

Britain's Security: Labour's Defence Policy Review

Submission by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)



Summary

CND welcomes this opportunity to contribute to Labour's defence review. The Labour Party faces a huge opportunity – to develop a defence policy for Britain fit for the twenty first century. It cannot be based on old dogmas – or old notions of status and a false sense of what enhances Britain's role in the world. It has to meet our needs – as a decent, humane and internationally-oriented society. We welcome this debate: as we head to a decision on Trident replacement, it is urgent and much needed.

CND calls for Trident, Britain's nuclear weapons system, to be scrapped and plans for a replacement to be cancelled. Most countries in the world do not have nuclear weapons. They are immoral weapons of mass destruction that by their very nature would target innocent civilians. Trident is militarily irrelevant, hugely expensive and its use – or threat of use – would be illegal.

This submission will discuss further how Britain's defence policy, including on Trident, should be guided by strong values which will make us safer. It will look at the real threats we face today and how nuclear weapons are useless in dealing with them. Finally, it will look at how many jobs would be affected by a change in Britain's defence policy.

Values

CND welcomes the Labour Defence Policy Review as an opportunity to take a fresh look at Britain's role in the world. In a world where states are more connected than ever before and where we face common threats such as climate change and terrorism, it is imperative we consider how our actions impact upon the wider international community. Of course, the government's priority has to be to ensure the safety of its citizens, but some of our recent defence decisions actually put us at greater risk as well as endangering and killing people in other parts of the world.

Britain's illegal war in Iraq, its continuing involvement in the 'war on terror', recent extrajudicial killings and a commitment to replacing Trident, are all examples of how we have made the world less peaceful, less safe.

We should be promoting dialogue and negotiation; understanding other nations' concerns and addressing these, rather than threatening, invading and upgrading our ability to kill their populations indiscriminately.

One of the most obvious manifestations of this is Britain's possession of nuclear weapons. The vast majority of countries have not developed nuclear weapons. Germany and Japan, for example, are economically and politically important countries which do not possess nuclear weapons. Possession of nuclear weapons by some when others are not allowed to have them is seen by many as a provocative double standard. If we choose to replace Trident with a new system, and therefore rearm for another thirty to forty years, we send a message that nuclear weapons are necessary for a country's security and this will encourage proliferation. Unstable or isolated states are more likely to seek nuclear weapons in this context. Their behaviour is often the result of complex regional problems or of a history of hostile external intervention or exploitation. These issues are best resolved through diplomacy and political negotiation on the basis of equality and mutual respect – not on the basis of having the capacity to destroy them many times over.

Britain is the world's sixth most powerful economy, the fifth-highest provider to the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping budget, a member of the UN Security Council, of the G7 and the Commonwealth. Its status as an internationally confirmed world power is undeniable, even without possessing nuclear weapons. Britain can and should lead, but not in military spending. Britain could stop spending so much on arms, including nuclear weapons, and instead invest more in conflict prevention measures, mitigating climate change effects or educating the world's poorest communities.

The UK is currently undermining the international system which has developed since the Second World War, under the auspices of the UN. Britain is a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) since 1968. This commits us to negotiate to agree measures to achieve nuclear disarmament.

Article VI of the NPT states:

*'Each of the Parties to the Treaty undertakes to pursue negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament, and on a Treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control.'*¹

For Britain to decide to replace Trident, and at the same time refuse to participate in abolition negotiations, cannot possibly demonstrate the 'good faith' demanded by the NPT. Trident replacement will mean Britain possessing nuclear weapons until nearly 2060 – 90 years after we agreed to disarm.

Furthermore, in 1996 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) gave an advisory opinion on the legality of nuclear weapons. The Court concluded that:

'the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict, and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law'.²

A legal opinion by Rabinder Singh QC and Professor Christine Chinkin, Matrix Chambers, on 'The Maintenance and Possible Replacement of the Trident Nuclear Missile System' concluded that a replacement would constitute a breach of the NPT.³

Britain needs to engage in the NPT process, as there are at least 127 governments who are so frustrated with the lack of progress they're calling for the initiation of a nuclear weapons global ban treaty. These 127 states (at the time of writing) have signed an international pledge calling for nuclear weapons to be outlawed.⁴ The process has gained momentum in the international community and yet the UK government dismisses their concerns. Negotiations on global abolition of nuclear weapons could easily start, with enough political will. A global ban treaty would outlaw all nuclear weapons and legal instruments would cover all the difficult issues, such as observation, inspection on demand, verification, control of nuclear material and criminality.

