

Trident replacement? Think Again

Dr Nick Ritchie, Senior Lecturer (International Security), University of York

July 2016

Article prepared exclusively for the European Leadership Network

The government seems likely to hold a vote in the House of Commons on the Successor ballistic missile submarine programme in the next few weeks before the summer recess begins on July 21. The vote will be primarily symbolic. It was originally construed as seeking parliamentary approval for a 'main gate' investment decision to move the Successor programme to the 'demonstration and manufacture' phase of procurement. The Main Gate Business Case, to use Ministry of Defence vernacular, constitutes the main investment decision where the MoD commits to the full cost of a programme and contracts are negotiated with lead developers. The 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review, however, said government planned to move "away from a traditional single 'Main Gate' approach, which is not appropriate for a programme of this scale and complexity, to a staged investment programme."¹ This reflects ongoing challenges with the programme's management, costings and resourcing that has resulted in a decision to establish a new MoD team responsible for 'all aspects of the defence nuclear enterprise'.² Consequently, the promised parliamentary vote has been downgraded to a vote on 'the principal of the renewal of the deterrent'.³ Nevertheless, a vote is coming and with it the question once again of whether the UK should stay in the nuclear weapons business or rethink. I will summarise here four inter-related reasons to rethink: security, risk, cost, and militarism.

Security

Trident replacement beginning with the procurement of a new fleet of ballistic missile submarines is generally justified in terms of security. This has two parts: first, nuclear deterrence works and, second, nuclear deterrence is necessary now and for the foreseeable future because we cannot know what threats the future holds. Together these two claims form a narrative of 'nuclear absolutism': nuclear deterrence works *absolutely* to prevent war between the major powers, and nuclear deterrence is *absolutely* essential to UK security.⁴ This is captured in the way the UK Trident nuclear weapon system is referred to as 'the deterrent' as if it deters by virtue of its existence. This narrative does three things: it

¹ HM Government, *Strategic Defence and Security Review*, Cm 9161 (London: HMSO, 2015), p. 36.

² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³ Michael Fallon, *Hansard*, House of Commons, 27 June 2016.

⁴ Michael Quinlan, *The future of nuclear weapons: policy for Western possessors*, 1993; Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) (2006) *The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent*, Cm 6994 (London: HMSO, 2006), p. 6.

shuts down debate about the security effects of nuclear weapons by implying they are positive, obvious, unproblematic and intrinsic to the weapons themselves, it thereby forecloses debate about the realities of nuclear violence if deterrence breaks down, and it provides a timeless (and universal) rationale for nuclear weapons as a common-sense response to ‘uncertainty’.

This absolutism is fundamentally misleading. It masks the inherent contingencies, risks, and realities of practicing nuclear deterrence in the name of national security. It frames retention of nuclear weapons as a false choice between security risk vs. no security risk and it reproduces a particular form of British militarism. The security benefits provided by UK nuclear weapons are far from absolute, the *added* deterrence value of nuclear weapons in terms of their contribution to war prevention is contested, and the risks of nuclear violence are significant. Consideration of investment in a further generation of nuclear weaponry should be clear-eyed about what nuclear weapons can and cannot do. The starting point must be to overcome the nuclear amnesia that now characterises the UK debate and revisit Cold War and post-Cold War studies on the contingency and risk of nuclear deterrence in order to judge the added security and insecurity effects of a UK nuclear arsenal. Space limits a detailed consideration but a number of points need making in this context.

Nuclear weapons undoubtedly have the potential to induce caution and thereby alter the behaviour of other political actors. However, historical and psychological research shows the political effect of deterrence is *not* an automatic outcome of the deployment of nuclear weapons or something intrinsic to the weapons themselves.⁵ Numerous studies have shown that there are fundamental uncertainties associated with the theory and practice of nuclear deterrence.⁶ They show that the capacity to deter is contextual and therefore difficult and uncertain. It requires an understanding of an adversary’s motivation, world view, resolve, and cost-benefit calculus, which is becoming increasingly problematic as the type of actors, capabilities, cultures, contexts, and intentions evolves and expands.⁷

Research has shown that nuclear weapons do not induce a common and rational logic of escalation and control between nuclear-armed adversaries in a crisis. Instead, nuclear weapons and the practice of nuclear deterrence can incentivise risk taking and intensify crises. History suggests that nuclear weapons have the potential to foster violent conflict as well as the potential to deter. The deep emotional dread and raw fear associated with

⁵ See Jervis, R., *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); George, A. and Smoke, R., *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), and MccGwire, M., ‘Deterrence: The problem not the solution’, *International Affairs*, 62: 1, 1986, pp. 55-70.

