

Continuous at sea deterrence was part of a discussion on defence and an independent Scotland held by the U K Defence Forum in 2013. Points made by the speaker and others are again relevant as the subject of Scottish independence returns to political prominence and are reproduced on the next page.

Assumptions :

- I. A YES vote in a future referendum for Scotland to become independent.
- II. The SNP (the Scottish National Party) leads the negotiations between future Scotland and future remaining United Kingdom (R-UK)
- III. SNP defence policy remains the same (a non-nuclear Scotland in NATO, with the Scottish Navy based at Faslane)
- IV. Faslane-Coulport is the optimal basing solution but was not the only one considered under the original Polaris study.
- V. R-UK wishes to continue as a credible nuclear weapons state

From which it follows :

- I. Prima facie a "treaty port" solution for nuclear submarine basing and rearming would not be possible.
- II. If any sort of lease could be had, the SNP would seek to maximise the "rent", and if it believes there is no alternative for R-UK, that "rent" would be high
- III. Any such lease/treaty would not constrain a future Scottish Government from imposing further restrictions and taxes e.g. a nuclear weapons transit tax.
- IV. Without possibly substantial financial compensation, Scotland would otherwise want nuclear weapons and submarines moved from Scotland as quickly as possible regardless of R-UK's CASD aspirations
- V. Failure to sustain the current CASD (Vanguard-Trident) would endanger the Successor programme and R-UK's nuclear weapons and hence international status.
- VI. Therefore contingencies must be considered.

Little regarded factors

- I. Missiles are stored, maintained and loaded into submarines in the USA.
- II. Unloaded submarines can be based at Devonport under existing licences.
- III. In addition to warhead storage facilities at Aldermaston/Burghfield there are licenced nuclear weapons stores at Longtown (just inside England off the M6) and at RAF Marham.
- IV. Coulport has a hugely excessive capacity for the UK's internationally declared warhead levels
- V. Warheads are often moved by special convoy from Coulport into England
- VI. Milford Haven is close to the Irish Trench (deep water access to the Atlantic) and there is a long MoD owned jetty there.
- VII. Milford Haven has current safety cases for gas tanker with an explosive capacity possible greater than that of a warhead (which are in any event inert munitions).
- VIII. Barrow has nuclear licences and can be accessed by nuclear submarines.
- IX. Warheads at Coulport are mated to missiles on a FLOATING Warhead Mating Facility
- X. West Wales is a gateway to Irish trade (greater than BRICs) and would welcome upgrades of the A40 and rail links, as well no doubt support employment
- XI. Swansea could offer short-term regular berthing (not basing) to small Royal Navy vessels.

Conclusions

- I. The oft-stated premise "there is no alternative to Faslane-Coulport" is wrong.
- II. The premise that any alternatives would require complex, costly and lengthy construction is incorrect.
- III. Contingency planning "in secret" could and should be undertaken.
- IV. Such contingency planning would inject realism into any post-independence policy formulation.
- V. Actions arising from a once-in-history event should be paid for from central funds not the Royal Navy's budget, not least because of the wide spread of benefits from the spending.
- VI. CASD post a YES referendum vote can be sustained by the ingenuity and the can-do approach for which the Royal Navy has been famed down the years, regardless of the future of Faslane-Coulport.

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Given the significance of this topic, the Editor will receive for potential publication commentary sent to robin.ashby@ukdf.org.uk ÂÂ