



OXFORD CND NEWSLETTER

May/June 2020



NHS NOT TRIDENT



WASH OUR HANDS OF TRIDENT TO COMBAT COVID-19

Oxford Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament

Where to begin?

The threads of history leading to our present catastrophe are numerous, but in isolation and grief we now have plenty of time to disentangle them. Let us put to one side the parochial thread of British chauvinism and exceptionalism that was entwined with Brexit and has led to the selection by a Conservative rump, and then election by a majority wanting to “get Brexit done”, of the most disastrous prime minister this country has ever known. That is a familiar tale in outline and we can already guess at some of the hidden detail that will emerge when – or if – an enquiry is held.

There is an old Chinese saying that “ice three-foot thick was not formed in a day”. It applies very well to the failings of international leaders over the last thirty years and particularly to the current Chinese leadership. Dislike of Donald Trump’s crude anti-China rhetoric should not lead us to extenuate Beijing’s culpability which falls into two categories. First was the initial sluggish response to the emergence of the coronavirus in Wuhan, and lack of timely warning that there was people-to-people transmission. These failures may be blamed on local officials (as Xi Jinping in Beijing is keen to do) but they arise from the Chinese Communist Party’s hostility to dissenting voices or anything that sounds like bad news. The second follows on the first: China’s continuing prickly objection to anything less than warm international support has seriously weakened the ability of the World Health Organisation to fully acknowledge, in time rather than tardily, that we face a pandemic originating in China. Meanwhile Beijing inveighed against any country daring to impose travel restrictions on flights from China, although it has since adopted even tougher measures, banning almost all incoming foreigners.

The ice began forming in 1989, the fatal year of the Beijing massacre (“Tiananmen Square”). Till then the post-Mao 1980s had seen a remarkable flourishing of debate within as well as outside the Party on how to make it and society generally more open, tolerant and democratic in a broad (not necessarily Western) sense. There was discussion of holding real elections within the Party, to make its leaders more accountable, and similar elections to the (non-Party) National People’s Congress. Other subjects that were raised included freedom of the press to expose past crimes and current injustices, freedom of organs government organs to tackle issues without taking orders from the Party, and

an end to “feudal” attitudes of deference to high authority. These proposals, if followed through, would have led to a very different, more responsive, political culture much better able to face up to the coronavirus today. But after Tiananmen, the Chinese people were effectively offered a bargain: forget about democratic reform and aspire to enjoy a higher standard of living through the new economic reforms.

The corresponding failure of the “Western” democracies goes back as far. Although the twin dangers of climate change and mounting world poverty were well recognised, the Cold War had provided an alibi for inaction. With its ending, there was a brief flurry of optimism: the 1990s would be the Decade of Decision and the world would benefit from the “peace dividend.” Again, the reforms under discussion – they included settling the Middle East crisis, strengthening UN authority, reducing arms expenditure and moving towards nuclear disarmament, could have transformed the scene. Third World poverty should have been adequately addressed; health and other social services in the developed countries would have had absolute priority. Of course, there were improvements though not so many as claimed, but the gloss wore off the new idealism, and our governments today behave much as they did back then. Fantasy enemies abroad receive more attention than real threats at home: our stockpile of nuclear weapons must be kept in good shape; as for a stockpile of Personal Protective Equipment, well, that was too expensive to approve in the Age of Austerity. No wonder that David Cameron, George Osborne and Nick Clegg are keeping very quiet today.

The Chinese have another saying that is sadly pertinent: *Sickness comes as fast as an avalanche, but it goes as slowly as pulling silk off a cocoon.* We are learning that lesson too late. ■

John Gittings



Pandemic exposes government security failure

Wash our hands of Trident to combat COVID-19

For some years, pandemics have been designated as tier one threats to our security. Successive National Security Risk Assessments have rightly identified such human health crises as worthy of the highest level of concern and planning. So why does Britain find itself signally unprepared for the coronavirus, with insufficient equipment, staff and infrastructure to serve its people? Why is our government opting for a Darwinian-style cull of older and more vulnerable citizens, rather than mobilising every resource to save lives and protect our communities?

