

Championing internationalism in the post-coronavirus world Labour CND RESPONSE

Q5: Weaknesses in national security and global stability

Real security is that which makes our citizens safe. As mounting criticisms of the Tories handling of the Covid19 crisis demonstrate, it is not always the case that state security and human security coincide, or that government notions of 'national interest' align with the interests of the majority of the people in Britain. Academics and practitioners alike are increasingly recognising that traditional ideas of state security underwritten by military force are too narrow a definition for the globalised world of the 21st century.

Real security is not about national status. From Ernest Bevin to Tony Blair, Britain's status has been the underlying though rarely acknowledged rationale of those in the Labour Party who support nuclear weapons. As Foreign Secretary from 1945 to '51 Bevin, in his own words, wanted a British bomb with a Union Jack on it. Tony Blair admitted in his memoirs that he thought not proceeding with Trident replacement would be too big a downgrading in our status as nation, though its utility was 'non-existent in terms of military use'.

National security fit for the 21st century means investment in cyber security, healthcare, and environmental protection. It means providing economic security for our citizens and stopping the growth of far-right extremism.

Embedding genuine security into our foreign policy objectives would be boosted by progressing international and multilateral initiatives for peace and disarmament, especially those which control the possession and use of weapons of mass and indiscriminate destruction. This would be a significant step the UK could take to reduce global instability, and a lead by Britain we could all be proud of.

Marian Hobbs, former New Zealand Minister for Disarmament in the Labour government of Helen Clark, has argued there is still much work to be done implementing existing conventions around chemical and biological weapons. Despite the 1997 Ottawa Treaty on anti-personnel mines, more than 60 million people are still in danger of being killed or injured by landmines.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty has stalled. Non-nuclear weapon state signatories have increasingly questioned the 'good faith' enshrined in the treaty – that the nuclear weapon states will pursue disarmament. For that reason, non-nuclear weapon states took the lead at the UN in promoting a new Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW, commonly known as the Global Ban Treaty). Labour should explicitly welcome such initiatives on disarmament and take part in the multilateral conversations which the UK and other nuclear weapons states are refusing to engage with.

A major weakness in UK security policy is the vast sums of money devoted to Trident replacement. Britain's nuclear weapons system is irrelevant to the threats we face, while the possession of nuclear weapons make us a target. The immediate and present threats to Britain were identified by the government's own Strategic Defence and Security Reviews of 2010 and 2015, including health pandemics and climate disasters.

We should commit to scrapping Trident replacement at the earliest opportunity and be prepared to dismantle the existing system when in government, starting with an end to at-sea patrols. In line with TUC policy, we should establish a Shadow Defence Diversification Agency now to prepare a just transition.

This would improve Britain's security, promote global stability, and enhance the UK's international reputation if a future Labour government took a lead on real security.

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