



Trident:

Key points



Quaker Peace & Social Witness
Peace & Disarmament Programme

Below is a list of 16 key points that could be raised in letters to MPs and decision-makers on the subject of Trident replacement.

The list is by no means exhaustive and should be used as a guide. There is a lot of information in the Trident briefing (Sheet 2) to help you form more substantial arguments.

- 1) Britain is a signatory to the **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)** which commits nuclear weapon states to negotiate the elimination of their nuclear arsenals. The replacement of Trident would undermine this treaty and would also undermine efforts to halt nuclear proliferation by states such as Iran.
- 2) Nuclear weapons are **immoral and indiscriminate**. The testimonies of *Hibakusha* – survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki nuclear blasts – illustrate the inhumanity of nuclear weapons.
- 3) Nuclear weapons are no longer of use in combating **current threats to the security of the UK**. The Cold War is over, the UK faces no direct military threat, and nuclear weapons cannot be used against terrorists.
- 4) The **financial costs** of replacing Trident are extremely high. How can such high levels of spending on a weapon that will supposedly never be used be justified? What else could that money be spent on? (see the CND postcard for ideas)
- 5) The vast majority of states, most of which face greater insecurity than the UK, do not believe that nuclear weapons enhance global security and see **no need for them** in their own national security postures.
- 6) We would be extremely hypocritical to justify the replacement of Trident and the retention of nuclear weapons indefinitely, while insisting that other states such as Iran renounce similar aspirations of their own. This **double standard** is unsustainable and makes nuclear proliferation more likely.

- 7) **Trident is not and has never been an “independent deterrent”**. The UK is the only declared Nuclear Weapon State that is dependent on a foreign power for its nuclear capability. We are reliant on the United States for many of the parts and it may be that Trident could not be used without the prior agreement of the US Administration. Any replacement of *Trident* would be heavily dependent on US support and would continue to tie the UK to US policy.
- 8) Technical developments since the Cold War and recent moves by the US to develop smaller nuclear weapons make the prospect of a new generation of British nuclear weapons even more disturbing. When this lowering of the nuclear threshold is considered in the light of the current doctrine of pre-emptive strike and the posturing of some non-nuclear states as “rogue” and a threat to our “vital” interests, a replacement to Trident could be seen to **enable the US and/or UK to include nuclear options in planning for pre-emptive strikes against states they consider an imminent threat**.
- 9) The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, as well as a number of false alarms of attack during the Cold War – show that **nuclear deterrence is unstable and unreliable**.
- 10) A number of Cold War accidents involving critical damage to nuclear weapons show that the **risk of a devastating nuclear accident** is always present while the weapons exist.
- 11) Nuclear power programmes, which are used to produce the fissile material for weapons, are **financially unsustainable**, generate highly radioactive **waste** that cannot be disposed of safely, present **a target for terrorist attack**, and always run a risk of repeating the kind of catastrophe seen in Chernobyl in 1986
- 12) By taking the lead in disarmament Britain would be setting **an historic precedent** which would pave the way for others to follow suit as well as **bolster efforts to halt nuclear proliferation** by non-nuclear states (such as Iran).
- 13) The major threats to future world security are not rogue states or terrorists, but those arising from the systemic injustice of **global poverty**, irresponsible treatment of the natural world leading to **climate change and resource depletion**, and **militarism**. Nuclear weapons and their production **exacerbate these problems and divert resources** from where they are most needed.
- 14) The doctrine of nuclear deterrence is **logically bankrupt**, for it implies that every nation will be safer if it develops nuclear weapons, when the opposite is true.
- 15) The **Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission**, chaired by Hans Blix, carried out a thoroughgoing independent inquiry into the challenges of abolishing weapons of mass destruction worldwide. The final report published in June 2006 says that British and French governments:

‘will have to decide whether it will be meaningful to retain costly nuclear arsenals that were developed for an enemy that no longer exists, in order to meet hypothetical threats against which such weapons are of questionable value. Both countries are now at a crossroads: going down one road would show their conviction that nuclear weapons are not necessary for their security, while the other would demonstrate to all other states a belief that these weapons continue to be indispensable.’
- 16) The **Defence Select Committee** in their first report into the future of Trident called for a **“genuine and meaningful debate”** on Trident replacement. They also proposed non-replacement as an option for consideration and asked that the government conduct a proper threat assessment and explain the purpose and relevance of ‘nuclear deterrence’ in relation to current security threats.