

## TACTICAL TRIDENT

It is not credible to threaten a small nuclear power with an apocalyptic all-out assault of 48 nuclear warheads each eight times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb—just in order to protect an invasion force.

That is why in Nov. 1993 the then Defence Secretary Malcolm Rifkind announced a new role for a single-warhead Trident missile ('Tactical Trident') which could be fired to deliver 'an unmistakable message of our willingness to defend our **vital interests** to the utmost.' (*Brassey's Defence Yearbook*, 1994) (See Milan Rai, *Tactical Trident*, 1995.)

More details were given in the military journal *International Defense Review* (Sept. 1994): 'At what might be termed the "upper end" of the usage spectrum, [Tactical Trident] could be used in a conflict involving large-scale forces (including British ground and air forces, such as the 1990-91 Gulf War) to reply to **enemy nuclear strikes**. Secondly, they could be used in a similar setting, but to reply to enemy use of weapons of mass destruction, such as **bacteriological or chemical weapons**, for which the British possess no like-for-like retaliatory capability.'

'Thirdly, they could be used in a **demonstrative role**, ie aimed at a non-critical, possibly [!] uninhabited area, with the message that if the country concerned pursued its present course of action, nuclear weapons will be aimed at a high-priority target. Finally, there is the **punitive role**, were a country has committed an act, despite specific warning that to do so would incur a nuclear strike.'

Only one of these scenarios involves an enemy with nuclear weapons.

## VITAL INTERESTS, NUCLEAR THREATS

These are important facts missing from the debate about Trident renewal. Simply: one of Trident's central functions is to guarantee the economic and financial privileges of privileged elites—'vital interests'—by threatening countries around the world with nuclear destruction.

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# TRIDENT

## NUCLEAR THREATS AND 'VITAL INTERESTS'

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### BLAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

On Mon. 4 Dec., Tony Blair announced his Government's intention to retain nuclear weapons indefinitely, by replacing the submarines that carry Britain's Trident nuclear missiles. <<http://tinyurl.com/y6fogq>>

JNV opposes the replacement of Trident. We oppose the development, use or threatened use of nuclear weapons (or any other weapons of mass destruction) by Britain or by any other state or group.

### THE RISKS

Tony Blair justifies keeping nuclear weapons past 2024 by referring to three specific threats:

- (1) a 'major nuclear threat to our strategic interests' might emerge;
- (2) there is 'a new and potentially hazardous threat' from states such as North Korea and Iran;
- (3) 'there is a possible connection between some of those states and international terrorism'. <<http://tinyurl.com/y6fogq>>

In other words, China or Russia may become unfriendly to Britain's 'strategic interests'; there are anti-Western 'rogue states' in the world engaged in WMD proliferation; and they might supply weapons to figures such as bin Laden, who has declared his determination to acquire WMD.

Blair does not explain why non-nuclear methods are inadequate in dealing with these risks, or why other countries do not also have the right to use nuclear weapons to manage such risks. On the issue of state-sponsored nuclear terrorism, Blair knows perfectly well that the high-level US 'Gilmore Commission' concluded in 1999 that the likelihood of a WMD state supplying such weapons to a terror group was 'low'. (pp. 17-18; pdf <[tinyurl.com/yneqyn](http://tinyurl.com/yneqyn)>)

Blair also fails to define Britain's 'strategic interests'. This is his most important omission.



## PROTECTING 'VITAL INTERESTS'

Blair's 4 Dec. speech to the House of Commons ends by claiming that the Trident decision is based on 'what we think is in the long-term **strategic interests** of our nation and its security.'

Blair has also published an official justification of his Trident decision, a 'White Paper', which uses the slightly different phrase '**vital interests**' (20 times in 40 pages). In the foreword, Blair writes: 'An independent deterrent ensures our **vital interests** will be safeguarded.'

The White Paper says the UK's nuclear weapons are designed 'to deter and prevent nuclear blackmail and acts of aggression against our **vital interests** that cannot be countered by other means.' (p. 17. The White Paper is a 1Mb pdf download: <<http://tinyurl.com/ug5od>>)

This is the constant refrain throughout the White Paper: nuclear weapons are there to protect Britain's 'vital interests'. How strange, then, that this key concept of 'vital interests' is **not defined** in the White Paper, or in its appendices, or in Tony Blair's speech.

## VITAL INTERESTS OUTSIDE EUROPE

If we look back to New Labour's 1998 'Strategic Defence Review' (SDR), this said that Britain's nuclear arsenal should be the minimum needed to 'deter any threat to our **vital interests**'. (Ch. 4, para. 61. The whole SDR is a 2Mb pdf <[tinyurl.com/yl5mcr](http://tinyurl.com/yl5mcr)>, Ch. 4 is at <[tinyurl.com/ylv6tw](http://tinyurl.com/ylv6tw)>.)

The SDR stated baldly that 'our vital interests are **not confined to Europe**.' (Ch. 2, para. 9)

It set out the main elements: 'Our economy is founded on **international trade**. **Exports** form a higher proportion of Gross Domestic Product than for the US, Japan, Germany or France. We **invest more of our income abroad** than any other major economy. Our closest economic partners are the European Union and the US but **our investment in the developing world** amounts to the combined total of France, Germany and Italy. **Foreign investment into the UK** also provides nearly 20% of manufacturing jobs. We depend on foreign countries for supplies of **raw materials**, above all **oil**.' (Ch. 2, para. 9)

So: Britain's 'vital interests' include exports, investments abroad, foreign investment into the UK, and imported raw materials (particularly 'oil'), as well as national survival.

The SDR was clear: 'Outside Europe our interests are most likely to be affected by events in the Gulf... We have particularly important national interests and close friendships in the Gulf.' (Ch. 2 para. 40)

## PROTECTING EXPEDITIONARY FORCES—PAST

Britain's nuclear forces therefore must have a role in the Middle East.

In the run-up to the 2003 Iraq war, then Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon stated three times that British nuclear weapons could be used against Iraq, for example if British troops were threatened by chemical or biological weapons. (Hugo Young, *Guardian*, 6 June 2002 <[tinyurl.com/lyktavt](http://tinyurl.com/lyktavt)>)

In the run-up to the 1991 Iraq war, then Prime Minister John Major was asked if 'a nuclear device' would be used against Iraq 'if that is necessary for the protection of our own troops' from chemical or biological attack. He replied: 'I do not envisage needing to use the sanction that he suggests.' (*Hansard*, 15 Jan. 1991 <[tinyurl.com/ykrvre](http://tinyurl.com/ykrvre)>) The option was left open.

These nuclear threats were designed to protect British expeditionary forces in the Middle East, or, from another point of view, to prevent regional powers deterring British invasion forces from forcing their way into the region. **Nuclear threats gave Britain freedom of action.**

## PROTECTING EXPEDITIONARY FORCES—FUTURE

This role for nuclear weapons is hinted at in the Trident White Paper, which says: 'Over the next 20 to 50 years, one or more states could also emerge that possess a more limited nuclear capability, but one that poses a grave threat to our **vital interests**. We must not allow such states to threaten our national security or **to deter us and the international community from taking the action required to maintain regional and global security**. The UK's continued possession of a nuclear deterrent provides an assurance that we cannot be subjected in future to nuclear blackmail or a level of threat which would put at risk our vital interests or **fundamentally constrain our foreign and security policy options**.'

Iranian nuclear weapons, if they are developed, might deter Britain from invading the Persian Gulf region. Nuclear weapons can neutralize this 'constraint', and help Britain to retain control of its 'vital interests'.

There are problems with using nuclear weapons in this way, however.