This criminal and negligent approach is far from what we have been led to expect by government experts. In 2005, Tony Blair's government published a National Security Strategy which proudly stated: 'The World Health Organisation has recognised the United Kingdom as being in the vanguard in preparing for a pandemic and we will continue to improve our capacity to minimise the potential effects of a pandemic including ensuring that effective planning is in place at regional and local levels across the country'.

But it wasn't just Blair's government that had its sights on dealing with a potentially massive public health emergency. In 2010, the Coalition Government identified a natural hazard such as an influenza pandemic as a tier one risk to our security and in 2015 again the risk assessment included the tier one category 'Public Health: Disease, particularly pandemic influenza, emerging infectious diseases and growing Antimicrobial Resistance...'

So successive governments of different political persuasions have all rightly identified the threat which pandemics pose. Yet it is clear that the necessary level of investment has not been put

into preparing for this major risk. After a decade of austerity, we are all aware of the inadequate funding of our NHS; the situation is bad enough in 'normal' times but during the coronavirus crisis it has disastrous consequences.

But we don't have to look far to see what has gone wrong when it comes to security policy and spending. The last two security strategies have designated the risk of nuclear weapons proliferation and use as a tier two threat. Yet at the same time the governments that have produced these risk assessments have chosen to automatically pour – without question and consideration – £205 billion into a new nuclear weapons system to 'meet' this lower level threat, leaving the health system chronically underfunded and unable to meet the challenge of a pandemic. The same problem applies to the tier one threat 'major natural hazards' which includes severe flooding, the terrible impact of which we are seeing repeatedly. The government has abjectly failed to meet this threat too.

Once again our government is shown to have the wrong priorities. The pandemic threat was rightly identified, but our national resources have instead been squandered on weapons of mass destruction to bolster our shabby global image, instead of funding our health service to be fit for purpose. The consequences could not be more stark: many thousands of us will be left to die, many in the most terrible conditions. Together we must stand up to this brutal and callous government and demand the right to live, in peace and genuine human security. ■

Dr Kate Hudson
CND General Secretary

Nuclear weapons contractor to make 10,000 ventilators

Defence firm Babcock will begin manufacturing 10,000 ventilators, it was announced this week.

In a statement Babcock said it had "responded quickly to the UK Prime Minister's UK Ventilator Challenge" and that the manufacturing of 10,000 Zephyr Plus ventilators would begin subject to regulatory approval. It is expected that staff who routinely work on defence contracts have been redeployed to work on the ventilator project.

Babcock is also refurbishing parts of Britain's Trident nuclear weapons system and is part of an

alliance which manages Coulport and Faslane.

One of the objections to scrapping Trident is that highly-skilled employees would be left without jobs. CND's defence diversification answer to this point over many decades has been that workers can and must be redeployed to socially useful parts of the economy. However, whenever we have proposed this 'defence diversification', the usual retort is 'that's impossible!'

The Babcock ventilator scheme shows us that it is possible after all. ■

Oxford CND was going to have the 2020 AGM on 10th March, with a guest speaker, Commander Robert Forsyth RN (ret'd). The meeting was cancelled, but Commander Forsyth agreed to let Oxford CND newsletter publish this courtesy of *The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation* who published this article in the May 2020 edition of *The Sentinel*.

Commander Robert Forsyth served in the Royal Navy from 1957-81 and commanded both conventional and nuclear submarines. He was 2nd in command (twice temporarily in command) of the Polaris SSBN HMS Repulse from 1972-74. He pursued a second career in industry from 1981-99.

Trident Submarine Commanding Officers in Legal Jeopardy

Commander Robert Forsyth RN (ret'd)

During the Cold War the Commanding Officer (CO) of an RN Polaris submarine understood that an order to fire would be based on a single premise: if the Soviets launched a nuclear strike against the UK then the Prime Minister would order a retaliatory strike - the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction. International law at the time was nowhere near as well developed as today, and there was a general acceptance of justification if it deterred an attack in the first place or prevented further attacks.

