

Some notes for CND strategy conference

Strategy for peace, doctrines of war

Milan Rai, *Peace News*

I'd like to make three suggestions of my own, before responding to one of the questions.

PREVENTING USE

Firstly, the focus for the nuclear disarmament movement ought to be “preventing the use of nuclear weapons”.

This means identifying the factors that make nuclear war more likely, and tackling them, rather than focusing on disarmament in the sense of reducing the number of nuclear weapons.

Of course, to really prevent the use of nuclear weapons, we have to abolish them, but the benefit of prioritising prevention of use, in my view, is that it brings out some of the more important intermediate steps or goals for our movement.

AGGRESSIVE DOCTRINES

Secondly, this means more attention to Britain's aggressive nuclear doctrines.

FIRST USE Britain – and NATO – reserve the right to use nuclear weapons first.

THE RIFKIND DOCTRINE Britain is also committed to using nuclear threats – and, if necessary, nuclear weapons themselves – to protect commercial “vital interests” in the rest of the world (the 1993 Rifkind doctrine, re-affirmed by New Labour in 1998).

Polls show that such policies are (a) deeply unpopular and (b) unknown to the public.

A Greenpeace/MORI poll in 2005 (sparked by a reading of some polls in my book *Tactical Trident*) showed that 77% of people in Britain opposed the first use of British nuclear weapons (against an enemy who possessed nuclear weapons but who wasn't using them).

An Omnimas poll in 1987 showed that only 7% of people in Britain knew that the government was committed to first use of nuclear weapons. That was soon after the high water mark of the disarmament movement here in the UK: the proportion of people knowing the truth is unlikely to have risen dramatically.

AGGRESSIVE WARS

Thirdly, there is a real convergence (not a partnership of convenience) between CND, opposed to nuclear use to protect “vital interests”, and the anti-war movement, opposed to military intervention to protect “vital interests”.

Wars of aggression are (apart from accidents) the most likely trigger for the use of nuclear weapons. Preventing or terminating such wars is a major contribution to reducing the risk of nuclear use.

OUR DEMANDS

Question: What demands do you think we should put to the British government in advance of the 2010 NPT Review Conference? Which are the most likely to be achievable (please rank if possible). What are the advantages and disadvantages of demanding more than we think we can achieve? Should we demand more than we think we can achieve?

LONG TERM

I think we should try to be honest with ourselves about what is achievable in this field, what our timescales are.

While threshold states like Libya and South Africa have been dislodged from nuclear weapon status fairly easily, the established and imperial nuclear powers – Britain, China, France, Israel, Russia and the US – are committed to nuclear weapons as a core element of their statehoods.

Holding nuclear weapons is of vital importance to those who hold power in these states. Nuclear status, for a country like Britain, is intertwined with the commercial and economic power of its transnational corporations, particularly in relation to those of France and the US.

X In my view, abolition of the British bomb is not going to be possible until these corporations are radically altered – or abolished – in a democratic economy.

This is a long-range objective which can only be achieved by a very powerful (probably European-wide) movement of movements, in which a revitalised and radical labour movement would have a key role.

MEDIUM-TERM DEMANDS: DOCTRINE

If this view is correct, the key priority in our short- and medium-term goals should be restraining the use of nuclear weapons by current possessors, rather than hoping for abolition in the absence of a massive grassroots movement for major social change. This would mean a higher priority for nuclear doctrine rather than nuclear hardware.

X In this light, three useful steps would be to:

> urge Britain (and the other permanent members of the UN Security Council) to sign a legally-binding international Negative Security Assurance treaty – promising not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states – as demanded by virtually everyone party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty;

> urge Britain (and the other permanent members of the UN Security Council) to sign up to a No First Use treaty – as proposed at one time by China;

> urge Britain (and the other permanent members of the UN Security Council) to formally renounce nuclear doctrines permitting the use or threatened use of nuclear weapons to secure or defence “vital interests” – which was ruled illegal by the International Court of Justice.

The value of these demands would be three-fold:

> they would give an opportunity to educate and mobilise the British people, who by large majorities reject such doctrines (but who don't know they have always been the position of the British government);

> and they would make possible a much stronger connection between CND and other British social movements such as the anti-war movement (given the overlap of interest in preventing state violence for “vital interests”;

> and they would make possible a much stronger connection between CND and the peace and justice movements of the rest of the world.

Of course there is much more to say. I look forward to the debate that will spring from this conference.

Milan Rai, long ago a member of CND National Council
07980 748 555 - milanrai@btinternet.com
Co-editor, *Peace News* - Co-coordinator, Justice Not Vengeance