

Bin the Bomb Briefing

Aims

1. To provide supporters with information to help them to:
 - (a) argue why Britain should not upgrade or replace Trident
 - (b) counter arguments for upgrading or replacing Trident.
2. To provide the public and decision makers with information in order to influence their views.

Contents:

Arguments for upgrading or replacing Trident:

- (1) North Korea has the bomb and Iran is developing one
- (2) We need nuclear weapons because of the threat from terrorists
- (3) There are many jobs in Scotland which depend on Trident
- (4) Nuclear weapons are an insurance policy in an uncertain world
- (5) British nuclear weapons are for deterrence
- (6) If we give up the bomb Britain will no longer be a major power

Arguments against upgrading or replacing Trident

- (1) British nuclear weapons could kill millions of civilians
- (2) It is wrong to have nuclear weapons
- (3) British nuclear weapons are not independent
- (4) Britain will be more secure without nuclear weapons
- (5) Upgrading or replacing Trident will make the world poorer
- (6) Most people in Scotland don't want nuclear weapons

Annex British nuclear weapons today and likely proposals for the future

Now is the time

Today Britain has Trident nuclear weapons. The Trident system was designed to last until 2020. Decisions have to be made soon about whether to spend thousands of millions of pounds replacing it. Instead of going down this road we should seize the opportunity to set aside our nuclear arsenal and to present an example to the rest of the world.

Arguments for upgrading or replacing Trident:

1. North Korea and Iran are building nuclear bombs

On 9th October 2006 it was reported that the secretive regime in North Korea had carried out a nuclear test. The following day the Conservative Shadow Defence Secretary, Dr Liam Fox said that North Korea's actions showed why it was necessary for Britain to have nuclear weapons. But is this true ?

Countries that are considering building the bomb are not doing this in order to destroy London or Glasgow. They are concerned with threats in their own region. We should not focus on the hypothetical prospect of a nuclear attack on the United Kingdom from an impoverished country on the other side of the world. Instead we need to play our part, as one country among many, trying to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.

Britain is now at a turning point. Whatever we do, we will set an example for the rest of the world. If London decides to upgrade or replace Trident this will send a message around the globe that every nation should have the bomb. If there is a nuclear free-for-all it is only a matter of time before there is a horrendous nuclear war. Alternatively if we move towards a future without nuclear weapons – then we are saying to all the other countries in the world that there is no place for the bomb.

Today when British diplomats urge other nations to stop the spread of nuclear weapons they are seen as hypocrites. Their message is ignored. If we abandoned our nuclear arsenal then our representatives could play an influential, possibly crucial role on the world stage.

We should follow the example of South Africa. At the close of the apartheid era, South Africa dismantled all its nuclear weapons. A few years later, in 1995, their diplomats played a crucial role in talks that strengthened the nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty.

This Treaty is the cornerstone of international efforts to limit the spread of nuclear weapons. While it recognises Britain as a nuclear weapons state, this was not envisaged as a permanent state of affairs - "it was supposed to be on a temporary basis, looking forward to the day when nuclear weapons would hopefully eventually be abolished." (David Broucher, former British Ambassador to the Geneva Disarmament Conference.). For this reason the treaty places firm obligations on Britain to pursue in good faith negotiations leading to disarmament. We cannot be both pursuing disarmament in good faith, and renewing Trident.

Even if, in years to come, North Korea somehow managed to build a nuclear missile that could fly half-way round the world - would they really want to attack Britain ? And in the extremely unlikely situation that they might – would our Government authorise a nuclear strike and kill millions of starving civilians on the Korean peninsula in an act of revenge ?

"When nuclear weapons states say to the non-nuclear states that they should stay away from nuclear weapons, it is like smoking a fat cigar and telling your youngsters not to smoke"

- Hans Blix, former UN chief weapons inspector.

"There is a chasm too wide for logic to leap, between arguing that Britain must maintain nuclear weapons to guarantee its security, and lecturing Iran et al that the safety of the world would be compromised if they behaved in the same way."

