Nuclear-Armed Submarine Collision Off Scotland Kept Secret For 43 Years

Documents reveal 1974 crash between US and Soviet subs off Scottish coast

Matthew Weaver, *The Guardian*

Two nuclear submarines from rival sides in the cold war collided a few miles off the coast of Scotland in an incident that was covered up for 43 years.

The potentially catastrophic crash occurred in November 1974 when the *SSBN James Madison,* armed with 16 Poseidon nuclear missiles, was heading out of the US naval base at Holy Loch, 30 miles north-west of Glasgow.

Soon after leaving the port it hit an unidentified Soviet submarine that had been sent to tail it, according to a cable to then US secretary of state Henry Kissinger, marked "secret eyes only."

The cable, sent by national security adviser Brent Scowcroft, said: "Have just received word from the Pentagon that one of our Poseidon submarines has just collided with a Soviet submarine.

"The *SSBN James Madison* was departing Holy Loch to take up station when it collided with a Soviet submarine waiting outside the port to take up trail. Both submarines surfaced and the Soviet boat subsequently submerged again. There is no report yet of the extent of damage. Will keep you posted."

The cable was published by the CIA on January 17 as part of a mass release of more than 12 million pages of previously classified reports in 930,000 documents. The cable corroborates an until-now unconfirmed report on the incident in the *Washington Post* on January 1, 1975 by the investigative journalist Jack Anderson.

He reported that the collision left a 9-foot scratch on the side of the *James Madison* and that the two submarines came within inches of sinking one another.

Another document marked "top secret" released in the same batch expressed alarm that the news of the collision had leaked. It said: "On January 3, the NID [National Intelligence Daily] ran an item on the collision just off Holy Loch of US Polaris submarine and a Soviet attack submarine. Unfortunately, Jack Anderson had run the same news in the *Washington Post* a day or two earlier.

"This pre-emption on Anderson's part forced the surfacing of a piece of information in a current intelligence two months after the event occurred...."

Kate Hudson, general secretary of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, said the secret cable exposed the "enormous risks" of nuclear weapons. "The history of nuclear weapons is a history of near misses, accidents, potential catastrophes and cover-ups. This latest example joins 25 other near misses that could have led to nuclear war."

CND is calling for an inquiry into Trident, the successor to the Poseidon program, after it emerged that a malfunctioning missile with the potential to carry a nuclear warhead was forced to self-destruct in mid-air off the US coast last June. (See following article.)

Hudson added: "These enormous risks have to be acknowledged particularly when we also now face the increasing likelihood of cyber-attack on nuclear weapons systems. With advancing technological developments added to the already dangerous mix there can be no confidence that nuclear weapons are a credible part of British security in the 21st century.

"This is also the week of the Trident missile crisis, a misfire and a government cover-up. We shouldn't have to wait 40 years for the CIA to release documents to know the truth, which is why we're calling for a Trident inquiry."

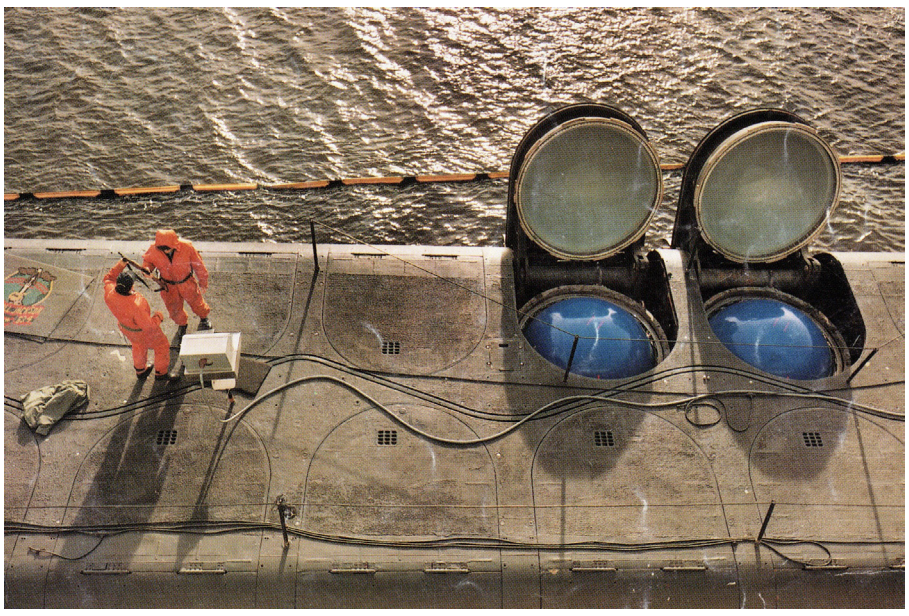
Member of Parliament Brendan O'Hara, the Scottish National Party defence spokesman, said the disclosure was "deeply worrying." He added, "What happened in 1974 looks like a very, very lucky escape—it could have been completely devastating.

"The truth is—as we saw with the Trident malfunction revelations—nothing has changed, it could happen again," he said.

"The people of Scotland live in the shadow of this appalling nuclear arsenal because Westminster puts it there—against the [wishes of the] vast majority of its elected representatives—and without taking the necessary measures to defend it or to protect the people who live here," O'Hara said.

