Trident Briefing 2016

Later this year a decision will be made on the replacement of the British nuclear weapons system known as Trident. The Network of Christian Peace Organisations offers this Briefing for use by individuals, organisations and churches in the lead-up to this decision. We believe this is a matter of faith and spirituality that speaks of how we live together in the world, how we see one another and how we understand security. Trident cannot protect us from 21st Century challenges such as terrorism, climate change, cyber war or global instability. By claiming to need a so-called nuclear ‘deterrent’, the UK is inciting other countries to develop their own. A world with nuclear weapons is a much more dangerous place than a world without them.

The UK is committed by international treaties to negotiate at an early date the total elimination of its nuclear weapons.

What you can do

Use the arguments and questions overleaf to help you to:

- Write to local and Church press to question plans to replace Trident, perhaps looking at local/regional needs that could be met with the money which would be spent on Trident.
- Engage with your Member of Parliament, setting out in your own words your concerns about the replacement of Trident.
- Join or ask to be put on the mailing list of one of the member organisations of NCPO and keep in touch with peace and disarmament developments and opportunities all year round.

NCPO members at Stop Trident Rally, 2016  Credit: Pat Gaffney
Arguments and questions to engage in discussion and help challenge Trident replacement

Cost
The cost of Trident replacement is massive and continues to rise. The submarines alone were to cost £11-£14 billion in 2006 and now that estimate has risen to £31-£41 billion. The total cost of deploying the submarines, missiles and warheads for an additional 30 years is now estimated to be over £200 billion. This figure includes the cost of eventually decommissioning the submarines and warheads, as well as the ongoing running costs which are expected to rise from the current £2 billion per year to nearly double that amount by the 2060s.

At a time when austerity budgets continue to mean cuts to social services, increasing pressure on the NHS, rising tuition fees, and the draining of local authority resources, spending that much money on Trident reflects our distorted national priorities. With a fraction of the money to be spent on Trident, we could instead be building a world-class health service, re-opening access to higher education, investing in sustainable energy sources to meet our climate commitments, and addressing the real causes of war and terrorism which lie in the inequalities and injustices of the present international order.

A promise made ‘in good faith’
The British government promised in 1968 to negotiate ‘in good faith’ the complete elimination of its nuclear weapons. It gave an ‘unequivocal undertaking’ in 2010 that it was still committed to fulfilling this promise. And yet the UK continues year after year to vote against nuclear disarmament initiatives at the UN and has so far refused to put its own nuclear weapons up for negotiation. In 2015, the UK, together with the US and Canada, shamefully blocked the final agreement reached by 185 other countries at the Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference, and in 2016 it has been boycotting the UN working group which is meeting specifically to find ways to move forward on multilateral disarmament.

As Christians, we believe we need to be as good as our word. When we make promises to other countries we should stick by them. We cannot be saying one thing and doing the opposite. The UK has moral, as well as legal, obligations that commit it to a world without nuclear weapons. How does the renewal of Trident move us towards such a world?

Questions you could raise
Do you think the UK should be present at multilateral disarmament talks?
Do you think the UK should put its Trident weapons up for negotiation as promised in 1968?
Do you think it makes sense to renew Trident when the vast majority of other countries are trying to negotiate the total elimination of all nuclear weapons?

Security
As Christians, we put our faith in God rather than in weapons. We believe it is an act of faithlessness to claim that our only protection from weapons of mass destruction is to possess weapons of mass destruction ourselves. In what sense does Trident ‘protect’ us, when all it can do is to inflict death and destruction on another country after they have already inflicted the same on us? When would such a revenge attack ever be morally justified?

We are told that Trident is a ‘deterrent’ and would never be used. But no weapon can be effective as a deterrent unless there is a clear intention to use it. The longer we rely on these weapons, the greater the likelihood that they will be used by accident or design. It is a gross misreading of history as well as of human nature to suggest that the only reason countries have not attacked us in the last 70 years is because they were ‘deterred’ by the threat of massive nuclear retaliation.

Questions you could raise
Do you think the vast majority of countries - which do not have their own nuclear weapons and are not ‘protected’ by the so-called ‘nuclear umbrella’ - are less safe and in more danger of being attacked than we are? Do you think the UK is more, or less, likely to be a target if we keep Trident? What should Britain do to prevent nuclear proliferation and make the world safer?

Humanitarian impact
Trident is a weapon of mass destruction. A single Trident warhead is more than six times as powerful as the bomb which killed 140,000 people in Hiroshima. Each Trident submarine carries 40 warheads, or more destructive power than was used in the whole of World War II. If these were ever used, even only on military targets in and around Moscow, they would probably kill more than 5 million people. The radioactive fallout would kill many millions more. Many would be killed even in the UK, since fall-out does not stop at national boundaries - as we saw with the Chernobyl accident.

As Christians, we do not accept that there can ever be circumstances in which it is permissible to commit mass murder or to deliberately target whole cities full of innocent civilians. While most Christians through the centuries have accepted there can be a ‘just war’ under certain circumstances, these circumstances cannot be applied to nuclear weapons or nuclear war, since these weapons are incapable of distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants, or even between belligerent countries and neutral countries.

Questions you could raise
Do you think all weapons of mass destruction should be banned and made illegal, including nuclear as well as biological and chemical weapons? Do you think it can ever be justified to use Trident against civilians, the elderly and the infirm – to deliberately target schools, hospitals, churches, fall-out shelters, museums, homes, public buildings?

Nuclear weapons are tools of terror and contribute nothing to peace. Our country’s money and know-how could be so much better used.
Philip Austin, Northern Friends Peace Board

Ash Wednesday Witness, London 2013

I have no faith in Trident because I have no faith in weapons of mass destruction. If we can ban chemical and biological weapons because of their indiscriminate function then I do not want my country to hold nuclear weapons.
Sue Claydon, Anglican Pacifist Fellowship

Liverpool Christians public witness Credit: John Usher

Japanese campaigner at Aldermaston
Credit: Pat Gaffney

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