⁶ Adler, E., ‘Complex Deterrence in the Asymmetric-Warfare Era’, in T. V. Paul, M. Morgan and J. Wirtz (eds.) *Complex Deterrence: Strategy in the Global Age* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2009), pp. 88-90.

⁷ See Bowen, W., ‘Deterrence and Asymmetry: Non-State Actors and Mass Casualty Terrorism’ in I. Kenyon and I. Simpson (eds.) *Deterrence and the New Global Security Environment* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 50-51; Booth, K., *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (London, Croom Helm, 1979). Jervis, R., ‘The Confrontation between Iraq and the US: Implications for the Theory and Practice of Deterrence’, *European Journal of International Relations* 9: 2, 2003, pp. 322-23; George, A. and Smoke, R., *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974) Chapter 17.

nuclear threats in severe crises can generate unintended outcomes.⁸ A number of studies have explored nuclear near misses where the risk of the collapse of conflict into nuclear violence was worryingly high, not least the Cuban Missile Crisis.⁹ There have been incidents where misperception and paranoia could have pushed humanity over the nuclear brink, including the Able Archer crisis in 1983. There have been episodes where the idea that the presence of nuclear weapons makes it somehow 'safe' to engage in conventional war because nuclear deterrence would prevent escalation has been severely tested, such as the India-Pakistan Kargil confrontation in 1999.¹⁰

Analysis of the Cold War nuclear confrontation shows that it was not the stable, predictable relationship of assured destruction it is often portrayed as today. It was highly dangerous, plagued by uncertainty, fuelled by worst-case assumptions and planning with very serious risks of a deliberate or inadvertent cataclysmic nuclear exchange.¹¹ General Lee Butler former head of US Strategic Command summed it up well in 1998: 'While we clung to the notion that nuclear war could be reliably deterred, Soviet leaders derived from their historical experience the conviction that such a war might be thrust upon them and if so, must not be lost. Driven by that fear, they took Herculean measures to fight and survive no matter the odds or the costs. Deterrence was a dialogue of the blind with the deaf'.¹²

The historical track record of nuclear deterrent threats is also mixed at best: nuclear coercion, or blackmail, has rarely if ever worked in practice;¹³ nuclear weapons have had little direct effect on the outcomes of extreme crises or deterred conflicts involving nuclear powers;¹⁴ and history demonstrates that the possession of nuclear weapons does not prevent regional aggression against the interests of nuclear weapon states.

Risk

The security benefits of nuclear weapons premised on the practice of nuclear deterrence are therefore not absolute but heavily contingent, and with that contingency comes the inescapable risk of nuclear use, or more appropriately nuclear violence. Proponents of nuclear deterrence might readily accept its contingency in practice by arguing that the risk of failure is very small. Yet the fallibility of nuclear deterrence is of paramount concern because even if the probability of something going wrong is small – either with nuclear weapons technology, organisational procedures, or the practice of nuclear deterrence in a

⁸ Burke, A., 'Nuclear reason: at the limits of strategy', *International Relations*, 23: 4, 2009, pp. 506-29.

⁹ Krepon, K., 'Can deterrence ever be stable?', *Survival*, 57: 3, 2015, pp. 111-32.

¹⁰ The most recent being Schlosser, E., *Command and Control: Nuclear Weapons, the Damascus Accident, and the Illusion of Control* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013).

¹¹ See Sagan, S., *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents, and Nuclear Weapons* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993); Pry, P., *War Scare: Russia and America and the Nuclear Brink* (Westport, CT, Praeger, 1999); Lebow, R. and Stein, J., *We all Lost the Cold War* (Princeton N.J., Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹² Butler, G., 'The Risks of Nuclear Deterrence: From Superpowers to Rogue Leaders', speech to the National Press Club, Washington, D.C., 2 February 1998.