In contrast, since the late 1990s, a policy of deliberate ambiguity has been introduced by which there are no defined restrictions as to what sort of strike might be ordered. While the Government talks of 'last resort' and 'only being used against an existential threat to UK' there have also been Government statements (see Parliamentary Report – Q & A 236/237) – subsequently not denied – that nuclear weapons might possibly be used against non-nuclear threats overseas and as a first strike. This has new and complex implications for Trident COs who, submerged on patrol, may not be in possession of the facts surrounding the order but, UK military law of armed conflict, article 16.47.3, states, they are '... under a duty not to obey a manifestly unlawful order.'

Three additions to international law since the Geneva Conventions (GC) were first established are relevant:

a. **1977. Additional Protocol 1 (AP1) to the GC** provided new rules (articles 50 to 54) for the protection of civilians and their property; rules which nuclear weapons would almost certainly breach.

b. **1996. The International Court of Justice (ICJ)** in its Advisory Opinion unanimously ruled that the threat or use of nuclear weapons would

generally be unlawful; however, the 14 judges were evenly divided about the legality of their threat or use in the extreme case of an existential threat to the very survival of a State. Nonetheless, the ICJ President warned that this did not 'open the door to the legality of nuclear weapons.'

c. **1998. The International Criminal Court (ICC)'s Rome Statute** states that '... orders to commit genocide or crimes against humanity are manifestly unlawful' (Article 33) and includes provision to prosecute those who commit war crimes.

This places Trident COs in an impossible position. On patrol, and not knowing the facts, they have no way of judging if a firing order is lawful. In answer to my written questions asking how they could do so, the MoD gave these responses:

a. AP1 does not apply to nuclear weapons.

Comment: The GC Conference did not proscribe them because the five nuclear weapon States had pressured them not to consider the matter of weapons. However, the provisions of AP1 apply to any type of weapon.

b. The 1996 ICJ Advisory Opinion did not rule that the threat or use of nuclear weapons in the extreme circumstance of self-defence, in which the very survival of a State would be at stake, was unlawful.

Comment: This omits the fact that the Government's policy does not rule out other circumstances. Besides, the 1996 President of the ICJ subsequently wrote about UK Trident that '... even in an extreme circumstance of self-defence, in which the very survival of a State would be at stake, the use of a 100kt nuclear warhead - regardless of whether it was targeted to land accurately on or above a military target - would always be unlawful.'

c. MoD never answered the main question regarding my concern about the ICC Statute: how

could a Trident CO know an order to fire was not 'manifestly unlawful'? However, a former senior officer in the MoD Nuclear Policy Department has recently stated publicly: 'That the decision to launch is taken by the highest political leadership, with the advice of the broad church of political and legal bodies fully cognisant of their legal responsibilities *has removed, uniquely in military commands, this responsibility from his shoulders.*' (Emphasis added)

This was the first time such a controversial statement had been made. Asked if this was its official view, MoD replied: [He] has retired from the Royal Navy, is not a Government spokesperson and is entitled to express his own views as he wishes, whether they are in agreement or not with the Government's position.' Are they disclaiming his statement, or do they not wish to admit to a statement which the majority of international jurors would say is not correct?

Whichever it may be, today's Trident COs are damned if they don't obey but could be legally damned if they put their trust in Government. Although the Chilcot Inquiry said that the legality of the Iraq war could only be assessed by a properly constituted and internationally recognised court, it was highly critical of the way in which the Government decided that the war was lawful. It concluded that military action had not been a last resort – the implication being that it might have been judged to have been unlawful.

Had nuclear weapons been employed, as was intimated in 2002 they might be by the then Secretary of State for Defence, the Trident CO would have had no idea if he was acting unlawfully and therefore would have been in legal jeopardy. That situation remains under the current ambiguous UK Government nuclear weapon policy. ■

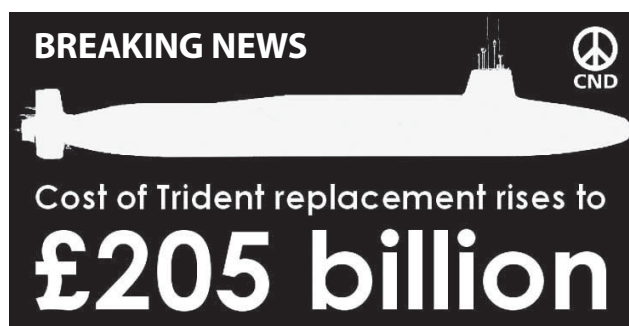
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April 2020 – Ex Royal Navy Commanders question Trident need as coronavirus costs rise

April 2020 – Ex Royal Navy Commanders question Trident need as coronavirus costs rise.

