

# Nuclear Free Local Authorities

# briefing



Date: 29<sup>th</sup> April 2016

No.143

Subject: NFLA response to the Labour Defence Review

## 1. Introduction to the submission

At its March 18<sup>th</sup> meeting, the cross-party NFLA Steering Committee decided that its Secretariat should submit a response to the Labour Party's Defence Policy Review. The submission was drafted for the NFLA by the NFLA Secretary

The Steering Committee decided to respond to the Policy Review given the prospects for change in Labour's nuclear weapons policy, and the response developed by the NFLA Secretariat largely concentrates on that. The NFLA response also looks at key factors in the international nuclear weapons debate, pressing issues and problems in the world that a defence policy should be more focused towards and the need for fundamental review and reform of the United Nations. The NFLA response is entirely consistent with its long-standing policy commitment towards working for a nuclear weapons free world. It reflects similar comments made to the Trident Commission and the Nuclear Education Trust in its policy reviews on Trident replacement and defence diversification.

## 2. The Labour Party Defence Policy Review

The Labour Party Defence Policy Review (<https://www.scribd.com/doc/295585960/Labour-s-Defence-Policy-Review>) was initiated by its Defence Spokesperson Emily Thornberry on the behest of new Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn. It seeks to respond to the UK Government's Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) and consider all aspects of Labour's defence policy.

The preamble of the Policy Review criticises the lack of depth in the SDSR and argues it is a missed opportunity. The Policy Review asks a number of key questions across four areas of defence policy – the values that should underpin the policy, the key threats to Britain's security, the resources and scope of Britain's military and security forces and ways to protect jobs in the defence sector.

The Policy Review also asks whether Labour should maintain its support for a 'like for like' Trident replacement programme. This will be important in Labour's policy stance for the expected Parliamentary vote on the programme expected later this year. The Policy Review seeks views from its members, the defence community and specialist defence policy organisations in order to undertake a thorough review of all aspects of the UK defence needs and defence responsibilities.

The NFLA submission was submitted on the 29<sup>th</sup> April to the defence review team – [defencereview@labour.org.uk](mailto:defencereview@labour.org.uk).

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### **3. NFLA's response to the Labour Party Defence Policy Review**

#### **a. Introduction to the response**

At its March 18<sup>th</sup> meeting, the cross-party NFLA Steering Committee decided that its Secretariat should submit a response to the Labour Party's Defence Review. The NFLA does not usually respond directly to policy reviews by individual political parties, given its cross-party nature. The Steering Committee though felt it was important to submit a response on such an issue of great importance to the NFLA – in particular UK nuclear weapons policy and wider issues relating to defence and security policy.

Since its inception in 1980, NFLA has been committed to the aim of developing a nuclear weapons free UK and a nuclear weapons free world. It is also formally opposed to the development of a 'like for like' replacement of the Trident nuclear submarine weapons system. With a Parliamentary debate on that decision expected later this year, the NFLA Steering Committee believe it is important to directly interact with the Labour Defence Review, given the important implications to the nuclear weapons debate of any change to that policy. NFLA also broadly welcomes the notion made by Labour's Shadow Defence Minister, Emily Thornberry, of accepting responses from a wide range of actors, including specialist defence think-tanks and non governmental organisations (NGOs).

#### **b. The cross-party make-up of the NFLA and its position on nuclear weapons**

It is important to note that NFLA is a genuinely cross-party organisation with councillors from 14 political parties across its four national Forums. In its constitution and terms of reference the NFLA asserts the following relevant areas to defence policy:

- To consider and recommend action which can be taken by local authorities to promote the well being of their areas by reducing nuclear or radioactive hazards in or potentially affecting their areas.
- To obtain and provide information and assistance to local authorities that can inform their understanding of the risks from nuclear hazards.
- To consider and recommend action which can be taken by local authorities and others to support and / or enable efforts to prevent the retention and proliferation of nuclear weapons and technology assisting that proliferation;
- To consider and recommend action which can be taken by local authorities and others to support the minimisation of nuclear hazards on local communities through the development of robust nuclear security and nuclear emergency plans around nuclear sites. (1)

NFLA has always sought to work with like-minded groups to achieve these aims. It closely co-operates with the Hiroshima-led Mayors for Peace organisation, which has over 7,000 members worldwide and is seeking the global elimination of nuclear weapons. (2) It is a supporting partner organisation of the UK branch of the International Coalition to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN-UK). (3) It is also a signatory to the 'Rethink Trident' initiative along with other NGOs, Parliamentarians, trade unions, faith leaders and prominent individuals. (4)