Another obstacle to global disarmament and a more peaceful world is Britain's membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), a nuclear-armed military alliance. Britain should

¹ 'Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons', http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/pdf/NPTEnglish_Text.pdf

² 'Legality of the Threat or Use of Nuclear Weapons (Request for Advisory Opinion by the General Assembly of the United Nations)', <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/95/10407.pdf>

³ 'UK Trident Replacement A Material Breach Of The NPT', Joint Opinion By Rabinder Singh QC And Professor Christine Chinkin, December 19, 2005 www.rethinktrident.org.uk/files/singh-opinion.doc

⁴ More information available here: <http://www.icanw.org/pledge/>

withdraw and take a vital step towards less confrontational global affairs. NATO should not be expanded but rather disbanded with resources and funding instead invested in the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

The US should be encouraged to withdraw all its nuclear weapons from European bases and all US military bases on British soil should be closed.

Threats

The 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS)⁵ officially classified the Trident nuclear weapons system as falling outside the top rank of security concerns faced by the UK and yet this assessment has had no impact on subsequent government policy. Despite the increase in government rhetoric around the potential threat from Russia, the 2015 National Security Strategy maintained the possibility of a nuclear attack as a tier two threat.⁶

The tier one threats identified were terrorism, international military conflict, cyber, public health, major natural hazards and instability overseas. The world faces huge challenges. Millions of people are being displaced due to climate change and conflict. The battle for dwindling resources and displacement due to environmental changes poses the greatest security risk for the international community today. The United Nations Refugee Agency estimates there will be over 25 million climate change refugees by 2050. The changing climate is also affecting Britain; in 2014 the government had to announce £540 million worth of spending to deal with the homes and livelihoods ruined by flooding.

States, including the United Kingdom, are also dealing with a fast evolving political landscape. Twenty five years after the end of the Cold War, characterised by two sides threatening each other with mutual destruction, we now live in a multi-polar world where many states – both nuclear-armed and nuclear-free – have complex relationships. The United States has declared a rebalancing of its foreign policy to concentrate more on Asia, shifting the country's geo-strategic focus from the Europe-centred Cold War past to the new realities of power across the world.

The increasing conflict in the Middle East poses continued problems for the region and the wider world. Britain's involvement in the 2003 Iraq war, and the war on and occupation of Afghanistan, together with a century of western economic, political and military intervention, have undoubtedly contributed to the destabilisation of the region and the rise of terrorist groups such as Islamic State and Al-Qaeda – previously non-existent in Iraq - which may pose threats on British soil as well as resulting in great dangers for the people of the Middle East.

The recent Ebola outbreak in West Africa is the biggest ever known, with the US Centres for Disease Control predicting over a million cases in total. As well as causing thousands of deaths, this outbreak is having a severe impact on already fragile healthcare systems and the wider economy in many countries.

⁵ 'A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy'
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/61936/national-security-strategy.pdf

⁶ 'National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom'
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478933/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_web_only.pdf

There is considerable insecurity in the world at the moment, but the risk of state on state nuclear warfare is not one of the main dangers. Nuclear weapons were developed specifically in the Cold War context: to be able to win an actual nuclear war against a hostile, massively armed state. Despite the Cold War coming to an end, with the Soviet Union dissolving in 1991, the UK went ahead with acquiring Trident which was launched in the mid-1990s with the last submarine entering service in 2001.

If the UK envisages at least another 50 years of British security being based on threatening other populations with mass destruction then we will encourage other states to do the same and thus paradoxically we increase our security risk rather than decrease it. Nuclear weapons cannot have a role to play in responding to the actual threats we face today. Principally, we already know from the terrible attacks in New York in 2001, London in 2005 and Paris in 2015 that possession of nuclear weapons by a nuclear weapon state does not dissuade terrorists. In addition, terrorists could never present any accurately located target for such a weapon of indiscriminate devastation. It is obvious that nuclear weapons will not protect us from environmental changes such as floods or drought. Similarly, cyber-attackers will not be deterred by Britain possessing nuclear arms.