Robin Cook, former Foreign Secretary.

"we are an actor in this play and the actions of others are conditioned by the way in which they perceive us".

David Boucher, former British Ambassador to the Geneva Disarmament Conference.

"Britain welcomed the Ukraine's decision to give up its membership of the nuclear club voluntarily. If it is right for Kiev, why is it unthinkable for us?"

Michael Portillo, former Defence Secretary.

"As long as some countries place strategic reliance on nuclear weapons as a deterrent, other countries will emulate them. We cannot delude ourselves into thinking otherwise".

Mohamed El Baradei, Director, International Atomic Energy Agency

"To replace Trident would represent a further announcement to the world that safety and security can only be achieved by threatening mass destruction; this is to encourage other to believe the same, and thus to hasten proliferation."

General Assembly of the Church of Scotland May 2006

"Nuclear proliferation can only end when countries like the UK stop replacing weapons of mass destruction like Trident"

Michael Connarty MP (Labour)

2. We need nuclear weapons because of the threat from terrorists

Far from being discouraged by the threat of a nuclear attack, terrorists might encourage one. Suicidal fanatics could goad Britain into a nuclear strike.

"The elegant theories of deterrence all appear beside the point in the face of a suicide bomber who actively courts martyrdom. And if we ever were deluded enough to wreak our revenge by unleashing a latter-day Hiroshima on a Muslim city, we would incite fanatical terrorism against ourselves for a generation."

Robin Cook, former Foreign Secretary

Even those who are in favour of British nuclear weapons concede that they have no role in the fight against terrorism -

"I do not believe that the terrorist case plays any large part in whatever case there is for staying in this business"

Michael Quinlan, former Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence

"The most pressing threat facing the UK is that of international terrorism. Witnesses to our inquiry overwhelmingly argued that the strategic nuclear deterrent could serve no useful or practical purpose in countering this kind of threat"

House of Commons Defence Committee report into the Future of the UK's Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: the Strategic Context, 30 June 2006.

Some advocates of British nuclear weapons say that they could be used to deter a state from supplying Weapons of Mass Destruction to a terrorist group. Throughout the 1990s this argument was used about Iraq. But today it is admitted that Iraq had destroyed all its Weapons of Mass Destruction and had no links to Al Qaeda. The invasion of Iraq, propped up by flawed intelligence, has been a disaster. A nuclear strike based on information of a similar quality would be a complete catastrophe.

There are dangers in blurring the distinction between nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Nuclear weapons are so destructive that they are in a league of their own. To launch a nuclear strike in response to a chemical or biological attack would be a wholly disproportionate response.

3. There are many jobs in Scotland which depend on Trident

The Scottish Parliament has debated Trident several times. On each occasion very few MSPs try to argue why Britain needs nuclear weapons. Instead the focus was on job. They argue that we have to keep nuclear weapons because thousands of people are employed at Faslane.

But if the money for Trident were spent on any other government project it would create far more jobs.

It is wrong to assume that if Trident was scrapped then Faslane would close and all the jobs there would be lost. Currently operating from Faslane are 7 Sandown class Mine Hunters (crew 34-40) and 3 Swiftsure class submarines (crew 116), as well as 3 Trident submarines (2 crews of 135 on each). Faslane is also the base for several major international exercises every year and one of the main headquarters of the Royal Navy.

Most of the civilians that are employed working on Trident are based, not in Scotland, but in England and the United States. More are employed at Devonport dockyard and the Aldermaston nuclear factory than at Faslane on the Clyde.

