

Q1 Should the UK remain a nuclear weapon state?

This question seems to assume that the UK is now a state with independent nuclear weapons. Granted our extreme dependence on the United States for nuclear weapon technology and for the missiles themselves, this is at least questionable. Harold Wilson once said that ours is a 'Moss Bros' nuclear deterrent. Assuming for the purposes of this Commission that the UK is a genuine nuclear weapon state, the answer to the question is NO - for at least two main reasons. There are others.

SECURITY

Though people in this country have been led to believe for years that nuclear weapons are the ultimate guarantee of security they are actually exactly the opposite. They ensure, for the whole world community, ever increasing insecurity. Few realise how many accidents and misunderstandings have over the last 50 years brought us close to disaster. For those in doubt about this look again at the Cuba crisis and the history of the Petrov incident in 1983.

There are now 8 or perhaps 9 nuclear weapons states. There is good reason to fear that nuclear weapons will eventually get into the hands of non state agents against whom deterrence has no effect since there is no specific territory to threaten. Deterrence depends on our belief in the rationality and desire for life of the enemy. In 1978 the Report of the First United Nations Special Session on Disarmament said (para 13) that 'enduring international peace and security cannot be built on a **precarious** balance of deterrence.' In 1981 Lawrence Freedman said of peace based on nuclear weaponry: *'To believe that this can go on indefinitely without major disaster requires an optimism unjustified by any historical or political perspective'*.

But, say those who want to replace our nuclear weapons, we have no idea, in the long run, what the threats to the UK will be, so it is better, however expensive, to have what amounts to a nuclear insurance policy.

The first part of that proposition is quite true. Tidal waves, cyclones, epidemics are all possibilities. So too are revolutions and millions on the move, and perhaps at our borders, as refugees fleeing poverty and war. Some of this is quite possible if we continue to run the world as it is being run today. We do have to plan prudently and make what preparations we can for such disasters, emergencies and upheavals.

But for the UK to continue to possess nuclear weapons is not an intelligent response to the long term remote threat that some country might threaten us with nuclear weapons.

It is much more probable that nuclear threats will come from non state agents against whom 'our' nuclear weapons could have no deterrent effect. UK continued possession of

nuclear weapons will of course do nothing to reduce the possibility of accident or miscalculation.

It will however encourage others to believe that nuclear weapons provide security and try get their own.

Far better to devote our energies and resources **now**, while there is an opportunity, to achieve the global abolition of all such weapons, impose a stringent inspection and policing regime, and thus ensure our long term security at least in respect of nuclear weapons.

GOOD FAITH

The International Court of Justice advised in 1996 that: *'There exists an obligation to pursue in **good faith** and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects under strict and effective international control'*. The UK has yet to enter into such negotiations. It cannot be the 'good faith' required by the ICJ for the UK to ensure that, even after the current Trident ends its life span in or around 2028, it has its own nuclear weapons perhaps until 2060.

Q2 If it should remain a nuclear weapon state, is Trident renewal the only or best option that the UK can and should pursue?

All alternatives to Trident are equally challenged by the objections above. The search for a non-Trident option is just political and perhaps economic face saving. What does it matter to other countries if UK nuclear weapons, albeit fewer in number, are mounted on 4 submarines or 3 double-decker buses? We would still be telling the world that we need nuclear weapons for our security but that non-nuclear states cannot have them. This is not a tenable position.

Q3 What more can and should the UK do to more effectively promote global nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and nuclear security?

Four things at least.

The first is to enter positively into nuclear weapon elimination negotiations and urge the other nuclear weapon states to do so too.

The second is to decide not to replace Trident.

The third is to take confidence-building steps such as the removal of warheads from missiles, and invite international inspectors to verify this.

The fourth is to honour the obligations arising from the 1978 UN SSD1 Report, paragraphs 100-106. We then agreed to promote public education about disarmament. *'...Programmes of education for disarmament and peace studies at all levels'* were promised. This was to take place in partnership with non-governmental organisations. This has never happened and the result is that most of the general public still mistakenly believe that nuclear weapons are the absolute guarantee of ultimate security.

Few have any idea that the dropping of the bombs in 1945 was not the only way to end the Pacific war. Few also know that current policies involve our readiness to use nuclear weapons in situations where they have not been used by an opponent – so-called 'first use' strategies. 'Absolute nuclear nonsense' Lord Mountbatten called such ideas in 1979.

Few know much about the long-term effects on humans and the environment of any use of nuclear weapons, or of the many nuclear weapon accidents which have occurred. Public education is the key to progress.

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