 510 005

Copies in large print and on audiotape are available from the Policy Projects Team,  
Liberal Democrats, 4 Cowley Street, London, SW1P 3NB

Published by the Policy Projects Team, Liberal Democrats, 4 Cowley Street, London SW1P 3NB

Layout and Design by Helen Banks

Printed by Contract Printing, 1 St James Road, St James Industrial Estate, Corby,  
Northants NN18 8AL

Printed on 100% Recycled Paper

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## ***Introduction***

1.0.1 Working towards the global elimination of nuclear weapons is the central principle of Liberal Democrat defence policy. In the 2005 general election manifesto we committed to pressing for a new round of multilateral arms reduction talks and retaining the UK's current minimum nuclear deterrent for the foreseeable future, until sufficient progress has been made towards the global elimination of such weapons.

1.0.2 In light of the Government's original commitment to reach a decision on the replacement of the Trident system by the end of this Parliament, the FPC commissioned a small group to make proposals for Liberal Democrat policy on the future of the Trident system. This consultative paper is the first part of this group's work. It looks at the role and effectiveness of the current Trident system and examines the continuing need for such a system in light of the changed security environment. It also considers the ethical and global context of any decision on the future of Trident.

1.0.3 This consultative paper will form the background to a consultative session on the Future of the Trident System to be held at the Party's autumn conference in September.

## ***The UK's Trident system***

2.0.1 The UK's Trident system is based at the Clyde Submarine Base in Western Scotland. It is a force of four nuclear-powered submarines (SSBNs) each with sixteen launch tubes for the US Trident submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) carrying multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs). The missiles are owned by the UK within a common pool with the US and the submarines and warheads have been made in Britain, though there has been close dialogue over warhead design between US laboratories and the UK's Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE).

2.0.2 There is always one SSBN at sea, but its readiness to fire has been greatly reduced since the Cold War period when one boat could be in launch position at fifteen minutes notice. Normal 'notice to fire' is now said to be measured in days.

2.0.3 Successive governments have announced reductions in the total holding of operational warheads and in the number carried in each boat. The 1998 Strategic Defence Review said that the operationally-available stockpile would be less than two hundred, with a maximum of forty-eight per boat.

2.0.4 The UK phased out its other nuclear-weapon forces by the end of the 1990s and the declared intention since the mid-1990s has been for the Trident system also to provide a 'sub-strategic' role. Although details of this concept have not been disclosed it is widely believed that some missiles may only carry one live warhead, and that one warhead may have an explosive yield well below that of a normal warhead.

## ***Nuclear deterrence***

3.0.1 The most common strategic reason for developing a nuclear weapon capability is insecurity. States may believe that a nuclear capability is it's the only defence against extreme threats. The first Anglo-American nuclear weapon programme was developed as the answer to the potential development of atomic weapons by Germany in World War II, and was continued to maintain military superiority against an overwhelming Soviet conventional superiority in Europe. The Soviet Union developed its nuclear capability as part of its armoury against a hostile West. China saw itself as vulnerable to a surprise attack from the US, and it needed nuclear capability to deter such an attack. Israel sees itself as surrounded by enemies. India sees itself as vulnerable to Chinese nuclear weapons, and Pakistan perceives a risk from Indian weapons. International isolation can increase a state's sense of insecurity, and therefore its perceived need for a nuclear capability. This was the case for South Africa in apartheid times, and has been true of North Korea, Iran, Iraq and Libya at various times.

3.0.2 A powerful motivation for acquiring nuclear weapons has been the effect on national status and prestige. In Britain, which had been an equal partner in the Manhattan Project but excluded by the US at the end of the war, there was both an assumption that it would need to have atomic weapons in order to retain its place as a leading world power as well as to counter the Soviet threat. Similarly France saw the need for a nuclear capability to underpin its return to the world stage as a leading player. Given that each of the five permanent members of the Security Council (the P5) are also the first five nuclear weapon states, some have argued there is an association between nuclear capability and international status and influence. Such considerations may have been part of the motivation for India's weapons programme.

3.0.3 While nations will justify their nuclear weapon programmes for external security reasons, there are often internal domestic pressures driving the procurement. For example, bureaucratic momentum sustained the French programme before General de Gaulle came to power. Pakistan responded quickly to India's test in large part for domestic political reasons.

