

Nuclear Information Service

35-39 London Street, Reading, RG1 4PS, United Kingdom
tel/fax: +44 (0)118 327 7489 e-mail: office@nuclearinfo.org www.nuclearinfo.org

Britain's Security: Labour's Defence Policy Review Response from Nuclear Information Service

1. Nuclear Information Service (NIS) is a not-for-profit, independent information service which works to promote public awareness and debate on nuclear weapons and related safety and environmental issues (see <http://nuclearinfo.org> for more information). Our research work is supported by funding from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.
2. NIS welcomes the Labour Party's policy review on defence and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the review. As an organisation which works mainly on nuclear disarmament issues, our contribution focuses mainly on the UK's nuclear weapons, although we have also briefly addressed the broader questions asked as part of the review. References have been cited for key sources only.
3. The next Labour government should aim to transform Britain, and turn the country into a progressive modern democracy. As part of this programme the Labour government should rewrite Britain's outdated and archaic defence and foreign policies, which have their roots in imperialist and militarist narratives crafted largely by Conservative commentators and thinkers. Labour's new defence policy should have two aims:
 - To ensure that the public have the security and stability they need to live safe and prosperous lives.
 - To achieve the goal of a peaceful and just world, where no nation feels the need to rely on nuclear weapons for security, by supporting global arms control initiatives and disarming its own nuclear weapons.
4. Labour's new policy should be seen to be responsible and to address the security needs of the British people, and also contribute to broader global peace and stability. We consider a Labour government can achieve this by taking the following measures:
 - Focusing on pro-active non-military interventions to resolve global conflicts before they develop into crises, using force only as a last resort.
 - Focusing on security threats which pose the greatest risks to the UK's public – rather than the state – and building up the resilience of communities to deal with dangers.
 - Taking a number of gradual steps 'down the nuclear ladder'.
 - Replacing the UK's nuclear weapons with a range of conventional defensive capabilities.

Britain's place in the world – values, principles, objectives

5. The UK should seek to make the world a safer and more peaceful world for everyone, and move away from a security model based on 'keeping the lid on' global problems and preserving the status quo to maintain UK's position and privileges at the disadvantage of others.

6. Current UK security strategy is heavily biased towards military intervention and force projection. This means that our response to global problems is generally reactive, based on fire-fighting crises rather than preventing them from happening, and requiring expensive military equipment. A greater emphasis on non-military approaches to the root causes of security threats could be both more effective both in terms of results and costs. In future the UK should place more emphasis on the use of soft power to meet its international aims, and move away from the militarist approach of recent years which, if anything, has aggravated international security problems rather than resolved them. The government should move towards taking a proactive approach to global security based on preventing, rather than responding to, crises through early intervention and a 'sustainable security' approach: conflict resolution and negotiation; peacekeeping and diplomacy; and developing economic opportunities through trade, investment, and development aid to tackle the inequalities and disadvantage that cause conflict¹.
7. The UK should act as a responsible member of the international community. We should use our position in the United Nations and international alliances such as the European Union and NATO to act as a peacemaker rather than a warmaker : acting as a moderating force within the UN Security Council and NATO, presenting alternatives to military action, and acting as a brake on the ambitions of 'hawks'. We should be actively working for the reform of international institutions that are not working effectively and not performing competently in maintaining international security. A key guiding principle behind the UK's security strategy should be that we will only use military force as a last resort and will ensure that when we do, we are indisputably in compliance with international law and have a clear international mandate to use force.

Threats to Britain's security

8. A Labour government should protect Britain's security by recognising that the modern world poses a complex range of threats which cannot all be addressed by the use of military force. One of the new government's first steps should be to consult widely and prepare a robust National Security Strategy which identifies and prioritises these threats.
9. Among the very real threats which face ordinary people – in this country, as well as overseas – are threats posed by pandemic diseases, climate change, economic shocks, and poverty, and the mass displacement of people and migration resulting from these factors. Military responses can play little, if any, role in addressing these threats. In contrast, military force has traditionally been used as a response to threats which face the state, its ideology, and its economic interests, and a strong case can be argued that recent offensive UK military operations have increased risks to the public from terrorist attacks, rather than kept them safe.
10. Rather than taking a patrician, state-centred view on maintaining security, a Labour government should as far as possible aim to help the public to resist the security threats they face. One of Labour's security goals should be to increase the resilience of local communities to withstand and recover from the real threats that affect the everyday lives of ordinary people, such as flooding and severe weather, crime and extremism, threats to public health, and cyber risks.