#### **c. Relevant responses to other nuclear weapon consultations**

NFLA has been consistently involved in the UK and global nuclear weapons debate over the past 35 years, exactly half of the time nuclear weapons have existed in the world. It welcomes that the Labour Party's Defence Policy Review seeks to be as broad-based and informed as possible. With that in mind, it recommends that the Policy Review also looks at the findings of a number of related nuclear weapons policy consultations, including:

- Three excellent consultations and final published reports by the Nuclear Education Trust – 'British military attitudes to nuclear weapons and disarmament', June 2015; 'The UK's National Defence Needs and International Nuclear Disarmament Responsibilities', February 2014; 'Trident Alternatives Review and the Future of Barrow', December 2012. (5) NFLA responded in detail to the latter two of these reports and will be reiterating its comments throughout this response. (6)
- The final report of the Trident Commission, facilitated by BASIC. (6) NFLA actively inputted to this report led by three former Defence / Foreign spokespersons Des Browne, Malcolm Rifkind and Menzies Campbell. NFLA disagreed with the final conclusions of the

Commission report of maintaining a 'like for like' Trident replacement programme, but welcomed the seriousness with which the report was put together. (7) It welcomed the comments made by BASIC's Dr Paul Ingram advocating a way forward from the Trident Commission report, which it encourages the Labour Defence Review to consider. (8)

**d. SDSR 2015 – a missed opportunity**

NFLA agrees with the context of the Labour Defence Policy Review that the UK Government's 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) was a missed opportunity. (9) Given the major trimming of defence budgets between 2010 – 2015 and the huge amount of financial resource being pledged for Trident replacement – with over £3.9 billion already spent on the project before a 'Main Gate' decision has yet been made – the SDSR should have been a much more methodical and meticulous review looking at all aspects of defence policy.

In this context, NFLA welcomes the Labour Defence Policy Review being conducted as "open, inclusive and transparent" and that it will take into account the views of "all relevant stakeholders". As a relevant nuclear policy stakeholder, NFLA hopes the Policy Review will take on board its comments. NFLA is though concerned the timing of Labour's review may be interrupted by a Parliamentary vote on the 'Main Gate' for Trident replacement, one of the central planks of current UK defence policy. The Policy Review and the Labour Party needs to be flexible enough to respond to this eventuality with an interim as well as a final report to take account of this critical Parliamentary debate and vote.

**e. NFLA response to Policy Review Sections**

**Section 1 – Britain's Place in the World: Values, Principles and Objectives**

NFLA would very much welcome an outcome from the Defence Policy Review that focuses on values that would build a 'more peaceful, just and safer' world with a 'greater contribution to international peacekeeping' and strengthening the capabilities of 'an under-performing UN system'. All of these words from the Review's consultation document, if genuinely acted upon, would move Labour towards a bold, transformed defence policy that speaks much more of ethical and just operations in a complex and fast-moving world. NFLA would welcome such a move away from previous bilateral / multilateral offensive defence actions towards taking part in more multilateral international peacekeeping, peacemaking and peace-building operations.

The real and pressing issues facing the UK and the wider EU are now multi-faceted and global in scope, and must be considered in the process of determining Labour's values, principles and objectives. They include:

- The pressing and disturbing threat that comes from climate change and the impact it is already having on resource extraction, fair resource allocation and severe changes in weather regularly damaging the environment and affecting vulnerable communities.
- The impact on EU states of the ongoing refugee crisis which has many different factors towards it – particularly bitter civil wars and the continuing disparity between developed economies and the poorer developing economies often called the 'global south'.
- The fast-moving and alarming threats of our technological age, when cyber attacks may become just as deadly as a conventional military attack.
- The ongoing lack of fair and just economic development in large parts of the world, which are becoming breeding grounds for new drug-resistant diseases and are faced with large scale disruption, corruption, dissatisfaction and despair.
- The increased militancy of terrorist groups feeding on a real sense of injustice in the most troubled parts of our planet.

In its previous responses on nuclear disarmament policy, NFLA has consistently argued that a key factor in all of these issues is an ineffective and, in part, undemocratic United Nations (UN). The retention of nuclear weapons lay at the heart of this structure, given that all five permanent members of the UN Security Council are the original first five nuclear weapon states. The lack of reform of the UN system is a factor in the injustices and inequalities that lay in our world. The lack of international solidarity within the UN, due to the veto system,

has made it difficult for the organisation to be as effective as it should be in being the arbitrator for international conflicts and civil wars, and for providing leadership as a peace-keeper, peace-maker and peace-builder. It is also inadequately financed to carry out much of its job. Labour's defence and foreign policy values would be greatly enhanced by advocating fundamental reform of the UN to centre it at the heart of reformed international defence and foreign policy operations.