3.0.4 Britain's claim to world power status once rested on its global empire and its role in world finance and trade. With decolonisation in the 1950s, and the failed intervention in the Suez Canal Zone, which exposed Britain's military and financial weaknesses, nuclear weapons came to symbolise the country's claimed status. Aneurin Bevan warned the Labour Party conference in 1957 that a commitment to nuclear disarmament would "*send Britain's foreign secretary naked into the conference chamber*". French success in following Britain in developing a deterrent increased national sensitivities. When asked whether the UK should be willing to leave France as the only European nuclear-armed state, Sir Michael Quinlan, former permanent secretary to the Ministry of Defence, remarked that it would "*twitch an awful lot of very fundamental historical nerves.*" Equally, Sir Michael has argued that considerations of national influence merit little weight in the debate on renewal.

3.0.5 A major problem in nuclear procurement is long lead times combined with the inability to anticipate future threats. Today the case for the British nuclear force is made in part on the basis of its role as an insurance policy against an uncertain future. It is

argued that the UK possession of nuclear weapons makes the use of nuclear weapons against the UK less likely, and that although the UK may have no intention of using nuclear weapons, their possession is necessary to deter an attack. It can also be argued that the UK's possession of nuclear weapons has no or minimal impact on nuclear proliferation.

3.0.6 Deterrence only works if the threat posed to potential nuclear aggressors is credible; if they believe there is a risk Britain might retaliate in kind to a nuclear strike.

3.0.7 International isolation and insecurity are factors in states developing a nuclear weapons system. However, this in turn may lead to further international isolation and insecurity, which then reinforces the perceived need for such weapons. Regional status and international recognition are also motivators for states acquiring nuclear weapons, and increasingly it appears that the desire to deter intervention by foreign states or coalitions of states plays a large part. It is for this reason that progress on proliferation concerns can be made by reducing isolation, promoting democracy, and where necessary offering economic incentives or extending security guarantees. Confidence building measures also have a place; the nuclear weapon states must continue their agreed path to nuclear disarmament.

### **3.1 Preserving the nuclear taboo**

3.1.1 Nuclear weapons remain unused in warfare since their use against Hiroshima and Nagasaki 60 years ago. Over this time period the number of nuclear weapon states has increased to nine (assuming that North Korea has a nuclear weapon). The preservation of this nuclear taboo is important; strategists are rightly concerned by technical developments which suggest that nuclear weapons might once again be seen as usable military options.

3.1.2 In looking forward, some assessment of the strength of this taboo must be made. There was discussion of the use of nuclear weapons in the Korean War and the world was alarmingly close to a nuclear confrontation during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Yet the memories of the effects of the two bombs used against Japan reinforced a sense that nuclear weapons should not be used in circumstances other than national survival. While the memory of 1945 will fade further as the years pass, there has been a trend to value individual human life more highly. Arguably, international opinion makes it unlikely that a State will be able to break the taboo on use of nuclear weapons without major damage to its international standing.

3.1.3 The implications of breaking the nuclear taboo must be considered. Would the use of a nuclear weapon lead to a more general use of such weapons in warfare, or to a strengthening of resolve to constrain such weaponry? What impact would such use have on arms control? The horror of the effects on civil populations of such weapons is likely to be greater in 21st Century society than it was in the context of World War II.

### **3.2 The ethics of nuclear weapons**

3.2.1 Since their first use in 1945 nuclear weapons have raised challenging ethical issues. The scale of the destruction which they can produce is such that the normal

principle of proportionality contained in international humanitarian law is difficult to apply. Yet during the Cold War the existential threat to our society of a military attack by the Soviet Union was considered to be so great that the possession of nuclear weapons as a deterrent was accepted.

3.2.2 The removal of the threat provided by the Warsaw Pact and Soviet Union has meant that the question of ethics must be revisited in any discussion of the replacement of Britain's nuclear capabilities.

