

# Britain's Trident "Nuclear Deterrent": Instruments of Armageddon

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*The existence of nuclear weapons makes Armageddon possible. If there were no nuclear weapons on the planet the human race would have a dire threat lifted and could focus on the other, less instantaneous, threats to the survival of our species.*

In certain cops and robbers films a scene arises when protagonists are lined up opposite each other, both factions pointing weapons at their opponents. Obviously this is a highly risky scenario which typically ends badly – in a bloodbath. One of the protagonists decides he can win if he fires first; a passing waiter drops a tray of glasses and a gunman thinks the shooting has started; someone can't stand the tension, panics, and starts the slaughter. Occasionally sanity prevails and everyone carefully puts down their weapons. Such a confrontation is the posture adopted on a nuclear scale by our leaders to make us feel safe! All the nuclear states resist an agreement to give up their nuclear weapons. In fact they are all renewing them.

On Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2015, the UK parliament debated the renewal of its Trident nuclear 'deterrent'. The debate was called by the Scottish and Welsh national parties and the Green Party. It took place to the great discomfort of the Conservative and Labour parties for obvious reason when we consider that the vast majority of Conservative MPs and most Labour MPs want to renew the UK's Trident fleet of nuclear submarines. A fully armed Trident submarine has the destructive power to incinerate over 76 million human beings<sup>1</sup>, extrapolating from the number killed at Hiroshima. It is contended that preparing the ability to carry out this crime against humanity is for our security (which raises the question 'How many people are you prepared to exterminate to keep you safe?').

Our country is not threatened by any major power. In fact the only threat is from terrorists who seek revenge for our illegal and immoral wars in the Middle East so this degree of Armageddon-scale nuclear belligerence on the part of the Tories and Labour is puzzling to many and various explanations have been attempted. An article in The Guardian suggests that if we as much as run down our nuclear arsenal '...Washington would not be happy'<sup>2</sup>. The reasons suggested for Labour's position include that it would be threatening jobs and would be seen as weak on 'security'; jobs for building mass extermination machines and security by threatening to participate in nuclear Armageddon.

The government is well aware that UK citizens do not want this threat of instant annihilation hanging over them at all times. The panic over Scottish independence made that abundantly clear (the Scottish people want the Westminster nuclear arsenal removed from their country). Further evidence is the way the Ministry of Defence (War is Peace) submitted

a written statement about Trident to the House of Commons the very day its Christmas break started. The government has said it will not make a decision about Trident renewal until 2016. Yet it has already allocated more than 3 billion pounds of our money to the project for 'long lead items'<sup>2</sup>. Moreover it has just earmarked an additional 261 million pounds for Trident. This is treating the public with contempt. Further evidence, if such is needed, that the government has already decided to renew its instruments of Armageddon, is the exclusion of Trident costs from the Strategic Defence and Security Review planned for after the general election. This is in spite of the fact that the Trident project is predicted, by the early 2020s, to cost around 35% of the defence equipment budget<sup>2</sup>.

If the government really had the security of its citizens as its first priority it would be spending the billions of Trident pounds on making the world free of the curse of nuclear weapons. So why is the government's agenda so at variance with the wellbeing of the UK's citizens?

Sir Nick Harvey, the Liberal Democrat's former defence minister told the House of Commons it is '*inconceivable*' that '*any sane person could press the button*'. Can he really be unaware of the possibility of a not- sane person, or someone otherwise incapacitated, getting their finger on the nuclear button? Is he unaware that in 1995 the heavy drinking Boris Yeltsin had his finger on the nuclear button when the Russian black box was opened because their early warning system (falsely) told of an incoming nuclear strike<sup>3</sup>? Russian policy at the time was 'launch on warning'. Global nuclear war was only avoided because one man, Boris Yeltsin, had the good sense to wait in spite of the electronic notice that a nuclear attack on Russian was under way. Does Harvey not know that since 1945 there have been a large number of other terrifying occurrences where the human race has very narrowly escaped a global nuclear war because of accidents and misunderstandings; all of which would have been impossible if the arsenals had not existed? Is he unaware that, thanks to the proliferation encouraged by the nuclear states, the repressive dictatorship in North Korea has an arsenal of nuclear weapons and that other non-nuclear states in the Middle East and elsewhere have the capability to build nuclear weapons?

In fact the government has its own agenda and it is not to do with the security of citizens. It is about prestige, power, saving face, pleasing the Americans. Mr Blair the globe-wandering multi-millionaire ex UK Prime Minister gave the game away in his memoirs when he wrote, referring to Trident renewal, "*the expense is huge and the utility ... non-existent in terms of military use*". In the end he thought giving it up would be "*too big a downgrading of our status as a nation*"<sup>2</sup>. What distorted sense of values attaches 'prestige' to a nation by its preparing for the incineration of millions? And what kind of representatives of the people are willing to put the survival of the people at risk in order to inflate their egos and boost their 'prestige'? Of the 193 states in the United Nations there are only 9 who have built nuclear weapons. The UK, to its shame, is one of them. The nuclear states not only put their own citizens at risk but also the citizens of the non-nuclear states. Nuclear radiation does not respect national boundaries.

The government tells the public the UK must have its 'minimal, independent, nuclear deterrent'. It is not minimal, it is not independent and it is not a deterrent. What is minimal about destroying 76 million people? An All-party Trident Commission, set up by the British American Security Information Council last year stated that Britain's deterrent is 'a hostage to American goodwill'<sup>2</sup>. What is independent about that? It is not a deterrent

because it does not deter the only threat to our safety, namely that from terrorists.

In the foreword to the UK 2007 White paper, 'The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent', the then prime Minister Mr Blair wrote that we cannot foresee what will happen in the next 50 years, thus implying that the UK should keep its nuclear arsenal for that length of time. This was tantamount to saying the British government was not going to honour its commitment to '*..pursue in good faith and bring to a conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its forms...*'. This was the obligation, according to the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, of all those governments who had signed and ratified the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. It was therefore the obligation of the UK government. And on 15 January 2007, as the Defence Select Committee began its inquiry into the government's White Paper on Trident replacement, a new opinion poll showed that the vast majority of the British public supports a convention banning all nuclear weapons<sup>4</sup>; more evidence that the agenda of the politicians is different from that of the citizens.

The time has come for our 'prestige'-obsessed politicians to abandon their attachment to their instruments of Armageddon; time for Britain's politicians to honour the wishes of its citizens and declare the United Kingdom a nuclear free zone.

#### Notes

1. During the House of Commons debate on 20.1.15 the Scottish Nationalist MP Angus Robertson informed the House that 'at present, a UK Trident submarine remains on patrol at all times, and each submarine carries an estimated eight missiles, each of which can carry up to five warheads. In total, that makes 40 warheads, each with an explosive power of up to 100 kilotons of conventional high explosive—eight times the power of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, killing an estimated 240,000 people from blast and radiation. See: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmhansrd/cm150120/debtext/-150120-0001.htm#15012040000001>
2. <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/defence-and-security--blog/2015/jan/20/trident-uk-s-nuclear-arsenal-commons-debate>
3. <http://www.globalissues.org/issue/67/nuclear-weapons>
4. <http://www.cnduk.org/cnd-media/press-releases/trident/item/88-new-poll-uk-public-wants-nuclear-weapons-banned>

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