If Labour continues to support the Trident nuclear weapons system being fully replaced and upgraded, in a similar manner to other nuclear weapon states, it risks sending out a highly negative message to the 190+ states that do not possess nuclear weapons. 127 of these states have signed the 'humanitarian pledge' commitment to fill the unacceptable "legal gap" which would formally ban nuclear weapons. This Pledge was issued on 9 December 2014 at the conclusion of the Vienna Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons. This important document provides governments with the opportunity to move beyond fact-based discussions on the effects of nuclear weapons to the start of treaty negotiations. NFLA believe this document can assist Labour in developing the type of new paradigm that British defence policy has been lacking for years. It could also assist Labour in refocusing its values and principles by embracing the 'humanitarian pledge' as a central focus for renegotiation of international nuclear weapon treaties and a new way for our military to work under.

As the International Coalition to Ban Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) has noted: "Outlawing nuclear weapons is not a radical proposition: it enjoys widespread support among nations, and is the logical and necessary course of action in light of the indiscriminate and catastrophic effects of any use of these weapons." (10) NFLA believes support for such an approach by Labour (and other political parties) can lie at the heart of a new, more ethical, defence policy moving the UK more speedily towards multilateral nuclear disarmament.

Within this, a much more active role in the nuclear weapon disarmament talks under the auspices of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conferences and associated discussions is essential. It is highly disappointing, for example, that despite the UK having a policy of promoting multilateral nuclear disarmament, the current UK Government – like all permanent members of the Security Council – are not taking part in the Open-Ended Working Group on nuclear disarmament. This is a clear example of the need for radical change and to embrace new policy paradigms in both British defence and foreign policy. Labour could lead the way and garner strong public support for such a change of emphasis.

Trident replacement also goes against the spirit of Article VI of the NPT as it clearly would not be 'pursuing negotiations in good faith on effective measures relating to cessation of the nuclear arms race at an early date and to nuclear disarmament'. (11) If the UK was to replace Trident submarines it will commit it to remaining a nuclear weapon state until around 2060. That is a full 90 years after it had originally agreed to disarm. What would such a measure say to countries who may contemplate attaining nuclear weapons and to those who have made long-standing commitments to remain 'nuclear free'?

Britain also needs to be less cynical in its foreign and defence policy and put forward new solutions to improve international structures focused on the UN and parallel institutions. It needs to consider as well who it sells British-made lethal weaponry to and play a much more positive role around developing a more ethical defence and foreign policy in defence procurement. Otherwise, it will continue to make the same old mistakes which have bedevilled the post Cold War world. A return back to the 'ethical' foreign policy once proclaimed by former Labour Foreign Minister Robin Cook after the 1997 election would be a great step forward for Labour in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in reasserting important values for both UK defence and foreign policy needs and responsibilities.

## **Section 2 – Threats to Britain's Security**

Even in official Government publications, it is important to note that the main threats to Britain's security do not specifically include a nuclear weapons attack.

The 2010 UK Conservative – Liberal Democrat Government National Security Strategy did not classify the Trident nuclear weapons system as in ‘tier one’ of major security concerns. Instead, it identified international terrorism, international military non-nuclear conflicts, cyber threats, public health, major natural hazards and civil wars overseas as being of more concern than nuclear weapons. NFLA would agree with such an assessment and argue that they should be considered as the core part of Labour’s defence objectives. (12)

The necessary response to the refugee crisis in Europe has put a strain on military, security and civilian services across the continent and is one of the most intractable issues for the EU to deal with at present. The 1 million plus refugees who have come from Asia and Africa to Europe in the past 4 years have come due to many difficult and complicated factors like civil war, state collapse and economic necessity. They have created real issues for global and for UK security than nuclear weapons have in recent years and emphasised the need for a re-focus of our military operations towards humanitarian support for those fleeing persecution.

Over the past decade, health pandemics like SARS, avian flu, Ebola and Zika have also spread quickly and infected many thousands of people (Ebola as many as 1 million people). Trident has no role in dealing with such a threat.

