

Feature Articles

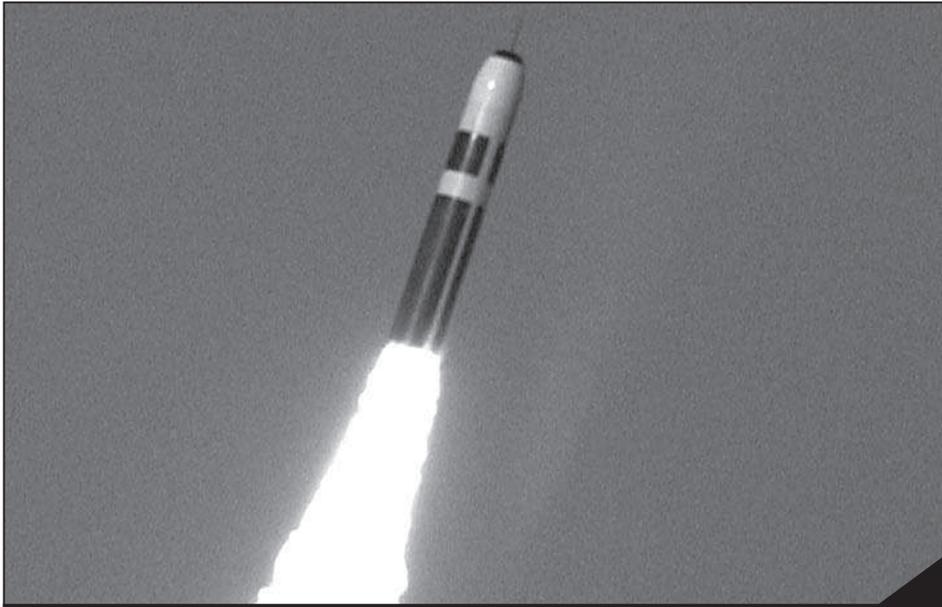


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The UK's Trident nuclear weapons system - a government decision on renewal/ replacement is due in this parliament

Aldermaston's new nuclear weapon project - time to get active!

Dominick Jenkins argues that more scientists and engineers need to get active to help stop the UK government undermining attempts at nuclear disarmament.

In the late 1980s I worked in an attic office just off Covent Garden for a group of scientists and engineers called VERTIC. They proved that it is impossible to hide the distinctive seismological signature of a nuclear weapons test. Their work was a crucial part in discrediting claims that it would be foolish for nuclear powers to sign up to a ban on nuclear testing as you couldn't tell whether the Russians, or the Chinese, were not secretly testing. It was all incredibly important. Without being able to keep on testing nuclear weapons, the nuclear powers would not be able to keep on modernising their nuclear arsenals and new countries would not be able to make the modern nuclear weapons which can be fitted on a long ranged missile.

Then came Gorbachev's mission to break down the ice of the Cold War. This was the beginning of a positive circle in which diplomacy, citizen action, political initiatives, disarmament treaties, and verification reinforced each other. The world's nuclear arsenals have been reduced from 70,000 nuclear warheads to 27,000 today. The non-nuclear states

demand that nuclear weapons states make good their legal commitment under the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to carry out nuclear disarmament and, specifically, to sign a Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) which they did in 1996. The world's nations had shown they could co-operate to end the nuclear threat - the impossible had happened.

The test ban is now threatened. Co-operation between UK, French, and US nuclear weapons laboratories has intensified. The result is we are now on the edge of developing a new generation of "more usable" nuclear weapons. Moreover, according to the leaked 2002 US nuclear posture review, the US now plans to use nuclear weapons pre-emptively against countries developing chemical and biological weapons, against deep bunkers, against mobile missiles, and in the event of "surprising military developments". Finally, the UK's Trident nuclear weapons system has been transformed into a weapon which can assist in securing Britain's "vital interests" overseas (oil, trade, and investment) and the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston is being preparing to build a new nuclear bomb to replace it.

Greenpeace UK, as part of Greenpeace's global disarmament campaign, is launching a campaign to stop research and development of a new British bomb. We are calling for the UK to:

- Take Trident submarines off patrol and remove their nuclear warheads to an internationally monitored storage site;
- Abandon immediately all plans to build a new nuclear weapon;
- Work closely with other key states to strengthen existing disarmament treaties and to restart global multilateral disarmament.

This is a position which everyone can unite behind. It provides reassurance to those who believe that it would be unwise to be completely without a nuclear option while other countries continue to have nuclear weapons, while placing Britain at the forefront of restarting the multi-lateral disarmament which alone can ward off the return of a Cold War situation, in which we are once again threatened by the thousands of nuclear weapons still retained by the major nuclear powers.

This is a struggle we have to win. The test ban is a great achievement. It shows that the world can co-operate to deal with the nuclear danger. We cannot allow it to be undermined. To win, we urgently need the support of British scientists and engineers. Right away we need scientists to demand that the government publish all the studies it has carried out on the effects of building a new British atomic bomb. We need the help of scientists to understand the significance of what is being done at Aldermaston. What is the significance of the replacement of the existing laser with one a thousand times more powerful and of the purchase of computers that will have 900 times the computing power of their predecessors? Most vitally we need scientists to explain the importance of the CTBT and the NPT and why we should not be undermining them.

Greenpeace UK's briefing, *Where are the UK's Nuclear Ambitions Taking Us?*, and details of the campaign can be found at : <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk>.

SGR has endorsed the Greenpeace position, as defined in the three bullet points above.

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