¹ More about a sustainable security approach and how it might be implemented for the UK can be found in: Chris Abbott, Paul Rogers, and John Sloboda: 'Global Responses to Global Threats'. Oxford Research Group, June 2006. <http://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/sites/default/files/globalthreats.pdf>
IPPR Commission on National Security in the 21st Century: 'Shared Responsibilities: A National Security Strategy for the United Kingdom'. Institute for Public Policy Research, June 2009. http://www.ippr.org/files/images/media/files/publication/2012/01/shared-responsibilities_security_final_June2009_1704.pdf

Britain's military and security forces: Capabilities, spending, and choices

11. Military strategy and the weapons systems purchased to achieve military aims must support Britain's broader security and international policy. On entering office a new Labour government should conduct a broad review of National Security, which will provide an opportunity to review military needs and ensure they are aligned to our broader international aims. All major defence policies and projects – including those relating to nuclear weapons – should be assessed through the review process to test how they contribute to addressing current and future security threats. The review should identify the threats which the armed forces will be required to address and the international roles that they will be expected to play, set the standard of service at which these tasks will be delivered, and specify the level of funding needed to achieve this.
12. The Labour Party should accept that there is no such thing as a responsible trade in weapons, and that the arms trade plays a significant role in fuelling global conflicts. A Labour government should halt public funding support for the export of arms and close those government teams which have the role of promoting arms sales. Diplomatically and politically it should take steps to control the arms trade, especially the sale of weapons and technology to repressive authoritarian regimes. UK forces should take part in peacekeeping efforts to intercept and prevent weapons from entering combat zones.
13. Currently, nuclear weapons have a significant emphasis in the UK's defence policies. This is principally the result of historical and political factors which evolved during the Cold War rather than on the basis of a considered long-term analysis of UK security needs. The stubborn view that the UK should retain its nuclear weapons come what may, which has dominated defence policy-making for more than fifty years, now brings with it a number of risks:
 - Despite the government's claims, Trident does not guarantee the UK's security. The strategic rationale for retaining nuclear weapons is thin, based on intangible concepts such as 'deterrence' and 'insurance' rather than a sound cause-and-effect reasoning of how they would contribute to the UK's security.
 - It is inflexible, setting the UK's defence policies on a pre-determined course for the next thirty years or more, with highly limited opportunity to adapt policy as new situations evolve.
 - It commits security policy for future generations to highly expensive, single use platforms and equipment, consuming resources that might be used more effectively for other purposes and might address a broader and more realistic range of threats.
 - It assumes a 'business as usual' security model, which presupposes that the principal threats the UK will face in years to come will be the same as those at the time the Trident system was designed in the 1980s.
 - The assumption that the UK's nuclear weapons will remain invulnerable to detection when deployed at sea upon a submarine may not remain valid as technology advances, for example in the areas of satellite surveillance, low frequency active sonar, and underwater drones.
 - Neither is it clear that the UK's nuclear weapons could continue to credibly guarantee to launch an attack which would inflict unacceptable damage on an enemy as capability develops in the realms of anti-ballistic missile defences and cyber warfare.
 - Mounting international concerns about the humanitarian impacts and legality of the use of nuclear weapons may mean that a security policy which relies on inflicting mass casualties using weapons of mass destruction becomes unacceptable and untenable.

- It does not provide mutual security to all parties or address the security concerns of non-nuclear armed states, and is therefore inherently unstable and insecure.

We believe that this approach to Britain's security is ill-considered and irresponsible, and is based on political dogma rather than objective analysis. The Labour Party should therefore hold the government to account over the weakness of its nuclear deterrence policy and, when in office, take steps to responsibly disarm the UK's nuclear weapons and introduce a security policy which is matched to modern needs and will protect the public from the real threats that they face.

