

Britain's Weapons of Mass Destruction

An Assessment by Greenpeace, April 2003

1. The UK is in material breach of the NPT

For 31 years Britain has failed to implement its commitment to disarm under Article VI of the NPT. Far from pursuing negotiations in good faith, the UK has yet to participate in any treaty negotiations on achieving global nuclear disarmament whatsoever.

Instead, the UK has given its implicit backing to the US strategy of pre-emptive war against so called “rogue states”, suspected of possessing weapons of mass destruction, by failing to condemn it. The UK has also stood by, while India, Pakistan and Israel develop nuclear arsenals and fail to abide by UN Security Council Resolutions calling upon them to disarm.

The UK has continued to cooperate actively on nuclear weapons related issues with the United States, while the Bush Administration has torn up some international treaties and undermined others.

- **The UK has adopted a more aggressive military strategy, in line with the Bush Administration**

Far from a “diminishing role” for nuclear weapons in military strategy, the UK has signed up for the US strategy of pre-emptive attacks against states suspected of possessing weapons of mass destruction.

British Secretary of State for Defence Geoff Hoon refused to rule out the use of UK nuclear weapons in the war with Iraq.¹

According to Hoon, “the long standing British government policy that if our forces – if our people – were threatened by weapons of mass destruction we would reserve the right to use appropriate proportionate responses which might... in extreme circumstances include the use of nuclear weapons.”²

¹ Secretary of State for Defence Geoff Hoon MP, House of Commons, Official Report, 3 March 2003, Column 578.

² Secretary of State for Defence Geoff Hoon MP, speaking on the Jonathan Dimbleby programme, ITV, 24 March 2002.

- **Britain cooperates closely with the US on nuclear weapons and military strategy**

Prime Minister Tony Blair's number one foreign policy goal is "to remain the closest ally of the United States".³

Joint US-UK Working Groups covering all aspects of nuclear weapons policy and in recent years hundreds of meetings have taken place.⁴ The UK has participated in US sub-critical tests at the Nevada Test Site and British nuclear weapons scientists at Aldermaston cooperate closely on all aspects of nuclear weapons design, development and production with their counterparts in the United States and France.

- **The UK is pursuing options for new nuclear weapons**

Instead of making an unequivocal commitment to accomplish the elimination of its nuclear arsenal, the UK is pursuing the option of developing new nuclear weapons in future.

According to Defence Minister Lewis Moonie, "Aldermaston must maintain the capability to design a successor to Trident."⁵ Britain is investing in substantial new facilities at Aldermaston.⁶

- **The UK is cooperating with the US missile defence programme**

Although the 2000 NPT Final Document called for the ABM Treaty to be preserved and strengthened, Britain has given its full backing for the US missile defence project, including allowing the US to use bases at Fylingdales and Menwith Hill in Yorkshire.

- **The UK has made no progress on implementing Article VI since 1998**

The UK has made clear that intends to do little more to implement the 2000 NPT Final Document. According to British Ambassador Peter Jenkins, "Having reduced our nuclear weapons to a single system at the minimum level necessary for the UK's national security, further unilateral steps we can take now without compromising that security are limited."⁷

³ Tony Blair, "Britain's Place in the World", speech to Foreign Office Conference in London, 7 January 2003.

⁴ House of Commons, Official Report, 25 Jan 2002, Column 1116W.

⁵ Michael Evans, "Trident to stay in front line for 20 more years", *The Times*, 30 December 2002, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/printFriendly/0,1-2-527364.00.html>.

⁶ Mark Townsend, "Secret Plan for N-bomb factory", *The Observer*, 16 June 2002.

⁷ Opening Statements, United Kingdom: Ambassador Peter Jenkins, NPT PrepCom, 9 April 2002.

According to Defence Minister Lewis Moonie, Britain intends to keep Trident “to the end of its useful life, a minimum of 30 years”.⁸

2. British participation in the US attack on Iraq is a double standard

The UK claims that it had to join the US attack on Iraq to tackle Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, whilst remaining silent on the existing nuclear arsenals of Israel, India and Pakistan. Although the UK calls for Israel, India and Pakistan to join the NPT as non-nuclear-weapon states, it continues to sell arms to all three countries.

- **Selling arms to Israel**

The UK sells arms to Israel even though Israel remains in breach of many Security Council resolutions.

On 8 July 2002, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw MP announced that he would grant export licenses for components of F16 fighter jets to the US, which were destined for export to Israel.⁹

The export of any equipment, which could be used by Israel against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories had previously been banned in Britain.

The F16 is the most likely delivery vehicle for Israel’s air launched nuclear weapons and similar aircraft have been reportedly used to attack targets in the Occupied Territories.¹⁰

- **Arming India and Pakistan**

Britain has also continued to sell arms to India and Pakistan, despite them continuing to develop and deploy their nuclear arsenals.

A joint report by the UK Parliament’s foreign affairs, defence, trade and industry and international development committees has condemned the British government’s failure to block arms sales to India and Pakistan at the height of nuclear tensions between the two countries over Kashmir.¹¹

Between December 2001 and April 2002, the UK issued 101 export licences to India for military aircraft and related equipment and 30 licences for Pakistan.¹²

⁸ Michael Evans, “Trident to stay in front line for 20 more years”, The Times, 30 December 2002, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/printFriendly/0,,1-2-527364.00.html>.

⁹ House of Commons, Official Report, 8 Jul 2002, Column 654W.

¹⁰ BBC News, “Straw defends Kashmir arms sales”, 19 July 2002, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/2137350.stm

¹¹ First Joint Report of the Defence, Foreign Affairs, International Development and Trade and Industry Committees, Strategic Export Controls: Annual Report for 2000, “Licensing Policy and Prior Parliamentary Scrutiny”, HC 718 of 2001-02, 19 July 2002,

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200102/cmselect/cmfaff/718/71802.htm>

¹² *Ibid.*

3. Britain must reaffirm its commitment to the NPT

- Tony Blair should make an unequivocal commitment to accomplish the elimination of Britain's nuclear weapons.**

Britain must confirm that Trident will be phased out and that it will not be replaced. Work on options for replacing Trident and work to revamp British nuclear weapons facilities must stop immediately.

- Britain should reaffirm its commitment to the CTBT**

Tony Blair should disassociate himself from Bush's position on the CTBT. Cooperation between Britain and the US on sharing nuclear information should stop and Britain should not participate in further US subcritical tests.

- Britain should implement a diminished role for nuclear weapons in its military policy**

Britain should disassociate itself from the Bush Administration's nuclear posture. It should make a clear and legally binding commitment that British nuclear weapons will not be used against non-nuclear-weapon states.

- Britain should stop cooperating with the US missile defence system**

Britain should refuse to allow the US to use the British bases at Menwith Hill and Fylingdales as part of the missile defence system.

- Britain should disassociate itself from the Bush Administration's policy of pre-emptive war**

Britain should withdraw its silent support for the Bush Administration's doctrine of pre-emptive war against suspected proliferators. Instead the UK should work to strengthen the treaties concerning weapons of mass destruction: the NPT, the CWC, the BWC and the CTBT.