¹³ Sechser, T. and Furhmann, M., 'Crisis Bargaining and Nuclear Blackmail', *International Organization*, 67: 1, 2013, p. 1

¹⁴ Kugler, J., 'Terror without deterrence', *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 28: 3, 1984, pp. 479-482.

crisis – the effects of the deliberate or accidental detonation of even a single modern nuclear weapon in a developed country promises to be catastrophic. Recent UN research shows that the human, environmental and economic effects of multiple nuclear detonations would be unmanageable.¹⁵ Evidence in the UK shows that the country would struggle to respond to an accident with a nuclear weapon.¹⁶ Recent environmental modelling shows that even a relatively modest nuclear exchange would have a catastrophic impact on the global climate caused by the tremendous amount of smoke released into the atmosphere.¹⁷ Moreover, the risk is not small. Studies have revealed the high risk of nuclear war during the Cold War. Economist Carl Lundgren’s recent modelling of the probability of nuclear war concludes that ‘The first sixty-six years of the nuclear age produced a 61 per cent chance of a nuclear war’.¹⁸ He states that this is equivalent to a 2.1 per cent chance per year, or an average frequency of one nuclear war every 47 years.

Supporters of UK nuclear weapons counter that the precise reason for deploying them is so that they will *never* be used. They are ‘political’ as opposed to ‘war-fighting’ weapons whose purpose is solely to deter (or the far more specious argument that they are ‘used’ everyday by virtue of existing). That might be the intent but the logic of nuclear deterrence rests on detailed, permanent and active plans, operational capabilities, organisational infrastructure and political will to detonate nuclear warheads on other countries (what Henry Nash called the ‘bureaucratization of homicide’¹⁹). Great lengths are gone to to ensure the Prime Minister can fire UK nuclear weapons with absolute certainty. Risk is a necessary feature of the system. The very logic of nuclear deterrence rests on the possibility of deliberate or uncontrolled escalation to nuclear violence. Nuclear deterrence is a dangerous game of nuclear brinkmanship and provocative threat making based on ‘threats that leave something to chance’ as Thomas Schelling put it – the chance being massive and indiscriminate nuclear violence.²⁰

Opportunity cost

¹⁵ Borrie, J. and Caughley, T., *An Illusion of Safety: Challenges of Nuclear Weapon Detonations for United Nations Humanitarian Coordination and Response* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2014).

¹⁶ Edwards, R., ‘Mock MoD nuclear emergencies “exposed life-threatening errors”’, *The Guardian*, 9 February 2016. Available at <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/09/mock-mod-nuclear-emergencies-exposed-life-threatening-errors>>.

¹⁷ For example, Toon, O., Robock, A. and Turco, R., ‘Environmental Consequences of Nuclear War’, *Physics Today*, December 2008, pp. 37-42; Mills, M., Toon, O., Turco, R., Kinnison, D., and Garcia, R., ‘Massive Global Ozone Loss Predicted Following Regional Nuclear Conflict’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 105: 14, 2008, pp. 5307-12. For an overview and further references see Starr, S., ‘Catastrophic Climatic Consequences of Nuclear Conflict’, research paper commissioned by the Independent Commission on Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament, October 2009.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 371 and 370.

¹⁹ Nash, H., ‘The Bureaucratization of Homicide’, in Thompson, E. P. and Smith, D. (eds.), *Protest and Survive*, (Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, 1980), pp. 62-74.

²⁰ Schelling, T., *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 187.

‘Providing nuclear deterrence’ remains one of MoD’s seven core Military Tasks, but it comes at an increasingly heavy price. The cost of the Successor programme has continued to rise, now set at £31billion with a £10billion contingency. Spending on the nuclear enterprise as a whole includes annual operating costs of around £2billion plus additional investment at Rolls Royce, the Faslane Naval Base, and the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) Aldermaston.²¹ This inevitably involves major opportunity costs and continues to raise questions about the wisdom of investing such huge sums in a system of limited security value. The Successor programme is set to be the biggest procurement programme for a generation at a time when the Royal Navy surface fleet is suffering from significant under-investment, the army is being cut to the bone, and when downward pressure on the defence budget looks set to return after the decision to leave to European Union. The MoD budget settlement in the 2015 Comprehensive Spending Review was based on a small increase of 1.0% over the current parliament to 2019/20 predicated on forecasts of annual GDP growth of 2.4%. That now looks far less likely if GDP contracts as a result of the Brexit decision as many expect.²² Moreover, Trident replacement is a bet on Scotland remaining in the Union. A decision to leave, perhaps through a Brexit-inspired second referendum, would add enormous costs to UK nuclear weapons programme if it were forced to construct replacement facilities for the submarine base at Faslane and warhead storage facility at Coulport south of the border.²³