In fact, the opposite is true. Instead of spending at least £100 billion on a new nuclear weapons system, resources should be invested in addressing the real threats we face. At a time when the armed forces – along with wider society – are facing severe budgetary cuts, it seems inconceivable that a third of the Ministry of Defence's procurement budget should be spent on a militarily useless weapon. Not surprisingly, military sources have questioned whether this money would be better spend on meeting other, more pressing and relevant military needs.

The cases of Iran and North Korea and their actual or potential nuclear proliferation are of significance in considering the consequences of Britain's actions. Both countries were included in the United States' 'Axis of Evil' and in the light of the US-led war on Iraq (the third country in the so-called Axis) not surprisingly had concerns for their security. The response of North Korea was a very clear indication of how proliferation can be provoked: it withdrew from the NPT, saying that it had a deterrent need to develop nuclear weapons. Remaining nuclear-armed for at least another half century and by example encouraging other states to take the nuclear road, will ensure that we face those very threats in decades to come that we least want to see.

In contrast, the deal on Iran's nuclear programme shows what can be achieved through dialogue and negotiation. It is now crucial that repeated UN resolutions calling for a Nuclear Weapons Free Zone in the Middle East are honoured and acted upon.

US President Obama's initiative to launch a nuclear security summit was a positive development, though it remains to be seen whether it will continue once a new President is elected. If the meetings do continue, Britain should push for the initiative to be inclusive and universal for maximum effect, rather than invite only, as is the current arrangement.

The most effective strategy to guarantee Britain's security is to work towards nuclear disarmament, rather than pursuing a path which is certain to contribute to proliferation. Britain's future security will be best provided for by pursuing global disarmament initiatives in tandem with the decision not to replace Trident. The decision on whether or not to replace Britain's nuclear weapons system must be taken on the basis of what will most contribute to the security of the British people. A decision not to replace Trident will best meet that requirement. It will strengthen the international disarmament and non-proliferation regime by ensuring Britain's compliance with its international treaty obligations; it will deter nuclear proliferation and de-escalate current global and regional

tensions; and it will release significant financial resources to meet a range of public spending priorities, including meeting the new security challenges of the twenty-first century.

The decision not to replace Trident will help shape the type of world we will face in decades to come. Active support for disarmament and non-proliferation will help prevent a new nuclear arms race and increased proliferation. Choosing to replace Trident will ensure that we will face the nuclear threats in the future that we most wish to avoid. The choice we face today is clear: nuclear disarmament or nuclear proliferation and war. A bold initiative by our government not to replace Trident, together with strong promotion of multilateral initiatives, can help reshape the global security context and ensure a future free from the threat of nuclear annihilation.

Military and Security Forces

The UK government has pledged to meet NATO's target of spending 2% of national income on defence every year. NATO should not be in a position to impose spending 'guidelines' on independent nations, which should be determining their own funding priorities based on genuine need. A commitment to adhere to an arbitrary spending 'guideline' undermines Britain's sovereignty and ability to respond to world events. The government should therefore oppose any spending 'guideline' set by NATO and determine its own level of defence spending based on what is necessary for Britain's security.

The annual running cost of Trident, Britain's nuclear weapons system is 5-6% of the defence budget, around £2.4 billion. A planned replacement programme would cost well in excess of £100 billion, including lifetime costs. Conservative MP and Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee Crispin Blunt has worked out the cost will actually be £167 billion. Since then, the government has had to admit that building new submarines will cost £41 billion, rather than the £25 billion which had previously been suggested. A third of the Ministry of Defence's procurement budget should not be spent on a militarily useless weapon when the armed forces – and other government departments – face severe budgetary cuts.

As well as disregarding NATO's spending guidelines, Britain should also ignore the alliance's insistence on going to war, both in eastern Europe and in the Middle East. After our disastrous experience in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, we should learn the lessons from recent military actions. Recent history shows that US and UK military action in the Middle East and North Africa has been ill-conceived, leading to death and destruction for innocent civilians, and shattered states - both of which were abandoned by their attackers - where terrorists including Islamic State have since been able to organise.

Extrajudicial assassinations should also be stopped immediately. The use of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) for this purpose and other military operations is increasing rapidly. With no proper international or government policies in place to control their use, drones are violating human rights and increasing the risk of conflict. The use of drones raises serious moral, ethical and legal issues. As there is no risk to those operating the drones, their participation in an escalating violent conflict becomes a much easier and therefore more likely option. Negotiations and peace talks become less likely as it is much less risky to send in armed drones than to commit personnel to the combat zone.