14. The BASIC Trident Commission, which reported in July 2014, concluded that the UK and other nuclear weapon states should commence to move down a 'glide-path' towards the elimination of nuclear weapons. This remains the case. A Labour government should give a clear commitment that it will disarm its nuclear weapons in the interests of global peace and security, but must be seen by the public to be doing this in a responsible way which does not undermine their own security.
15. A future Labour government should take a step-by-step approach to disarmament of the UK's nuclear weapons. The first step should be by awarding no new contracts for modernising the Trident programme (including building new submarines) unless a security review can identify a clear strategic rationale for the programme and can demonstrate that it should take priority over competing defence programmes.
16. As a second step, a Labour government should continue on the trajectory taken by previous governments in reducing the scale and role of the UK's nuclear forces and, at an appropriate time, take the UK's Trident submarines off a routine of constant at sea nuclear armed patrols.
17. Thirdly, the government must make the most of the impact that these measures would have internationally by launching a diplomatic offensive on global nuclear disarmament, using its status as a recognised nuclear weapon state and a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council to the following ends:
 - Supporting the humanitarian initiative on nuclear weapons and the commencement of negotiations on a nuclear weapons convention.
 - Stabilising relations with Russia.
 - Encouraging the USA to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty
 - Building detente between India and Pakistan and urging Pakistan to drop objections to a Fissile Materials Treaty.
 - Enabling a conference on a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone to take place and ensuring the conference is followed up with concrete measures.
 - Encouraging NATO states and states under the USA's nuclear umbrella to take action in support of multilateral disarmament initiatives such as the humanitarian initiative.
 - Using the UK's own disarmament programme as a prototype for developing disarmament verification processes.

It is sometimes said that unilateral disarmament measures by the UK would have no impact on the rest of the world, but this is not so. Although the UK has taken a number of unilateral nuclear disarmament measures in the past, these have not been accompanied by any determined effort to encourage others to take action as well, and have therefore not had as much impact as they might have had. On the other hand, the UK has played an important diplomatic role in halting Libya's nuclear weapons programme, negotiating the Biological Weapons Convention, supporting global implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, and achieving the international agreement on Iran's nuclear

programme. The role that the UK can play in driving forward arms control agreements should not, therefore, be underestimated.

18. Labour should not be tempted by the option of cancelling the Trident programme but instead replacing it with an alternative nuclear system, such as a submarine launched cruise missile or an air launched nuclear weapon, as has been proposed by some analysts. The 2013 Trident Alternatives Review concluded that such options could be expected to be less effective and more expensive than a Trident-based system. Moreover, as these systems are primarily designed for tactical, war-fighting use, their adoption could actually increase the risks of a British nuclear weapon being used, under circumstances of questionable legality rather than being held as a weapon of truly last resort. Unless a clear strategic rationale for the UK to possess nuclear weapons can be formulated, which we feel is unlikely, the UK should aim to move 'down the nuclear ladder' – rather than move 'sideways' – by phasing out the Trident system and replacing it as necessary with conventional capabilities.
19. According to a 2014 report from the House of Commons Defence Committee, “It is possible to foresee an environment in which the core role of nuclear deterrence – to protect a state from attack – is achieved by the deployment of advanced conventional weapons, providing both offensive and defensive capability”². The committee felt unable at the time to evaluate the technical options to do this, but suggested that such an evaluation should be undertaken in the future. Andrew Futter of the University of Leicester has suggested that a defensive conventional strategic deterrent force for the UK could consist of a number of elements:
 - A mixture of air and missile defences. The missile defence element could derive from a greater UK involvement in NATO's Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) programmes, and / or an indigenous system based on the Fylingdales early warning radar system, an upgraded and expanded fleet of Type 45 destroyers equipped with the Principal Anti-Air Missile System (Sea Viper), and deployment of the US Aegis Ashore BMD system.
 - A conventional precision strike counterforce capability, which could conceivably be deployed using a converted Trident system and submarines.
 - Upgraded conventional force capabilities.
 - Continued membership of the NATO alliance, which would presumably continue to provide a 'nuclear umbrella' over at least the medium term.