UK and other armed forces have moved away from expensive single-mission military platforms to flexible, multi-use capabilities capable of performing a range of missions. This is significant in the context of the evolving international security environment in which UK armed forces operate. Whilst accepting that history is full of surprises, the truism of future uncertainty must be considered within the context of an environment where some significant security threats and risks are relatively clear, where known contingencies are important to plan for with limited defence resource, and where a nuclear weapons capability appears to be of limited relevance.²⁴ Threats to UK interests are ever more likely to arise from a complex and interdependent mix of environmental, economic, military and political sources of insecurity, including the effects of climate change, mass poverty and economic injustice, global pandemic diseases, mass migration and refugee flows, national governance and weak and failing states, international terrorism and asymmetric warfare, the spread of WMD and advanced conventional military technologies, ethnic and sectarian

²¹ For detail see Ritchie, N. and Ingram, P., ‘Feeding the ‘Monster’: Escalating Capital Costs for the Trident Successor Programme’, British American Security Information Council (BASIC), April 2016. Available at <<http://www.basicint.org/sites/default/files/Feeding-monster-April2016.pdf>>.

²² Chalmers, M., ‘Would a New SDSR be Needed After a Brexit Vote?’, Royal United Services Institute, June 2016. Available at <https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/chalmers_brexit_sdsr.final_.pdf>.

²³ Ainslie, J., ‘Trident: Nowhere to go’, Scottish CND, Glasgow, February 2012; House of Commons Scottish Affairs Committee, *The Referendum on Separation for Scotland: Terminating Trident – Days of Decades?* HC 676 (London: HMSO, 2012).

²⁴ Fitzsimmons, M., ‘The Problem of Uncertainty in Strategic Planning’, *Survival* 48: 4, 2006, pp. 131, 134.

nationalism and competition over access to key resources such as oil and water.²⁵ Future conflicts are likely to be complex and diverse. They will not be susceptible to purely military solutions and the use of military force in regional crises will be messy, indeterminate and of limited value. Western military solutions to crises will have to increasingly factor in the effect of the use of force on non-military dimensions of security to ensure legitimacy and lasting effectiveness. It is extremely unlikely that the level of military security threats arising from the interaction of this myriad of security factors will threaten the very survival of the British state, even though British and wider Western political and economic interests will undoubtedly be threatened, other nuclear-armed states may be involved, and future British governments may feel compelled to use military force in some instances. Second, future conflicts are likely to take the form of ‘hybrid wars’ – a combination of international and civil war that blends ‘terror, insurgency and war... sparking myriad, hybrid forms of conflict’.²⁶ These will be characterised by the absence of front lines or a clear distinction between civilians and combatants based on a fragmentation and decentralisation of organised violence that avoids major battles and directs most violence against civilians. Zones of peace and conflict will co-exist and it will not be possible to contain such wars territorially. Conflict will likely be fuelled by clashing political identities operating at local, national and transnational levels, expanding urban populations, poverty and sectarian politics.²⁷ The use of UK military force will have to be selective, flexible and minimise collateral damage if it is to be effective. Stability, security, peace-building and reconstruction tasks are likely to become core military missions alongside or even in place of combat operations.²⁸ Engaging in these types of missions effectively requires investment in people and capability from a finite defence resource. Like it or not, there are trade-offs and it is right to question the validity of a decision to invest such a substantial portion of that scarce resource into a nuclear weapon system of limited relevance to likely security threats and challenges.

Militarism

UK nuclear weapons are intimately connected to a collective sense of the national self – to conceptions of national identity and the idea of playing a particular role in the world. Nuclear weapons are tied to an enduring commitment to do ‘hard’ and well as ‘soft’ power (a gendered dichotomy if ever there was one) and to use military power as a self-proclaimed ‘force for good’ through expeditionary warfare. This permeates nuclear discourse and shapes understandings of nuclear weapons and international conflict. Successive governments in the post-Cold War period have tied continued possession of nuclear

²⁵ Snyder, C., ‘Contemporary Security and Strategy’, in C. Snyder (ed.) *Contemporary Security and Strategy*, 2nd edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 1-13.

²⁶ Arquilla, J., ‘The End of War as We Knew it?’, *Third World Quarterly* 28: 2, 1999. p. 369; Kaldor, M., *New and Old Wars* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 6

²⁷ McCuen, J., ‘Hybrid Wars’, *Military Review*, LXXXVIII: 2, March/April 2008, pp. 107-113; Wood, D., ‘U.S. Facing a New World of Warfare’, *Baltimore Sun*, 17 March 2008.