It is also becoming increasingly evident that the damaging effects of climate change are becoming ever present nationally and internationally. Devastating floods in the south west of England in winter 2014 and in the north of England in winter 2015 have caused billions of pounds of damage. Restoring these communities has become ever more difficult for local government in a time of collapsing budgets and austerity. Across the world, devastating droughts, record-breaking and highly destructive earthquakes, tsunamis, flash floods and record high temperatures are damaging many communities and creating real dislocation and mass evacuation and emigration. In Japan in March 2011 they even led to the Fukushima nuclear disaster which led to the evacuation of over 200,000 people and an environmental catastrophe to the land and marine environment still occurring 5 years later (as is also continuing in Chernobyl some 30 years later). Again, a defence policy centred on Trident can play no role in alleviating such issues. Rather, conventional military forces become more useful in this context in dealing with on-the-ground disaster recovery.

Nuclear security threats, including cyber threats, are also of real concern to the NFLA, and should be for all our political parties over and above our ‘nuclear deterrent’. NFLA is in the process of completing a detailed policy briefing on nuclear security concerns, which will be sent separately in addition to this submission for your consideration.

It highlights issues such as:

- The potential for a malicious attack from an insider within the nuclear sector.
- The potential for a malicious attack by a terrorist grouping on a nuclear site or through use of an improvised chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear materials in an urban environment.
- A malicious threat to a transport of nuclear materials, which occur on an almost daily occurrence in Britain.
- The potential use of drones in a malicious manner on a nuclear site.
- The loss of sensitive nuclear information to an outsider.
- The potential to use a cyber attack on a nuclear facility, such as the Stuxnet virus that was maliciously used on Russian and Iranian nuclear sites.

All of these threats are much more likely to occur and can be flexibly and locally delivered, unlike an unwieldy, out-dated centralised nuclear weapons programme. They can also be delivered within Britain by a small and dedicated malicious group rather than another state actor. Recent concerns suggesting terrorist groupings have been considering attacks on Belgian and German nuclear facilities only intensify the scale of this threat. Britain’s defence policy has to be much more flexible to deal with such threats.

The tens of billions (perhaps as much as £100 billion) planned for replacing Trident submarines would be much better spent in dealing with these more immediate and

potentially much more acute threats and policy problems. The main effective strategy to ensure Britain's security should rather be working more effectively towards nuclear disarmament and countering nuclear proliferation. Extending for another 40 years a nuclear weapons programme risks other countries getting frustrated with our nuclear stance and potentially acquiring such weapons by fair means or foul, as has previously occurred with India, Pakistan and North Korea, and has only been narrowly avoided to date with Iran. The Iranian example is an excellent case study in the use of effective diplomacy and international sanctions through the UN system that should lie at the heart of a more joined up defence and foreign policy strategy.

### **Section 3 – Britain's Military and Security Forces**

After considerable pressure from the media (and other sources) on political parties before and during the 2015 general election, the current UK Government has pledged to meet the NATO spending requirement of 2% of national income on defence every year.

NFLA shares the concerns of the Carnegie Foundation that the 2% level "says very little about a country's actual military capabilities; its readiness, deployability, and sustainability levels; and the quality of the force that it can field. It also is unclear about a country's willingness to deploy forces and take risks once those forces are deployed. It does not assess whether a country spends its limited resources wisely. And finally, it says nothing about the investment or research and development ratios in the budgets, which are usually counted among the most valuable indicators of whether a country is serious about its defence effort." (13)

Since 2010, public spending has been slashed across the board. Here in local government, most Councils have lost as much as 35% of their budgets. Other critical public services like the National Health Service (NHS), public housing and our emergency services have also seen their budgets shrink. NFLA does not want to see the defence budget being determined by an arbitrary NATO fixed measure but on a level determined by the Government based on dealing with the key threats and policy issues noted above.

The costs of Trident replacement need to also be carefully considered in this context. Through information provided by the UK Government to the Chair of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee, Crispin Blunt MP, the lifetime costs of Trident replacement could be as much as **£167 billion**. In recent statements the Government has admitted a significant cost increase of building the submarines alone from £25 billion to £41 billion. (14) Can it be truly justified that such costs are made at a time when critical public services and pressures within our conventional defence forces are being cut year on year?

There needs to be a thorough reorganisation of defence procurement policy, given the huge cost over-runs that have occurred across the Ministry of Defence for many years. UK military forces need to be reconfigured to play a role that is centred on peace-keeping and peace-building, as they were in limited ways in the latter parts of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan – where they were at their most effective. There is also a need to develop training for our defence forces to deal with the national and international effects of climate change, which are quite different to previous military conflicts they have been focussed on.