### **3.3 Nuclear weapons and international law**

3.3.1 The cornerstone of the international legal regime on nuclear weapons is the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) of 1968, which has near universal membership. It forbids non-nuclear weapon states party to the treaty from acquiring nuclear weapons and obliges nuclear weapon states (NWS) to work towards nuclear disarmament. Specifically, Article VI provides: *'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.'*

3.3.2 Progress on disarmament objectives was made at the NPT Review Conference in 2000 where NWS agreed that the *'principle of irreversibility'* applied to nuclear disarmament and related arms control measures, and gave the *'unequivocal undertaking ... to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals'*. A work plan was also agreed for unilateral and multilateral reductions in the size and operational status of strategic and tactical nuclear stockpiles. In 2002, under the Strategic Offensive Reductions Treaty (SORT) between the US and Russia, substantial long-term nuclear arms reductions were agreed.

3.3.3 Recent developments have brought into question the adequacy of the legal regime governing the proliferation of nuclear weapons. The 1996 Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) has still not entered into force; the US has withdrawn from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABMT); negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) to end the production of highly enriched uranium, have stalled; and there was a failure at the NPT 2005 Review Conference to agree on measures to increase the effectiveness of the nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation regime.

3.3.4 In 2003 North Korea withdrew from the NPT. Israel, Pakistan and India remain outside the NPT; the US-India agreement on nuclear cooperation threatens to further undermine the NPT; and Iran's nuclear programme continues to be a source of major concern to the international community.

3.3.5 International law does not preclude replacement of a nuclear weapon system, but the NPT contains a commitment to negotiate in good faith towards nuclear disarmament under Article VI and, through the NPT review conference in 2000, the principle of irreversibility. There is therefore a strong case that any increase in the UK's nuclear weapons capability would be incompatible with our obligations. This would also be consistent with the UK Government's stated objective of maintaining only the minimum deterrent necessary for our security.

3.3.6 With respect to the legality of the use of nuclear weapons, in 1996 the International Court of Justice delivered an advisory opinion on the issue, which was inconclusive. It found that although in most circumstances the threat or use of nuclear weapons would be illegal due to their indiscriminate effect on civilians, prohibited under international humanitarian law, however the court was unwilling to reach such a finding in extreme cases of self-defence where the survival of the nation is at stake.

3.3.7 In conjunction with a range of practical measures, at least three initiatives could strengthen the international non-proliferation and disarmament regime. As proposed by the UN High Level Panel in 2005, a multinational agency managed by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) could oversee the provision of nuclear fuels. This would pave the way for stricter controls on access to nuclear fuel cycle technology, which can easily be diverted for weapons uses and would ultimately lead to a moratorium on new enrichment or reprocessing facilities.

3.3.8 The Additional Protocol to the NPT, which allows greater IAEA verification access, is still not in force in close to two-thirds of all NPT state parties. As the Director General of the IAEA, Dr. Mohamed ElBaradei, has argued, this should be made the universal standard for all states in order to ensure rigorous standards of verification.

3.3.9 New steps to reinvigorate disarmament measures should also be taken: there are still 27,000 nuclear warheads in existence, with a significant proportion on high states of readiness. If non-nuclear weapon states are to be expected to adhere to their non-proliferation commitments under the NPT, then renewed disarmament talks are imperative. These must include India, Israel, North Korea and Pakistan and should aim to bring about changes in strategic postures and reductions in arsenals. This would include steps to achieve universal ratification of the CTBT and agreement on a FMCT.



## ***The future security environment***

4.0.1 As indicated above in section 3, the UK's current nuclear deterrent was developed in the context of the Cold War, with the primary purpose of deterring aggression by the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact states against the UK or its allies. To be a credible deterrent the system was developed to counter the threat posed by the substantial Soviet nuclear arsenal and larger Soviet conventional forces. It was designed to have the capability to inflict major damage on Moscow and a number of Soviet cities, even after a nuclear attack.

4.0.2 There is no doubt that the political and strategic context has changed dramatically. The Soviet Union no longer exists nor is there any equivalent threat. With respect to consideration of possible UK renewal of its nuclear deterrent there must be a full assessment of whether a nuclear deterrent remains effective in deterring current and future threats to our security.

4.0.3 As the 1998 Strategic Defence Review observed, "*there is today no direct military threat to the United Kingdom or Western Europe.*" None of the world's current nuclear weapon states pose a present or impending threat to the UK. As Trident is due to be de-commissioned in 2020-2026, we must seek to anticipate the threats that will be facing the UK at that time and beyond.

4.0.4 There is no doubt terrorism poses a current and future threat to UK security. However there appears to be a consensus that a nuclear deterrent is of little or no use in countering such a threat, a matter which is addressed below at paragraph 4.3.