²⁸ Bond, M., ‘Hybrid War: A New Paradigm for Stability Operations in Failing States’, *Strategy Research Project* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2007).

weapons to a national identity conception of being a major, interventionist, ‘pivotal’ power and defender of the international community operating alongside the United States through NATO. It reflects a historical narrative originating in the initial acquisition of a nuclear capability chronicled in detail by Peter Hennessy.²⁹ It is a powerful collective identity whose reproduction generates a ‘national interest’ in continued deployment of strategic nuclear weapons. In essence if we want to be ‘Britain’ we must have nuclear weapons both as a representation of this identity and as a means of enabling Britain to perform this identity.³⁰ We saw this in December 2015 when Chancellor George Osborne announced in New York that ‘Britain has got its mojo back’ and is ‘reasserting itself on the world stage’ following the vote in the House of Commons to join the bombing campaign in Syria against ISIS.³¹ We see this now as supporters of nuclear weapons cite the necessity of replacing Trident in order to reproduce this image of ourselves as a particular type of state that has been challenged by the Brexit decision.³² It is through this lens that relinquishing nuclear weapons is characterised as madness, weakness, emasculation, and dangerously irresponsible with political parties in Holyrood and Westminster that advocate such a position condemned as unfit to govern.³³ In short, replacing Trident reproduces a particular British militarism rooted in the belief that the UK should maintain a strong military capability and be prepared to use it aggressively to defend or promote its national interests. The consequences of this have been laid bare in the damning report of the Iraq Inquiry by Sir John Chilcot.

This is currently playing out in the response to Russian violence in Ukraine and its tacit threat to the Baltic states. The crisis in Ukraine has been used by UK politicians to reinforce for the case for Trident replacement as a necessary response to international political uncertainty generated by Moscow.³⁴ Yet it is far from clear what useful role, if any, UK nuclear deterrent threats can play. The current crisis is part of a wider deterioration of Russia-US/NATO relations from the mid-2000s. It is reflective of the mutual mismanagement of post-imperial Russia’s insecurity after Yeltsin in terms of what sort of state it is and how it should act. It is an insecurity framed (rightly or wrongly) by a narrative of post-Cold War humiliation and containment. It has resulted in the reassertion of a Russian identity of great power autonomy framed in terms of conservative, nationalistic and often xenophobic

²⁹ Hennessy, P., *Cabinets and the Bomb* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007).

³⁰ Ritchie, N., *A Nuclear Weapons-Free World? Britain, Trident and the Challenges Ahead* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), chapter 5.

³¹ Osborne, G., ‘A Conversation with George Osborne’, Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 7 December 2015. Available at <<http://www.cfr.org/united-kingdom/conversation-george-osborne/p37302>>.

³² See Dominiczak, P. and Swinford, S., ‘Theresa May calls for Urgent Go-ahead on Trident Replacement’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 4 July 2016. Available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/07/04/theresa-may-calls-for-urgent-go-ahead-on-trident-replacement/>.

³³ See Dominiczak, P. ‘Tories: Ed Miliband will Leave UK Open to ‘Nuclear Blackmail’ if He Does Deal with SNP’, *Daily Telegraph*, 8 April 2015; Johnson, B. ‘If We Want to be Taken Seriously, We Have to Defend Ourselves’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 February 2015. This reflects what Falk and Lifton labelled ‘nuclearism’. Falk, R. and Lifton, R., *Indefensible weapons: the political and psychological case against nuclearism* (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

³⁴ Norton-Taylor, R., ‘Ukraine boosts case for nuclear weapons, say Trident supporters’, *The Guardian*, 20 March 2014.

resistance to assimilation into a decadent Western hegemony (Moscow's enemy 'other').³⁵ We know, for example, that Russia has remained deeply suspicious of US primacy and fearful of Western containment. It has interpreted NATO expansion, the development of missile defences, the emergence of an international human rights agenda, Western support for 'colour' revolutions on its periphery, and US-led military interventions in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya quite differently to many in the West. Moscow has regarded the latter as transgressions of basic norms of sovereignty symptomatic of the US' 'unilateral domination'³⁶ in the same way the West regards Russian actions in Georgia and Ukraine.³⁷ This demonstrates the failure of NATO and Russia to develop a mutually acceptable European security apparatus that both reassures former Soviet republics and Warsaw Pact members wary of Russian power and reassures Russia about the West's long-term intentions towards it.