They say spending billions deploying and modernising the nuclear Continuous At Sea Deterrent is 'completely unacceptable' when UK faces COVID-19 threats

Three former Royal Navy Commanders are among those calling into question the deployment and replacement of Britain's nuclear 'Continuous At Sea Deterrent' in a letter sent to MPs.



Commander Robert Forsyth RN (Ret'd), a former nuclear submariner and a signatory to the letter, commented: "It is completely unacceptable that the UK continues to spend billions of pounds on deploying and modernising the Trident Nuclear Weapon System when faced with the threats to health, climate change and world economies that Coronavirus poses.

Commander Forsyth was second in Command on a Polaris submarine, Trident's predecessor, commanded two other submarines and the Commanding Officer's Qualifying Course Tom Unterrainer, Director of the Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation, which circulated the letter, commented: "This pandemic and the inability of the British government to either prepare for or effectively respond to such an immediate threat to life demonstrates the twisted priorities at the heart of nuclear weapons spending.

"Rather than work to guarantee real security this government prioritises the acquisition and deployment of weapons of mass murder."

Other signatories with Royal Navy backgrounds include Commander Robert Green RN (Ret'd) – a former nuclear-armed aircraft bombardier-navigator, Staff Officer (Intelligence) to CINFLEET in Falklands War – and Commander Colin Tabearth RN (Ret'd), a former Senior Engineer Officer on a Polaris submarine.

The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation says its hopes that efforts to question the nuclear 'Continuous At Sea Deterrent' "will encourage politicians and the wider public to begin to question the morality and the feasibility of nuclear weaponry". ■

Sellafield's future

For 70 years Britain has been dissolving spent nuclear fuel in acid, separating the plutonium and uranium it contains and stockpiling the plutonium in the hope of finding some peaceful use for it, to no avail: all it has to show today is a UK plutonium stockpile. To comply with its international obligations not to discharge any more liquid radioactive waste into the Irish Sea, the United Kingdom government agreed more than 20 years ago under the Ospar Convention on the protection of the north-east Atlantic to shut its nuclear fuel reprocessing works at Sellafield in northwestern England at the end of this year.

As well as 139 tonnes of plutonium, which has to be both carefully stored to prevent a nuclear chain reaction and protected by armed guards as well, to avoid terrorist attack, there are thousands of tonnes of depleted uranium at Sellafield. The reprocessing plant shut down prematurely as a result of a Covid-19 outbreak among its employees, and most of the 11,500 workers there have been sent home, leaving a skeleton staff to keep the site

safe. Whether the plant will be restarted after the epidemic is unknown. Fewer than half Sellafield's workers are involved in reprocessing. Most are engaged in cleaning up after decades of nuclear energy generation and related experiments.

There are 200 buildings at the massive site, many of them disused. It costs British taxpayers around £2.3 billion (US\$2.8bn) a year to run Sellafield and keep it safe. While the British government has been reluctant to make any decision on what to do about its stockpiled plutonium and uranium, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has expressed alarm about the danger it poses. "The United Kingdom has to find a solution for its plutonium stockpile, and quickly," its report says. The scientists point out that there is enough plutonium to make hundreds of thousands of nuclear weapons, and that it is a permanent proliferation risk. The annual cost of £73m to keep the plutonium safe is dwarfed by the much larger cost of trying to make safe the whole site with its thousands of tonnes of nuclear waste. ■

Nuclear project planning hit by delays

Decisions on future nuclear builds have been pushed back at three potential new sites due to the coronavirus crisis.

The planning process for **Wylfa Newydd**, Sizewell C and Bradwell B have all been delayed by periods ranging from weeks to months.