James Jinks, who with Peter Hennessy wrote a history of Royal Navy submarines, said the cable was further confirmation of a "highly secret underwater game of cat and mouse."

He said: "The Soviets routinely sent submarines to waters around Scotland, where they would attempt to detect, track and trail Royal Navy and US Navy ballistic missile-carrying submarines as they deployed from the Royal Navy base at Faslane and the US Navy base at Holy Loch."



With missile hatch doors open, testing equipment aboard an *Ohio* class ballistic missile-firing *Trident* submarine. Over 500 *Trident* D5 long-range US missiles like these are "leased" to Britain's Royal Navy for use on its four Trident submarines.

He added: "A little under two years before the collision between an unidentified Soviet submarine and *USS James Madison*, another Soviet submarine, a nuclear-powered *Victor* class submarine, was detected in the Clyde-approach areas.

"For six days, the Soviet submarine remained 60 miles north-west of Donegal and 50 miles off Colonsay, where it was kept under 24-hour surveillance by Royal Air Force Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft operating out of RAF Kinloss. It was eventually 'chased out' of the area by *HMS Conqueror,* a Royal Navy nuclear-powered hunter-killer submarine."

— https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/25/nuclear-submarine-collision-cold-war-cia-scotland

US & UK Cover-Up of Trident Missile Failure

Last June, off the coast of Florida, the test of a $21 million Trident D5 missile fired from the British submarine *HMS Vengeance,* failed and the unarmed rocket self-destructed, but the news was kept secret from the British and US public—at the request of President Obama—for seven months.

Fired toward what the Navy calls its "Eastern firing range" near the west coast of Africa, the London *Sunday Times*—a right-wing journal owned by the Rupert Murdoch machine—revealed in January that the test of the D5 missile, which reportedly has a range of 7,500 miles, saw the rocket fail and careen toward the US coast before spinning out into the Atlantic. The self-destruction trick is programmed to be automatic after a failure is detected, CNN reported.

The *Times* also revealed that when the colossally expensive failure occurred in June, the Obama White House asked then Prime Minister David Cameron's government not to comment on it publicly. The *Times* report was based on a British military official who spoke on condition of anonymity. The submarine *Vengeance* is one of four Trident subs including *Vanguard, Victorious,* and *Vigilant*. Each submarine carries 16 Trident missiles with eight nuclear warheads on each missile; 512 nuclear weapons in all.

The rocket failure came just one month prior to the House of Commons vote on whether to approve a controversial $50-to-$100 billion program to replace the four missile-firing Trident subs. Under the slogan "Scrap Trident," strong majorities of the general public, the British Labour Party, and the Scottish Parliament (Britain's Tridents are based in Scotland) are opposed to replacement. "Unaware of the failure, members of the House of Commons voted 472 to 117 in favor of renewal," CNN reported.

Both the UK and the US have invested hundreds of billions of tax dollars in upgrading nuclear arsenals, and both are beholden to multinational conglomerates that design and build nuclear weapons and contribute generously to political campaigns and party coffers. The world's largest arms dealer, Lockheed Martin based in Bethesda, Maryland, builds the flawed $21 million-dollar missiles. The UK's 512 Trident missiles garner about $10.75 billion for Lockheed Martin.

Catastrophic failures of such expensive weapons can prompt increased calls for their elimination. Scores of UN member states will begin negotiations March 26 in New York seeking a treaty ban on nuclear weapons, an "international convention" that both the US and UK governments have worked to derail.

Weapons "Lease" may violate treaty

Britain's long-range Trident D5 missiles are all produced and owned by the United States, which then "leases" about 512 of them to the Royal Navy—which is turn is invited to "test" them off Florida's coast near Port Canaveral. Articles I and II of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty forbid the transfer to another state, and the acceptance from another state, any nuclear weapon system.

The cost of building four new ballistic-missile-firing submarines is said by the UK government to babout $49.8 billion. Britain's Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and other independent experts warn that the actual cost will be closer to $124.7 billion.

Asked four times in January if she knew of the failure prior to the July House of Commons vote on Trident replacement July 18, 2016, Prime Minister Theresa May refused to answer, the London *Telegraph* reported.

"I can assure the House that the capability and effectiveness of the UK's independent nuclear deterrent is not in doubt," British Defense Minister Michael Fallon said Jan. 23. The phrase "nuclear deterrent" is the destabilizing rationale that allows nine self-selected countries to plan and threaten to use weapons of mass destruction. Minister Fallon asserted his "absolute confidence" in the missile system, if not in his ability to keep a secret.

The *Times* disclosed the failure January 22 after being informed by an anonymous source in the Ministry of Defense. The *Times* reported, "[A] senior naval source has told this newspaper that the missile—which was unarmed for the test—may have veered off in the wrong direction towards America after being launched from *HMS Vengeance*.…"

According to the *Times*, "The source said: 'There was a major panic at the highest level of government and the military after the first test of our nuclear deterrent in four years ended in disastrous failure. Ultimately Downing Street decided to cover up the failed test. The upcoming Trident vote made it all the more sensitive.'" ***—JL***

—*Sunday Times*, Jan. 22 & 24; Nadia Prupis, Commondreams, Jan. 23; CNN, Jan. 23; *The London Telegraph*, Jan. 22; Russia Today, Jan. 22, 2017.