4.0.5 The proliferation of nuclear technologies and severe pressure on the NPT opens up the possibility that new states could acquire nuclear weapons. Unstable or autocratic governments which acquire nuclear weapons could theoretically pose a threat to the UK. However, there are serious questions about the extent to which such a threat would exist in practice. It is clear that there must be a rigorous assessment of this issue, and indeed any potential threats from current nuclear weapon states, before any decisions are taken on the principle of Trident replacement.

4.0.6 The assessment will also require anticipation of the future geo-political context, including analysis of the impact of the rise of China and India and the international potential for political upheaval and conventional conflict. It should assess developments which could lead to instability or conflict, such as rivalry for resources, particularly oil and gas, given massive western dependency on the unstable Persian Gulf; climate change which has the potential to cause the mass displacement of peoples and severe natural disasters; globalisation and social and economic marginalisation; failed or oppressive states, and pandemics, such as AIDS.

4.0.7 Deterrence can take many forms: diplomatic and economic measures or conventional military options. In the case of each potential threat, there will need to be careful consideration of whether a *nuclear weapon* deterrence is both necessary and effective to counter the threat.

## 4.1 The political value of nuclear weapons

4.1.1 Given the extremely limited circumstances in which nuclear weapons could credibly be used it is difficult to gauge what impact their existence has on international stability. In a European context the fact that two major powers (UK and France) possess nuclear weapons may serve to obviate the need for other European countries to pursue a similar capability. More broadly, the impact of our deterrent on international peace and security and its geopolitical implications beyond Europe requires considerable analysis by the government before any decision on replacement.

4.1.2 Despite having reduced its nuclear weapons capabilities more than many other states, the UK's justification of its possession of national nuclear forces undoubtedly has an impact on non-proliferation objectives. Although other states' decisions on their nuclear postures may not be directly affected by UK possession of nuclear weapons, we must accept that it confers a degree of legitimacy on such weapons as being of considerable military, security and political value. Arguably, it leaves the UK open to accusations of double standards and could constitute a block towards nuclear disarmament.

4.1.3 The UK has so far abided by its disarmament obligations to reduce its nuclear arsenal with a view to eventual elimination. It has dismantled its maritime tactical nuclear capability, and removed all its air-delivered nuclear bombs. The UK is the only NWS to have a single nuclear weapons delivery system. Since 1990 the UK has reduced the total explosive power of its nuclear weapons by 70%; it has observed a moratorium on testing, ratified the CTBT and supported the negotiation of a FMCT. The Government has also made clear that the role for nuclear weapons is political - to deter aggression and that it would only be used in *'extreme circumstances of self-defence in accordance with international law.'*

4.1.4 It can be argued that by unilaterally abandoning nuclear weapons the UK would perform an important demonstrative function, encouraging others to follow suit, and reducing the incentive to potential proliferators. The UK could then play a leading role in promoting nuclear disarmament within international fora. Such a change of attitude by one of the P5 could have an impact on the climate for denuclearisation. The contrary view must also be considered. As there are no states which have reason to believe they face a current threat from UK nuclear weapons, nor are potential proliferators' motivations determined by the UK position, it would arguably have little impact. There are also few signs, at present, that other nuclear powers would follow suit.

4.1.5 It can also be argued that arms reductions should only take place in the context of a multilateral process; and given that multilateral disarmament has stalled the UK should refrain from unilateral measures. But on this basis we may never see substantive progress on disarmament in the near or even medium-term future. Supporters of the multilateral approach say that the only means of achieving a safer nuclear future, whether that involves complete elimination or something short of that, is within a multilateral context that brings other nuclear weapon states along too. Nevertheless, it is clear that the UK should act as a model nuclear weapon state playing an active role in multilateral discussions proposing new initiatives for achieving further reductions; restrictions on

circumstances of possible use of nuclear weapons; adjustments in doctrines; and other confidence-building measures.

4.1.6 UK nuclear weapons doctrine, over and above possession, also has a significant impact on international stability. Current doctrine refers to use only as a last resort in the supreme national interest within international law but would appear to allow for the preemptive (or perhaps even preventive) use of nuclear weapons against a non-nuclear weapon state, in order to forestall a significant threat being delivered against the UK or its forces. The contentious aspect of this approach is that the scope of potential use of nuclear force by the UK in relation to non-nuclear weapon states inevitably weakens the argument that other states should not enjoy the same advantages. The emergence of a military doctrine of preventive war, which has no basis in international law, underlines the importance of this concern.