International laws are being challenged as people are being targeted and killed in countries on which war has never been declared (e.g. Pakistan). Those targeted by drones are deemed to be guilty of acts such as terrorism and are killed with no opportunity to make a case for their innocence or their

lives. Thousands have now been assassinated in this way. Many civilians, including hundreds of children, have become casualties after being caught up in the attacks.

This paper has already argued that we should not replace Trident or maintain Britain's nuclear capabilities. Instead, we should lead by example and get rid of our nuclear weapons. Britain should then call for immediate negotiations leading to a timetabled abolition of nuclear forces worldwide. As well as a treaty banning nuclear weapons, Britain should lead efforts for full international compliance with the agreed Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and for a strengthened Biological Weapons Convention (BWC).

The use of depleted uranium (DU) in weapons is controversial due to the serious health issues associated with exposure to the material. It has already had a devastating impact on civilians caught up in conflicts across the world. Britain should be vigorously involved in international efforts to ban DU, rather than denying the dangers entailed in its use. The government should introduce an immediate moratorium on its use of DU munitions as well as contribute to more meaningful research into the impact of uranium weapons on civilian populations.

Jobs

This submission has advocated the scrapping of Trident and the cancellation of the planned replacement. The effect of this change on jobs in the sector is often discussed. There is an understandable fear that a decision not to replace Trident could lead to loss of employment and that alternative employment would be in different sectors, leading to a loss of earnings and conditions, and that the UK's skills base in science, engineering and technology could be diminished.

However, it is important to note the temporary short-term nature of many of the jobs involved—often based on just the construction of nuclear facilities; the actual number of jobs that are created in comparison to the massive investments made; the comparative effect on jobs of investing in other areas instead such as housing, health and even renewable energy sources; and ways in which the skills base can be maintained through investment in the transferring of skills to comparable non-nuclear sectors. An effective alternative employment and defence diversification strategy can meet concerns about the maintenance of jobs and skills.

Just over 11,000 people are believed to be directly employed on the Trident nuclear weapons programme (3,400 in Barrow, 900 in Rosyth, 2,300 in Devonport, 4,200 at AWE, 500 in Coulport). This is not a high number of jobs compared to the well over £100 billion which is due to be invested in a new system. The opportunity cost of investing such large amounts of money into nuclear weapons should not be ignored. Investment in other areas can also create economic growth and substantial job opportunities—without providing a means of killing and mass destruction.

It is also argued that there will be a loss of skills if the UK chooses not to continue with a nuclear weapons system, but the nuclear weapons workforce could be swiftly re-employed elsewhere because it includes large numbers of highly skilled physical scientists and engineers for whom there is a high demand from other sectors of the economy. Options for alternative employment opportunities, which could use the skills of the nuclear weapons workforce, could cover the areas of decommissioning and international disarmament work, development and production of renewable energy resources or non-nuclear defence contracts.

Defence employment is heavily dependent on market forces and ensuing Ministry of Defence contracts. Although in the short term a replacement of Trident with a similar nuclear weapons

system might boost jobs for some local areas it does mean reliance on employment from a handful of private companies whose commercial interests are naturally predominant. If a replacement was not chosen and Trident was allowed to continue until it became obsolete then this would give ample time to allow diversification plans to be put into place. The Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn MP proposed the establishment of a Defence Diversification Agency in his leadership campaign. Such a body could be instrumental in developing such plans and should be set up by the Labour party immediately.

Moreover, facilities would not close down overnight, this would happen over many years and any employment decline in some areas could be managed. An important increase in employment would actually result from the process of nuclear weapons being safely dismantled and the materials being stored and of the sites being decommissioned and cleaned up.

The decommissioning of nuclear facilities is a very large undertaking. If Trident was not replaced and some of the Trident facilities were closed down then dealing with the waste and the decommissioning process from these facilities and all of our old nuclear power stations would provide crucial alternative and regional employment for many years to come. Several argue that Aldermaston Atomic Weapons Establishment could become a centre of expertise for issues of verification, decommissioning and the dismantling of nuclear facilities and secure disposal of weapons-usable materials. Redirection of investment and subsidies into non-nuclear production and facilities can more than compensate for jobs currently located in the nuclear sector, and the same applies to potential future jobs related to any proposed new nuclear weapons system.
