

Trident Missile Failure Exposes Folly of Nuclear Weapons

Britain's nuclear arsenal has failed two tests in a row. Why must we still pay for these extortionate weapons of mass destruction?

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Global Research, February 27, 2024

[Declassified UK](#) 26 February 2024

Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Militarization and WMD](#)

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Three years ago, Boris Johnson's government announced a significant gear shift in nuclear weapons policy.

Trashing David Cameron's decision to [reduce](#) the nuclear arsenal to 180 warheads, he instead unveiled an increase to 260.

At odds with the UK - and global - trend of gradual reductions for over three decades, the decision received widespread international condemnation.

The news was published in the government's integrated review, an extensive [document](#) that aimed to portray a post-Brexit 'Global Britain' on the offensive, 'projecting force' globally.

It made much of Britain being western Europe's most heavily armed nation, of its leadership role in NATO, and its deployment of forces worldwide.

Britain, it claimed, was ready to deter - and defeat adversaries if necessary.

Trident Test Failure

There is much in the document that now just seems pathetically hubristic.

Repeated references to the UK's 'credible nuclear deterrent', seem particularly delusional.

Last month, the Royal Navy failed to test fire a Trident missile, which is the only delivery

system for Britain's nuclear warheads. It was the second such failure in a row.

The previous test took place in 2016. Launched from the submarine HMS *Victorious*, a malfunction in the system caused the missile to spin out of control.

Instead of flying over the Atlantic, the missile flew over the US and later self-destructed.

This time, the missile was supposed to travel 6,000 kilometres before landing in the Atlantic between Africa and Brazil, but it failed to launch properly from the submarine HMS *Vanguard* and actually crashed into the sea just yards away.

Defence secretary Grant Shapps, who was onboard, was keen to assert that the failure was an "anomaly" with no implications for the reliability of the wider systems and stockpiles.

Seeming sillier by the minute, he went on to claim that Trident "remains the most reliable weapons system in the world."

Catalogue of Failures

Funny though this would be if it wasn't so deadly serious, the failed launch is just the tip of the iceberg of a whole catalogue of failures.

Delays, cost overruns and dangerous incompetence give the lie to the grandiose claims made by the British government about its vastly expensive weapons of mass destruction.

There is a backstory to this too. The submarine that launched the missile, HMS *Vanguard*, was required to undertake the test because it had just come out of a "deep maintenance period".

Vanguard was sent to the Navy's Devonport Dockyard in Plymouth in 2015 for a major refit, scheduled to take three years.

However, delays and malfunctions meant the refit actually lasted seven years. Costs ballooned from under £300 million to over £500 million.

Delays included the discovery that superglue was used by workers to attach broken bolts to the submarine's nuclear reactor.

Apparently the Trident test failure won't prevent *Vanguard* from returning to active service.

Fleet-wide Issues

Other serious concerns have emerged about the fleet of four Vanguard-class submarines that carry Britain's nuclear weapons.

Recently, only two of the submarines have been operational.

While *Vanguard* was out of action in Devonport, HMS *Victorious* suffered a fire onboard in 2022.

A blaze broke out in an electrical component in one of the submarine's systems and it had to surface in the North Atlantic and return to port in Faslane.

It is now in dry dock at Devonport for repair and maintenance.

Last November, a faulty depth gauge on one of the subs resulted in the vessel continuing to dive.

It almost approached crush depth before submariners noticed the equipment had malfunctioned and corrected course, narrowly averting disaster.

In order to maintain the co-called “continuous at-sea deterrent”, with one submarine out on patrol at all times, these subs – and their crews – have been forced to undergo longer and longer missions.

Last September, one was spotted returning to port covered in barnacles and slime after a record six month patrol.

In 2022 it was reported that the lack of available Vanguard-class submarines meant crews were increasingly serving tours in excess of 150 days.

By comparison, the average patrol on the previous generation of nuclear vessels rarely exceeded 60-70 days.

Jobs for the Boys

In addition to concerns about the state of the vessels, there have also been concerns about the impact these extended tours have on crew discipline, morale, and psychological well being.

The Royal Navy has already opened an investigation into claims by female submariners working on Vanguard-class subs of sexual abuse and bullying by male colleagues and senior officers.

Not surprisingly, questions have also been raised about Babcock, the arms company responsible for running the Devonport dockyard and maintaining the Vanguard fleet.

Ministry of Defence data [seen](#) by *The i* newspaper last November found that “suppliers tasked with providing parts and replacement equipment to the Royal Navy recently missed their targets, with the Government rating their performance as inadequate.”

Yet in the 12 months to March 2023, Babcock made £178 million in profit from MoD contracts.

The truth is, nuclear weapons are big business for a number of companies.

Over one trillion US dollars will be spent globally over the next ten years, modernising and developing the existing nine state arsenals.

That’s around a hundred billion a year, of which over half is spent by the US.

The companies that make the most out of nuclear weapons are Boeing, Honeywell International and Northrop Grumman.

Here in Britain, the companies with the most significant involvement are BAE Systems, Rolls-Royce and Serco.

All these companies, together with the many banks, insurance companies, pension funds and asset managers that invest in them, have a vested interest in high nuclear weapons budgets.

That money comes from the government. In other words, it comes from us - the tax payers.

Nuclear weapons have got to go: for all the reasons we know, nuclear war, annihilation and the end times.

But also because they are a shocking, useless waste of our money, driven by vanity and stupidity. We need to spend the money on something else.

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Featured image: A Trident missile spins out of control. (Photo: U.S. National Archives)

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