4.1.7 In the new international security environment the UK's present nuclear doctrine requires reappraisal to ensure that it remains credible; is wholly consistent with this country's legal and political obligations; and is compatible with long-term international security. For example, further clarification is required in relation to the UK's negative security assurance not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear-armed states. It is vital to ensure that the doctrine buttresses non-proliferation objectives, rather than works against them.

4.1.8 The 'sub-strategic' role of Trident must also be clarified within such a reappraisal, to clarify that its function is pre-strategic (that its use would signal that 'last resort' has all but been reached), rather than 'war fighting' (i.e. used to achieve military objectives).

## **4.2 A non-nuclear future**

4.2.1 If the UK were to divest itself of its nuclear weapons unilaterally it could be in a similar position to that of Germany and Japan: a non-nuclear-armed state that is nevertheless capable of using its enrichment and reprocessing capability to develop nuclear weapons in the future if necessary, albeit at great expense and delay, and which is allied to nuclear-armed US and France. The most obvious impact on the UK's military power would be in relation to its freedom of action against nuclear-armed adversaries. For instance, would a non-nuclear-armed UK be prepared to confront a nuclear-armed dictator (or one armed with significant chemical and biological weapons (CBW) capability) who was threatening our vital interests overseas? But, as Sir Michael Quinlan says: "*... it is scarcely easier to assign high probability to any scenario now discernible in terms of specific actors, places and issues in which it would be important for the United Kingdom to have its own nuclear capability with the United States not closely engaged.*"

4.2.2 The multilateral position would be to retain a nuclear weapons capability pending an assessment that there were no longer any other WMD-armed states that posed a direct threat to the UK or its vital national interests. Preferably, this assessment would be underpinned by a universal international treaty regime preventing the possession of nuclear, as well as chemical and biological, weapons and which provided for rigorous verifiable and enforceable compliance.

### 4.3 Non-state actors

4.3.1 Consideration must be given to the possibility that non-state actors may acquire nuclear weapons or radioactive devices (dirty bombs) in the foreseeable future and the implication this has for the argument that nuclear deterrence preserves international stability. In recent years terror movements have blurred the boundaries between state and non-state actors. Such groups have not only had the support of states, but had significant power within states and over quasi state apparatus. There are serious questions about whether it is possible to deter regimes from assisting terrorists in the procurement of nuclear devices.

4.3.2 If this were to occur, the ethical dilemma becomes acute. If a non-state terror group is used to target London with a nuclear device, who is our foe? Any evidence is likely to leave at least reasonable doubt as to the level of state involvement. Would it be reasonable for the UK to retaliate against countries we believe may have assisted the terrorists? Would we risk tens or even hundreds of thousands of lives on the basis of intelligence, particularly after the flawed intelligence assessments which led to the invasion of Iraq?

4.3.3 In order to justify a nuclear weapons capability for defence against a nuclear threat by a non-state actor, considerations must include how terrorists might acquire a nuclear capability, and how a national nuclear deterrent might be applied to reduce such a threat.

4.3.4 There is evidence that extreme terrorist organisations have attempted to acquire nuclear material. The dangers of nuclear acquisition by such organisations derives from the possibility of fissile material or actual weapons being transferred for either financial or ideological reasons. We know that dirty bombs can be manufactured and used by terrorists, however, experts appear to believe they are more likely to cause mass panic rather than high numbers of casualties. Very few experts believe that it will be possible in the foreseeable future for terrorist organisations independently to manufacture a fission bomb.

4.3.5 Dr. Brian Jones, who until his retirement was a deputy director on the Defence Intelligence Staff and who gave evidence to the Hutton Inquiry, wrote recently *“the creation of the conditions for such [nuclear] explosions in a device that is small enough to be transported or delivered as a bomb or warhead is very demanding of all the many scientific disciplines involved”*. These disciplines include *“complex physics, chemistry, materials science, electronics and engineering”*. Jones concludes that: *“the development of even a single nuclear weapon would be a major, perhaps impossible, challenge for a terrorist group acting entirely independently of a state. Such a group might be able to assemble some sort of improvised device if it was given, or stole, certain critical materials and devices, but this would be unlikely to produce an explosion with the ferocity of the bangs we associate with state programmes”*. To summarise, it would be highly challenging for a terrorist group independent of a state to produce a nuclear bomb due to the ‘many scientific disciplines involved’ and that although stolen materials could facilitate the production of an improvised device this would not have a explosive capacity comparable to state nuclear weapons.