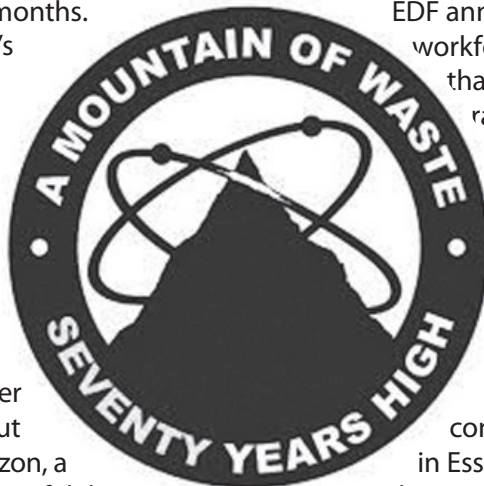
A decision on Horizon Nuclear's application for a development consent order (DCO) for Wylfa Newydd – the shelved nuclear project in Anglesey, North Wales – has been pushed back by six months by the government, from 31 March to 30 September. This is the second such delay for the decision, the original deadline for which was 23 October last year. While the project was put on hold over funding issues, Horizon, a subsidiary of Hitachi, had been hopeful the project could restart following the decision and the approval of a new funding model.

EDF announced it had delayed the submission of an application for a DCO for its £14bn Suffolk station, **Sizewell C**, for a "few weeks" because of

the crisis. The French energy firm had been due to submit it at the end of March. It said the move would also allow more time for people to register as participants for the public examination phase of the process.

EDF announced it was cutting its workforce on Hinkley point C by more than half, and implemented a range of measures to encourage social distancing after criticism that its actions there had been insufficient. A spokesman declined to state whether this could cause delays to the project. It is due to be completed in either 2025 or 2026.

Meanwhile, the public consultation for **Bradwell B** in Essex, which began last month, is to be extended by five weeks. The project is introducing new ways for the community to participate in the consultation online and on the phone, as well as allowing people to book 20-minute discussions with nuclear experts to answer questions throughout April. ■



Who had the UK nuclear button while Johnson was ill? No comment

The British government declined to say who had responsibility for the United Kingdom's nuclear codes while Prime Minister Boris Johnson was treated in intensive care for COVID-19 complications. When asked by the BBC if Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab had been handed the

nuclear codes while Johnson received treatment, Cabinet Office Minister Michael Gove said: "There are well developed protocols which are in place. I just really cannot talk about national security issues," Gove said.

UK nuclear weapon credibility

Two of Britain's four Trident-armed submarines have spent a year undergoing repairs in a threat to the credibility of the nation's round-the-clock nuclear deterrent, the defence committee chairman has said. Tobias Ellwood raised concerns over lengthy works undertaken simultaneously on a pair of Vanguard-class boats, which he said left the Royal Navy "limping on" with only two operational nuclear missile-carrying submarines alternating missions. While

most military maritime operations rely on the rotation of three surface ships, the continuous-at-sea deterrent is based on four submarines to ensure its resilience.

This model envisages that at any one time there is one boat deployed, a second preparing for deployment, a third undergoing short-term works after returning from a deployment and a fourth that may be in longer-term maintenance.

B2 Stealth bombers at USAF Fairford

3 x B2 nuclear capable Stealth bombers were stationed at USAF Fairford on the Oxfordshire / Gloucestershire border on exercise in mid-March. They joined 2 x U2 spy planes which seem to be stationed long-term at the upgraded USAF base.



Above: B2 on USAF Fairford runway, 16th March. The B2s departed after a shorter time than expected, but the U2s remain at USAF Fairford and continue on operational flights.

History will remember when the world stopped
And the flights stayed on the ground.
And the cars parked in the street.
And the trains didn't run.

History will remember when the schools closed
And the children stayed indoors
And the medical staff walked towards the fire
And they didn't run.

History will remember when the people sang
On their balconies, in isolation
But so very much together
In courage and song.

History will remember when the people fought
For their old and their weak
Protected the vulnerable
By doing nothing at all.

History will remember when the virus left
And the houses opened
And the people came out
And hugged and kissed
And started again

Kinder than before.

Donna Ashworth



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