A comprehensive missile defence system – in the absence of a nuclear strike force – could eventually serve as a truly defensive alternative to Trident's offensive nuclear capability,

Protecting British jobs and skills

20. The defence equipment programme should reflect genuine peacekeeping and defensive needs, and dovetail with the needs of the NATO alliance. Equipment should be interoperable with NATO allies, relying as far as possible on standard, off-the-shelf systems but also providing value for money and the necessary quality to 'do the job' well. In some cases this would mean purchasing equipment from overseas suppliers rather than UK manufacturers. However, we consider that a progressive Labour government should not be afraid to rein in public subsidies to the defence industry and should actively

² 'Deterrence in the 21st century'. House of Commons Defence Committee, 27 March 2014. Paragraph 71. <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmdfence/1066/1066vw.pdf>

encourage companies working in the defence sector to diversify into new, civil sector markets.

21. A study by the Nuclear Education Trust published in 2012 has investigated the economic and industrial implications for Barrow-in-Furness, where Trident submarines would be built, which would result from options other than a like-for-like replacement of Trident³. The study concluded that a review of the Trident programme might lead to a step-down in employment at Barrow but need not lead to closure of the shipyard, and that work on the Astute submarine programme would provide employment until 2023. Regeneration and diversification of employment at Barrow is possible, but may come at a cost of £100 million or more. However, this is a small sum in comparison with the costs of building even just one submarine.
22. In Scotland HM Naval Base Clyde, where Trident submarines are berthed and warheads stored, is another important location where jobs are dependent on the Trident programme. A 2007 study by the Scottish TUC and Scottish CND into the economic and employment consequences for Scotland of a decision not to renew Trident found that this would result in no more than 1,800 jobs being lost, and that this reduction would not take place until after 2022⁴. The study also found that Scotland would be significantly worse off if Trident is continued than otherwise because of opportunities lost elsewhere as a result of spending on Trident. It concluded that the non-replacement of Trident represents a major opportunity for productive investment in the Scottish economy, specifically to develop technologies for energy efficiency, energy conservation and renewables, which would require similar manufacturing and research skills to those currently used for Trident maintenance. A follow-up report in 2015 revisited the study in the light of the Government's austerity programme, which has squeezed defence budgets and spending elsewhere in the public sector, and presented a number of case studies from the United States Base Realignment and Closure programme which showed that with early planning, adequate resources, workforce involvement and the political will, local communities can prosper after the closure of large military installations⁵.
23. The possibility for converting employment in the military equipment sector to work on renewable energy and energy efficiency is frequently raised and is an area with considerable potential. The skills used in both sectors are reasonably similar: for example, a US study⁶ has examined the crossover potential between a naval shipyard, manufacture of the F-22 fighter and C130J transport aircraft, and expeditionary fighting vehicles with work on a range of 'green' technologies. The report concluded that nearly every green job had an equivalent position that an arms industry worker could be retrained to fill.
24. Although defence industries are sometimes said to represent a major part of the UK manufacturing base, they actually account for a small proportion of national employment, and most jobs in the manufacture of arms are located in areas with relatively low

³ 'Trident Alternatives Review and the future of Barrow'. Nuclear Education Trust, December 2012.

<http://www.nucleareducationtrust.org/trident-alternatives-review-and-future-barrow>

⁴ 'Cancelling Trident: The Economic and Employment Consequences for Scotland'. Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and Scottish Trades Union Congress. 11 March 2007.

<http://www.stuc.org.uk/files/STUC%20-%20CND%20Trident%20Report%202007/STUC-CND%20Trident%20Report.pdf>

⁵ 'Trident & Jobs: The case for a Scottish Defence Diversification Agency'. Scottish Trades Union Congress and Scottish Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. 22 April 2015. <http://www.stuc.org.uk/files/Congress%202015/DefenceDiversificationReport2014%20v2.pdf>

⁶ Pemberton, Miriam: 'Military vs. Climate Security: Mapping the Shift from the Bush Years to the Obama Era'. Institute for Policy Studies, August 2009.

http://www.ushrnetwork.org/sites/ushrnetwork.org/files/military_vs_climate_security.pdf

unemployment⁷. There is also convincing evidence to demonstrate that spending on personal consumption, health care, education, mass transit, and construction for home weather-proofing and infrastructure repair all create more jobs relative to the same expenditure on defence⁸.