This broader context highlights an enduring common security interest: working consistently with Russia on the slow and painful process of conflict resolution, diplomacy and compromise to develop a mutually satisfactory working relationship on European security and other areas of common security interest without sacrificing basic value commitments. This requires acknowledging that the NATO/European-Russian relationship is 'too big to fail' and that exclusionary 'containment' and militarised ideological confrontation is to be avoided given the foreseeable mutual long-term pain and high risk for all involved. Appreciating the wider social and historical context is not an exercise in appeasement, being an apologist for Moscow's actions, or downplaying the significance of Russia's recent threats and actions. It is not about ignoring or wishing away the increasing authoritarianism of the Kremlin under Putin, the worrying silencing of political opposition, and its shuttering of civil society space. But it is about accepting the long term requirement for careful management of European-Russia relations, that common interests will require cooperation, that Putinism is likely to characterise Russian politics for some time, and that the West's capacity to contain and deter has diluted as power has diffused in the international system.³⁸

Given the character of the conflict in Ukraine, the challenges that characterise the conflict's broader context, and the fallibility of nuclear deterrence in practice, it is difficult to make a convincing case for a UK nuclear deterrent threat against Russia as an essential part of the UK and NATO response. The interests at stake in the conflict are simply not commensurate with threatening wholesale societal destruction, despite hyped rhetoric about the threat to European and international order. Instead, this perspective supports the case for reducing and delegitimising the role of nuclear weapons in the current crisis, including UK nuclear

³⁵ Laqueur, W., *Putinism: Russia and its Future with the West* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015).

³⁶ Putin, V., 'Meeting of the Valdai Club International Discussion', Sochi, 22 October 2015. Available at <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50548>>.

³⁷ Trenin, D., '2014: Russia's New Military Doctrine Tells it All', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Moscow, 29 December 2014. Available at <<http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=57607>>.

³⁸ See Karaganov, S., Suslov, D. and Bordachev, T., 'Reconfiguration, Not Just a Reset: Russia's Interests in Relations with the United States of America', *The Valdai Club*, June 2009, Moscow.

weapons, based on the very serious long-term risks involved in embedding a deeply hostile and overtly nuclearised relationship between Moscow and Europe.³⁹

Summary

In sum, UK nuclear weapons and the practice of nuclear deterrence do not provide an infallible ‘insurance’ against attack or guarantee of protection. The security benefits of a UK nuclear capability are far from clear given the problems that plague nuclear deterrence in practice, the risks of deterrence failure, and the catastrophic consequences of getting it wrong when casualties can be measured in ‘megadeaths’. The political narrative of nuclear absolutism ignores this and instead perpetuates an illusion of nuclear control. Moreover, the investment costs are very high and will likely increase at a time when limited defence resource should arguably be channelled into people and capabilities to meet the types of challenges we are likely to confront over the coming decades. Finally, investing in a further generation of nuclear weapons reproduces a form of British militarism that has not served us well and constrains thinking about effective policy responses to security challenges. There are a number of issues I have not considered here (jobs and the future of nuclear-powered submarine-building industry, the effect of Trident replacement on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty through the revalidation of nuclear deterrence, and the ‘humanitarian initiative’ on nuclear weapons that is steadily delegitimising and stigmatising nuclear weapons), but I end with three questions: what material difference would it make to UK security if we did not have nuclear weapons? If we did not now possess them would we as a country feel compelled to procure them? Does our ‘security’ *necessitate* taking the sorts of nuclear risks outlined above? My answers are very little, very unlikely, and no. What are yours?

The opinions articulated above represent the views of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the position of the European Leadership Network or any of its members.

The European Leadership Network (ELN) works to advance the idea of a cooperative and cohesive Europe and to develop collaborative European capacity to address the pressing foreign, defence and security policy challenges of our time. It does this through its active network of former and emerging European political, military, and diplomatic leaders, through its high-quality research, publications and events, and through its institutional partnerships across Europe, North America, Latin America and the Asia-Pacific region. It focuses on arms control and political/military issues, including both conventional and nuclear disarmament challenges inside Europe, and has a particular interest in policy challenges arising in both the eastern and southern peripheries of the continent.

³⁹ Bahr, E. and Neuneck, G., ‘Forum: NATO and Russia’, *Survival*, 57: 2, 2015, p. 130.