"if we paid every worker at the Faslane base £40,000 per year to stay at home, that would be a lot cheaper than replacing Trident"
Rosie Kane MSP (SSP), Scottish Parliament 28 September 2006

"The UK has wasted opportunities in the past to use the skilled workforce in a way that will benefit Scotland's economy and people. We need to stop throwing tens of billions of pounds into a weapons system aimed at a threat which no longer exists. Let's instead look at the skills at Faslane and Coulport, look at what future markets are going to need in an age of peak oil and climate change, and start taking action that will benefit Scottish workers now and in the future."
Chris Ballance MSP (Green) September 2006

4. Nuclear weapons are an insurance policy in an uncertain world

Throughout the Cold War those who wanted Britain to have nuclear weapons could point to a conspicuous potential threat – the Soviet Union. Today the advocates of nuclear deterrence have to work much harder. The government says clearly that there is no current threat to the United Kingdom, which Trident can help to tackle. Nor is there any conceivable threat in the foreseeable future. Rather than concluding that there is no point in having the bomb – they argue that the justification must rest in the mist of decades to come – beyond what can be foreseen.

“This must be the only insurance policy which makes the risk greater. It is like having a policy to protect your house from subsidence, and the policy itself makes subsidence more likely”
Bruce Kent, Vice President CND

“The ‘insurance against uncertainty’ temptation and the other types of justification ... are a very unsatisfactory basis for committing scarce defence resources to this activity”
Professor John Simpson, Adviser to the UK delegation at the Non Proliferation Treaty conference.

5. British nuclear weapons are for deterrence

Spin doctors repeat the word "deterrence" to conceal from the public the reality of nuclear weapons.

"Deterrence was a dialogue of the blind with the deaf.

"I saw the arms race from the inside. I was responsible for war plans with over 12,000 targets, many struck with repeated nuclear blows, some to the point of complete absurdity. .. And through every corridor, in every impassioned plea, in every fevered debate rang the rallying cry, deterrence, deterrence, deterrence.

"Invoking deterrence became a cheap rhetorical parlour trick, a verbal sleight of hand. Proponents persist in dressing it up to court changing times and temperaments, hemming and re-hemming to fit shrinking or distorted threats.

"[deterrence] gives easy semantic cover to nuclear weapons, masking the horrors of employment with siren veils of infallibility. At best it is a gamble no mortal should pretend to make. At worst it invokes death on a scale rivalling the power of the creator.

"... the cold war lives on in the minds of those who cannot let go the fears, the beliefs, and the enmities born of the nuclear age. They cling to deterrence, clutch its tattered promise to their breast, shake it wistfully at bygone adversaries and balefully at new or imagined ones. They are gripped still by its awful willingness not simply to tempt the apocalypse but to prepare its way.

"We cannot sit in silent acquiescence to the faded homilies of the nuclear priesthood. It is time to reassert the primacy of individual conscience, the voice of reason and the rightful interests of humanity."

General George Lee Butler, former Commander of US Strategic Command

"It is no good taking refuge in the claim that the job of a deterrent is to deter, but not to fight; nothing could be more dangerous than to base a policy on bluff, on a threat you don't really believe you will ever have actually to implement"

John Slessor, head of RAF bomber command
(The Times, 6 January 1963)

"Deterrence boils down to arguing that the more dangerous things are the safer we are."

Dan Plesch

(The Future of British Britain's WMD, Foreign Policy Centre, March 2006)

If nuclear weapons will never be used then why waste millions of pounds on them ? - "If I apply that logic to buying shoes that then sit in the wardrobe and never get worn, I consider it a waste of money".
Roseanna Cunningham MSP (SNP), Scottish Parliament, 28 September 2006

"Why is it that when anyone else has something like Trident it is a weapon, but when we have it - it is a deterrent".

Rosie Kane MSP (SSP) Scottish Parliament 28 September 2006

6. If we give up the bomb Britain will no longer be a major power

Britain's place on the UN Security Council

"There is a widespread perception, particularly among the non-aligned countries, that in some way nuclear weapons are a passport to a permanent seat on the Security Council. I think that this line of reasoning is absolutely pernicious and we need to be very clear that this is not the purpose of nuclear weapons."

David Boucher, former British Ambassador to the Geneva Disarmament Conference

".. if the ability to blow up the planet is the qualification for presiding over the world's peacemaking body, then we should already have rewarded India, Pakistan and Israel with membership and we should be preparing to welcome Iran and North Korea."