4.3.6 Thus the barriers to non-state actors developing nuclear weapons are extremely high, although this is not necessarily the case for chemical and biological weapons.

4.3.7 It would appear reasonable to conclude that it is highly unlikely that non-state actors will be able to produce a nuclear weapon unless a nuclear weapon state provides active assistance or is no longer able to control its own institutions and facilities. This was a real concern a decade ago in the states of the former Soviet Union but there are now more effective controls in place. There are concerns, however, about the security of nuclear facilities in Pakistan and North Korea.

4.3.8 The United States and Russia still have a large number of nuclear weapons, and an even larger stockpile of materials which require protection. Russia has a resource problem in safeguarding old tactical weapons which may not have permissive action link locks. There is also a particular worry about the safety of Pakistan's weapons. Some extremist terror organisations operate illegally from Pakistan, and the country has suffered instability in the past. We should therefore endeavour to improve international co-operation in the storage and transportation of fissile material, both civil and military, so as to reduce still further any nuclear threat from non-state actors.

4.3.9 While nuclear deterrence is feasible between two nuclear weapon states, it is more difficult to formulate the logical basis for deterrence when one or more of the parties is a non-state actor. France is the first nuclear power to attempt to set out a doctrine of deterrence against a terror threat. President Chirac, speaking at L'Île Longue on 19th January 2006 described the new French approach, which was somewhat obscure. On the one hand he said that France's nuclear weapons might be used against a state which used terrorist means to attack France, but on the other he said that nuclear deterrence was not aimed at dissuading fanatic terrorists. US doctrine would appear to assume that in certain circumstances rogue states can be held responsible for the action of terror organisations.

4.3.10 Given the nature and objectives of terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, we believe that it is very unlikely that nuclear weapons could deter or dissuade terrorists themselves from using weapons of mass destruction. Furthermore, it is possible to construct realistic scenarios in which a nuclear-armed terrorist movement would welcome a counter attack on its host state. A disproportionate response, even against a general population, may serve terrorist causes, given that it may engender greater support for the movement.

4.3.11 We must accept that if the UK decides to renew Trident in the absence of any convincing adversary but as an insurance policy for extreme threats, it will be difficult for the UK to argue that other states which may also consider that they face such threats should not acquire nuclear weapons. This in turn increases the probability, however low, that nuclear weapons or fissionable material may ultimately be obtained by non-state actors. Clearly, this should not determine the decision on Trident but is a factor which must be taken into account.

## **Proliferation**

### **5.1 Quantifying the problem**

5.1.1 A large number of states are not capable of developing nuclear weapons and have no need to. Others are members of regional nuclear free zone arrangements: those covered by the Tlatelolco Treaty; Rarotonga Treaty; Bangkok Treaty; Pelindaba Treaty. In addition to Nuclear Weapons Free Zones there are treaties banning the deployment of nuclear weapons in Antarctica, Mongolia, on the seabed, and in outer space. Being a member of a nuclear alliance or having good relations with major nuclear powers may also help restrain proliferation through security guarantees, such as is the case for Germany and Japan. Nevertheless, most industrialised nations today have the technical capability to develop nuclear weapons within several years if the decision to do so were made: 44 states have nuclear research or power reactors.

5.1.2 There are a small number of states which could generate major proliferation problems through triggering or accelerating a regional arms race, for instance Saudi Arabia and Egypt in response to Iran, or South Korea and Japan in response to North Korea. Each new nuclear proliferator is likely to cause several of its geo-strategic rivals to reconsider their position. According to Kofi Annan: *“We are approaching a point at which the erosion of the non-proliferation regime could become irreversible and result in a cascade of proliferation.”*

### **5.2 Controls**

5.2.1 Arms control provides rules, transparency and the opportunity to establish the facts about possible violations through impartial international monitoring and inspection. The NPT prohibits all but the five state parties from possessing nuclear weapons. This Treaty and its Additional Protocol, along with supplier controls on the export of nuclear-sensitive materials, has helped to *contain* proliferation significantly without being able to *prevent* the determined proliferators. India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea remain outside the Treaty.