25. Studies such as those cited above have shown that, even at relatively isolated locations which are heavily dependent on Trident and the defence industry, opportunities exist for sustaining the local economy and preserving jobs if the UK's defence manufacturing sector is cut back. It is quite possible that jobs and spending in the defence sector could have an even greater local economic impact if they were devoted to new, non-defence related areas of activity. However, this would require a planned approach and a political commitment to stand by workers in the defence sector.
26. The next Labour government should therefore make a clear statement accepting responsibility for the future of the workforce at workplaces heavily dependent on the Trident nuclear weapons programme, and promise to maintain local economic and employment opportunities when work on the Trident programme ceases. Local authorities and trade unions with an interest in the Trident programme should be invited to endorse and support the statement.
27. The Labour government should set up a Defence Diversification Agency to address issues relating to economic and employment impacts of contraction within the defence sector, and particularly the downscaling or cancellation of the Trident replacement programme. The agency should act principally as an enabler, providing support and funding to local initiatives to develop alternative economic prospects for defence manufacturing sites led by local partnerships bringing together local authorities and regional development agencies, manufacturing companies and their workers, and trade unions.
28. Before entering government, and as soon as is practicable, Labour should work with trade unions and local authorities to set up a shadow Defence Diversification Agency which can commence work ready to transform into a formal Agency upon a change of government. The shadow Defence Diversification Agency should undertake a national study to identify the number and locations of jobs which are dependent on the defence sector, particularly the Trident programme, the broad skill portfolio available at each location, and outline possibilities for diversification into civil sector work at each location.

Conclusion

29. One of Jeremy Corbyn's recognised hallmarks, as leader of the Labour Party, is his opposition to nuclear weapons and the Trident replacement programme. Unsurprisingly, this policy has proved unpopular with the political right and the political establishment, including much of the media and some in the Labour Party, and has provided Labour's enemies with ammunition to attack the party as extremist. This has happened regardless of the fact that current Party policy is unambiguously in favour of Trident replacement. A decision to change Party policy so that it is against Trident replacement might be expected to see such attacks continue.

⁷ Schofield, Steven: 'Making Arms, Wasting Skills: Alternatives to Militarism and Arms Production'. Campaign Against Arms Trade, April 2008.

<https://www.caat.org.uk/resources/publications/economics/making-arms-2008.pdf>

⁸ Pollin, Robert, and Heidi Garrett-Peltier: 'The US Employment Effects of Military and Domestic Spending Priorities'. Department of Economics and Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts, Amherst. October 2007. www.comw.org/pda/fulltext/Pollin-Garrett-Peltier.pdf

30. However, this situation would not change if Labour decided to retain its support for Trident. Labour's enemies could be expected to continue to portray the party as irresponsible and naïve on security matters regardless of any policy change. Jeremy Corbyn, as party leader, would be attacked as being fickle and indecisive and would be seen to have made an embarrassing U-turn for party political reasons. This would damage his most important political asset, which won him the post of party leader: the widespread perception that he is a decent, honest, and principled man. Criticism of the leader by some on Labour's right wing would continue regardless of the Party's reaffirmed support for Trident, allowing the media to portray a divided Party and a leader who is under the thumb of his back-benchers.
31. In short, Labour has just as much to lose – if not more – by retaining its current policy on defence and nuclear weapons as it has by abandoning it for a progressive but realistic security policy which does not rely on nuclear weapons and phases out the Trident system.
32. The aim for Labour should be to show that its policies on both security and disarmament are responsible, credible, and coherent, and demonstrate that the dire consequences which some have predicted as a result of adopting these policies are exaggerated. At the same time, Labour must show that it is Conservative supporters of Trident who are irresponsible for gambling national security on the hope that Trident will remain credible, invulnerable, and relevant for another thirty years or more. Labour's new defence policy should focus on tackling the threats that really matter to ordinary people, and allow Britain to take a responsible role in keeping the peace around the globe. Nuclear weapons and Trident have no role to play in either of these tasks.