Michael Portillo, former Defence Secretary

France as the only European nuclear power

"To leave the French as the only people with this I think would twitch an awful lot of very fundamental historical nerves."

Sir Michael Quinlan, former Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defence.

"Apparently Downing Street does not want to allow the French to become Europe's only nuclear weapons power. It's an argument that would look well in Yes, Minister script, but in real life it is beneath contempt."

Michael Portillo, former Defence Secretary

If Britain gave up its nuclear weapons .. "In the real world responsible French leaders would think - 'Well, if the UK is beginning this trend there will be more pressure on us to follow suit'"

Dr Bruno Tertais, Foundation for Strategic Research, Paris.

Arguments for not upgrading or replacing Trident

1. British nuclear weapons could kill millions of civilians

One Trident nuclear warhead has the explosive power of 100,000 tons of TNT. To cause a similar blast would require over 3,000 large lorries, each packed with 30 tons of explosive. And nuclear weapons are far more of a menace than normal bombs because they release deadly radiation into the atmosphere. People close to the explosion are killed immediately by blast, heat and radiation. Others die slowly from radiation burns. The radioactive fallout can kill thousands of people living many miles downwind of the explosion. A nuclear bomb devastates such a large area that massive civilian casualties are inevitable.

Today there are a total of 144 nuclear warheads deployed on three Trident submarines, based at Faslane in Scotland. A study by Scottish CND showed that if these 144 nuclear weapons were used against likely military targets in Russia then 9 million civilians would be killed, including 2 million children. If they were deliberately used against cities the death toll would rise to around 30 million. In both cases there would be radioactive contamination and economic collapse over a massive area. This would result in huge numbers of additional casualties in the longer term.

2. It is wrong to have nuclear weapons

"Opposition to nuclear weapons in general, and to Trident and its replacement in particular, goes far beyond any financial considerations. At its heart, the argument is a moral and ethical one".
Roseanna Cunningham MSP (SNP) Scottish Parliament 28 September 2006

"In a nuclear war there would be no victors, only victims"
Pope Benedict XVI, January 2006

"Churches must prevail upon governments until they recognise the incontrovertible immorality of nuclear weapons".
9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, February 2006

The International Court of Justice considered the legality of nuclear weapons and, on the 8 July 1996, said:

"the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules and principles of international law applicable in armed conflict and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law."
International Court of Justice 8 July 1996

The judges reached this conclusion because nuclear weapons devastate such a wide area that they are certain to destroy civilian objects. The Basic Rule of the Geneva Convention 1949 says:

"the Parties to the conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and the combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives."

3. British nuclear weapons are not independent

Britain does not have independent nuclear weapons today and will not have independent weapons in the future. It has an Anglo-American system which can only be used in the mutual defence interests of both Britain and the United States.

Trident missiles are purchased off-the shelf from the United States, along with all the hardware and software required to target and launch them. The nuclear warheads are assembled at Aldermaston in Berkshire, but they contain vital components manufactured in America. In both its research work and its production programme Aldermaston works hand-in-glove with the American nuclear weapons' complex.

The Mutual Defence Agreement, renewed in 2004, says that Britain can only use the information and components supplied from the United States in the mutual defence interest of both countries. We cannot use our nuclear weapons in a situation which was not in America's interest.

It is inconceivable that the nuclear weapons based at Faslane could be used in an independent attack. The prospect of them being launched under NATO command is also remote, because this would require approval of many European countries. The most likely scenario in which British nuclear weapons might be used is in support of an American nuclear attack.