With the current Trident system still able to operate for a few years to come, there is scope now to call for more pressing negotiations within the NPT to reduce nuclear weapon stocks and take the heat out of some of the tension which has been ratcheted up between NATO members and Russia in the past decade. The UK should look to work with the many states that want to see a Nuclear Weapons Convention. The UK should also lead efforts to increase compliance with the International Chemical and Biological Weapons Conventions.

### **Section 4 – Protecting British Jobs and Skills**

NFLA is fully aware and sensitive to the effect that not replacing Trident could have on a certain number of British jobs and skills, and the wider concerns over national capabilities in science, engineering and technology.

It remains difficult to actually determine the amount of jobs that are dependent on Trident work. It has been calculated that it is around 11,000 – 3,400 working on building submarines at Barrow, 900 in Rosyth, 2,300 in Devonport, 4,200 at AWE Aldermaston and Burghfield and 500 in Coulport. Many of these are short-term in nature in constructing the nuclear facilities and submarines. Numbers of staff at Barrow have declined by almost two thirds over the past 20 years for example. (15)

Even a 'like for like' Trident replacement programme only guarantees a relatively stable amount of employment for around the next 35 years whilst the programme is delivered, leaving longer-term concerns over the level of employment at Barrow and other facilities. NFLA argue that considerable work is therefore needed to be undertaken by central government, local government, development agencies and the private sector to assist defence-dependent communities to diversify into other areas of high skilled, specialised jobs. Similar concerns are currently tasking the government at Port Talbot due to serious threats to steel jobs. The same process needs to take place in the defence sector.

NFLA believe there needs to be public resources placed in a Defence Diversification Agency, as has been suggested by Labour Leader Jeremy Corbyn and by previous Labour Leaders. This would allow the defence industry to maintain Trident until it became obsolete and provide sufficient time to put diversification projects in place. The UK has lacked an effective industrial policy for many years – this could be an excellent opportunity to include the defence sector within it. NFLA recommends Labour considers the recent reports of the Nuclear Education Trust, the excellent 2007 and updated 2016 Scottish TUC / Scottish CND report on defence diversification (16) and previous attempts made in the 1970s and 1980s with the Lucas Aerospace workers and the positive work of the then GLC Economic Development Unit. (17)

NFLA particularly recommends Labour consults with Dr Steven Schofield and his policy paper – 'Defence Diversification or Arms Conversion? Why Labour needs a programme for nuclear and conventional disarmament.' This succinctly summarises the format and structure of defence diversification and the economic and job benefits that a Defence Diversification Agency can realise and deliver. (18)

Transferable sectors like nuclear decommissioning work – defence and civil, other parts of the defence industry, international disarmament work, the development and production of renewable energy are all in existence and have great job potential with sufficient political will. A dynamic defence diversification agency could genuinely help with improvements to wider industrial renewal that Britain desperately requires and needs.

A transformed defence policy that is centred on peace-keeping and peace-building will require new forms of defence equipment that the UK defence sector could focus on as well.

Finally, in terms of support for veterans, it is high time that full and complete support was provided to the members, spouses and descendants of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association for the illnesses they have incurred as a result of exposure to radiation. It has been quite disgraceful that these servicemen and their families have not been properly compensated; unlike with every other nuclear weapon state and their own nuclear test veteran communities. Previous Labour Governments have promised this. It is high time to fulfil that promise and for Labour to pledge its support. (19)

## **f. Conclusion**

This response has outlined how Labour can make a radical change to its defence policy that NFLA believes can be both transformative and humanitarian in scope. This Defence Policy Review gives the opportunity to be bold and develop one of the most innovative reports for a generation. It would garner public support and it should be put forward to the defence sector and the armed forces as part of a move in Britain towards a more humane, responsible, practical and enlightened defence policy that engages more closely with our linked foreign policy needs and responsibilities. NFLA urges Labour to actively take up some of these ideas. Labour also recommends seeking specific policy advice from organisations like Nuclear Information Service, BASIC, Oxford Research Group and the Less Network for transforming

its values and providing the required detail to transform its final defence policy. NFLA remains available to discuss these issues in more detail.

## **g. References**

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[http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/pdf/NPTEnglish\\_Text.pdf](http://www.un.org/disarmament/WMD/Nuclear/pdf/NPTEnglish_Text.pdf)
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- (17) See Mike Cooley, 'Architect or Bee? The Human Price of Technology – the story of the Lucas Workers Plan of 1976 and subsequent developments', Spokesman Books, Reprinted 2016.
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- (19) See British Nuclear Test Veterans Association website <https://bntva.com> for its 'Recognition Ca