5.2.2 The arms race in quantitative terms has stopped and reductions implemented (Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), Strategic Offensive Reduction Treaty (SORT) etc) but nuclear weapons continue to play important roles in the defence postures of each possessor and there is no sign that any are seriously considering negotiations which could lead to complete disarmament. At the end of the 2000 NPT Review Conference the nuclear weapon states agreed 13 practical steps towards the goal of complete nuclear disarmament. These included: the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT); negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) with a view to their conclusion within five years; the Conference on Disarmament to establish a body with a mandate to deal with nuclear disarmament; and preserving and strengthening the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Since 2000, the latter has been abrogated by the US and none of the other objectives has been achieved.

5.2.3 Elsewhere, new arms control measures have been launched. For example, the Proliferation Security Initiative, promoted by the US, though not a legally-binding treaty, aims to interdict the movement of WMD-related material. There has also been UNSC

Resolution 1540 (2004) which aims to strengthen domestic protection and export control of any WMD-relevant material, and emphasises denying capability to non-state actors (it was passed under Chapter VII, and is binding on all states). In relation to ballistic missiles customarily seen as the delivery mode of greatest concern the Hague Code of Conduct (HCOC) has been added to the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) as another voluntary inter-state agreement that seeks to constrain their proliferation.

### **5.3 The way forward**

5.3.1 The multilateral, treaty-based approach is the most effective means of tackling proliferation. The challenge is to attempt to address the acknowledged weaknesses of the multilateral non-proliferation regime without abandoning the principles upon which it is founded and to which we subscribe: to update and strengthen and to make it relevant to new and emerging security threats. Our policy instruments need to be recalibrated not consigned to the dustbin. Strong political will is required to implement robust measures of verification and to enforce compliance.

5.3.2 We cannot afford simply to remain idle in the hope that the inherent pressures within the nuclear non-proliferation regime do not cause a major breakdown in proliferation control. We need to chart a course together with states outside the NPT towards a world in which nuclear weapons are marginalised to a point where they no longer play any, or at least any significant, part in international affairs.

## **Conclusion**

6.0.1 Given that the Trident nuclear weapons system has a limited lifespan, and there is a lengthy procurement process for any potential replacement, the UK Government claimed that a decision on replacement is required in the near future. This is placed in context by the June 2006 report by the Defence Select Committee on *The Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent*, which states that no *binding* decision on Trident needs to be made before 2014. Blair's decision to commit himself to a White Paper by the end of this year has demonstrated his government's contempt for consultation on this issue. At the same time, the Prime Minister and Chancellor's rival posturing is stifling the national debate on Trident's replacement. It looks increasingly like the reverse order will be followed, with the decision coming first and the justification then being developed in support. Although Ministers have confirmed Parliament will be allowed to vote on this issue this year, the Defence Secretary has refused to state that a vote would be taken on the substantive question of whether or not Britain retains a nuclear deterrent. There are very serious doubts as to whether there will be sufficient time for a full national debate on the basis of all the relevant information and analysis prior to the vote.

6.0.2 The Liberal Democrats fear that for the sake of political expediency the Government is running headlong into a decision which should be considered over a much longer timescale. We believe that any decision must be based on full consideration of the international political and strategic context, threat assessment, cost assessments, proliferation implications and alternative options. It must address the future role and relevance of nuclear deterrence in the light of future threats, its geopolitical impact and the consequences for international peace and security. We believe any replacement must also strictly conform with UK international legal obligations.

6.0.3 This paper is the first stage in the process of formulating Liberal Democrat policy on the future of the Trident system. We believe that this is a decision with enormous domestic and international implication which cannot and should not be rushed.

6.0.4 Following the consultation period for this paper, this group will begin discussions both within and outside of the Party on further issues relating to the Trident system, and other systems. This will include consideration of costs and the implications for the UK's defence budget and wider public expenditure. The group will draw on the outcome of the Party's consultation session in September as well as the report of the Defence Select Committee published in June and the Government's response to it. The group will produce a background paper on the issues and set out the available options. There will also be an accompanying motion to enable the Party to address the question of whether the Trident system should be replaced and what that replacement might be.