"I never believed that we had a really independent deterrent"
Harold Wilson
(The Secret State, P Hennessy, Allan Lane/Penguin, 2002, p70)

"Renewing our collaboration with the US on nuclear weapons will deepen the bonds between Downing Street and the White House, at the very time when the rest of the nation longs for a more independent stance."
Robin Cook, former Foreign Secretary

[Trident replacement] "could this be one reason why Prime Minister Tony Blair has been at such pains to support US foreign and strategic policy over the past eight years".
Chris Bellamy
(British Nuclear Forces, the decision that dare not speak its name, C Bellamy, The World Today, May 2005)

Even if they were not technically dependent – could they ever be used on their own -

"As to whether or not the United Kingdom would ever be in a situation where it had to use [nuclear weapons] independently. I have grave doubts".

Professor John Simpson, advisor to the UK delegation at the Non Proliferation Treaty conference.

4. Britain will be more secure without nuclear weapons

"There is no direct military threat to the United Kingdom or Western Europe. Nor do we foresee the re-emergence of such a threat"
Strategic Defence Review, MoD, 1998

"I am not convinced that renewing Trident is the best way to address those security risks that we face some 15 years down the line".
Charles Clarke, former Home Office Minister

"It is not easy to see what practical return Britain ever got out of the extravagant sums we invested in our nuclear systems. None of our wars was ever won by them and none of the enemies we fought was deterred by them. General Galtieri was not deterred from seizing the Falklands"
Robin Cook, former Foreign Secretary

Brazil, Argentina, Ukraine and South Africa all abandoned nuclear weapons projects - "None of those countries regards itself as any less secure than before. Nor need we, if our leadership can find the courage to let Trident be the end of Britain's futile and costly obsession with nuclear-weapon status."
Robin Cook, former Foreign Secretary

It is not just that we will be as safe without the bomb, we will be safer. Because we will strengthening the view, held by many nations around the world, that it is not acceptable to use or to possess nuclear weapons. By building up the nuclear taboo we will reduce the risk that there will be a nuclear war in future.

5. Upgrading or replacing Trident will make the world poorer

"if nuclear war is illogical, immoral and inconceivable, then investing billions of pounds in more nuclear weapons is iniquitous, irrational and absurd".

"Trident should be replaced with projects that bring life to the poor."

Cardinal Keith Patrick O'Brien

(Speaking at the end of Scotland's Long Walk for Peace, 19 September 2006)

6. Most people in Scotland don't want nuclear weapons

Opinion polls

System Three opinion poll in Scotland -78 % were opposed to billions of pounds being spent on new nuclear missiles to replace Trident.

Political parties

The SNP, Scottish Green Party, Scottish Socialist Party, Solidarity and all independent MSPs in the Scottish Parliament are opposed to nuclear weapons and proposals to replace or upgrade Trident -

"Nuclear weapons are a scar on Scotland and a threat to world peace". Nicola Sturgeon, Deputy Leader SNP, (speaking at a rally in support of Scotland's Long Walk for Peace, 16 September 2006)

"Trident is an illegal and immoral waste of money. Replacing Trident would compound this mistake and saddle us with an equally pointless and even more terrifying further waste of money." Mark Ballard MSP (Green)

In addition some individual Labour and Liberal Democrat MSPs also speak out against Trident -

"I don't think we need or should ever need Trident"
Cathy Peattie MSP (Labour)

"I can envisage no circumstances – no circumstances at all – in which a so-called strategic nuclear deterrent such as Trident or a replacement for it could possibly be used".

Mike Rumbles MSP (Liberal Democrat) Scottish Parliament 28 September 2006

Religious leaders

"We in Scotland have a duty to lead the way in campaigning for change, because we have the shameful task of housing these horrific weapons".
Cardinal Keith Patrick O'Brien, April 2006

"nuclear weapons are morally repugnant; .. to extend even longer into the future the UK's possession of them would be to add further to the evil they represent".

General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, May 2006

"far from deterring nuclear threats, replacing Trident may increase the risk of nuclear conflict; replacing Trident will send the wrong signals to non-nuclear countries around the world who may be encouraged to develop their own systems."

Scottish Trade Union Congress 2006

"When the Cold War ended, we heard much about the peace bonus – isn't it time to see it in action, and nuclear weaponry removed from Scotland"
Bill Paterson (Actor)