SHOULD THE UK RENEW THE NUCLEAR DETERRENT TRIDENT?

INTRODUCTION

From 1969 until now, beneath the sea there has been a submarine patrolling all of the world’s oceans. Its purpose - to protect Britain from a nuclear attack. However, the UK is facing the decision whether or not we should renew Trident. The Government will have to discuss all the advantages and disadvantages of renewing Trident. The cost, the maintenance, the possibility of using Trident and the people of the UK’s opinion. The final decision is to be made in 2016. This essay will discuss if Trident should have a place in Britain’s nuclear defence programme or if it should be decommissioned. At the end, I will give you my opinion on Trident’s effect on the modern world and if we should renew the nuclear deterrent Trident.

DISCUSSION

There are four submarines. One of them is always patrolling, one of them is undergoing maintenance and training and the other two are held in ports. Trident has three main parts. The submarine, the missile and the warhead. Firstly the submarine is 492 feet, over twice as long as a Boeing 747\(^1\). The missile is a state of the art Trident II D5 ballistic missile. The UK owns 58 of them, all of which are held in a Weapons Facility in Georgia, USA. These missiles have a huge range. If it was fired in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, it could go all the way to Alaska (See Appendix). Lastly, the warhead is stored in a Government owned Atomic Weapon Establishment in Berkshire\(^2\). Each submarine carries 16 missiles, containing four warheads. The warheads contain the nuclear material and the missile carries the warheads to the correct destination.

Originally, Trident was bought by the Thatcher Government in early 1980’s. It was bought because the older Polaris missile system needed replacing and because of the deteriorating international relations. Trident has been used as a deterrent, to prevent a nuclear attack on the UK and the UK’s allies. It was bought in the first place to stop countries deciding to partake in a nuclear war. However, some people believe it doesn’t actually do this. They say it is more likely to promote warfare between other countries, rather than preventing it.

The original decision was meant to be made before 2016, but due to the general election, the decision was delayed as many parties had differing views on the matter. There are many predictions on how much it will cost. Trident was said to have cost 20 billion pounds, but since we have delayed renewing the contract, it is now said to be 30 billion pounds. The Guardian has said Trident will cost “130 billion pounds.”\(^3\) Jeremy Corbyn has said Trident will cost 100 billion pounds. In truth no-one appears to know how much it will cost. But it is clear, the Government has underestimated the price of Trident. Now MP’s have voted in favour of renewing Trident at the very expensive price of 100 billion pounds. This is a huge investment of funds in this time of austerity. It would be able to “fully fund A&E services for 40 years, employ 150,000 new nurses, build 1.5 million affordable homes,

\(^{1}\) http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-13442735 accessed 07.02.16
\(^{2}\) http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7353/CBP-7353.pdf accessed 07.02.16
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build 30,000 new primary schools, or cover tuition fees for 4 million students,” ⁴ according to the ‘Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament’ website.

Trident has many advantages and disadvantages. This is why the decision is so hard to make. One advantage is it can be used to deter nuclear attacks. If one country has nuclear weapons and is in any way violated by another country they may feel the best way to respond is to threaten with their weapons. This may stop future attacks as well. If a country uses its nuclear weapon illegally, the UK could threaten to use the Trident missile against that country. If we do not renew Trident, other countries could see us as weak. They could take advantage of us by blackmailing, if we don’t help them they will fire upon us. This could be catastrophic because the country would be in a weak position and relations with that country would break down immediately. The world currently is in troubled times. The rise of extremist groups and terrorism has been dramatic. ISIS has been in the headlines, there have been serious attacks in Paris, Jakarta and Bangkok, along with suicide attacks everywhere. The world is much less peaceful. In times like these, we want to know we are safe and the chance of an attack in the UK needs to be as low as we can get it. Trident would probably help this.

These points are good, but on the other hand if the UK renews Trident other countries may take this as a sign the UK is preparing for a nuclear strike against them. It can cause relations to falter with other countries, because they are scared that we are going to fire upon them. Rather than preventing a nuclear war, it could be the start of a war. If we don’t spend our money on Trident, we could persuade other countries to remove their weapons. If a big and important country takes a stand against nuclear weapons, other countries may join us. It would mean we would have more money to spend “on either improving the UK’s conventional military capabilities, in particular counter-terrorist and drone capabilities, or being put to greater use within the NHS or addressing issues such as environmental concerns, poverty, disease and debt.” (Mills, C. 2016, p. 62.) Some would say, “Retaining a nuclear deterrent should be condemned on moral grounds.” (Mills, C. 2016, p. 62.) During these troubled times with terrorist threats people think Trident helps prevent attacks in the UK. The truth is it doesn’t. One or two nuclear weapons could be fired upon the home land of so-called IS. This wouldn’t stop them though. Terrorist sympathisers would still plan out and carry out attacks such as the one in Brussels. For every advantage, there are a multitude of disadvantages. For every disadvantage, there are a multitude of advantages. There isn’t a right choice, so it will be down to the Prime Minister’s opinion.

Trident is a controversial topic. Some people hate Trident and think all nuclear technology should be removed. Some people think Trident and nuclear technology is a great idea. Some people don’t know what to think about it. David Cameron thinks it is a must for the UK. He repeatedly says “It is an insurance policy.” The Conservatives back their leader and agree with him. It was one of the manifesto pledges made by them in the 2015 General Election. However, there is a huge contrast between the Conservatives and Labour. Jeremy

⁴ http://www.cnduk.org/campaigns/no-to-trident accessed 29.03.16
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Corbyn’s introduction as leader of the Labour party has changed everything. He is anti-violence and anti-war. He voted against air strikes against IS during a parliamentary vote. He tried to persuade people to not retaliate against the Russians, Middle East or any other country. But the majority of his party think that renewing Trident is the right thing to do. As leader, you are expected to agree with your party’s beliefs. Recently “Jeremy Corbyn gives Labour MPs free vote on Syrian Airstrikes.”\(^5\) He has also come under scrutiny after he said, “I would never use nuclear weapons if I were PM.”\(^6\) He is not obeying his party’s view, a dangerous thing to do. The SNP is adamant that Trident is wrong and it opposes nuclear weapons. It described Trident as, “unusable and indefensible.”\(^7\) The Liberal Democrats say that the decision wasn’t being made while they were in coalition but the new leader Tim Farron has said that he says Trident is too expensive to renew. He wants measures to be put in place to make it less expensive, like having less submarines and missiles.

The public’s view on Trident is very interesting. These polls are not completely accurate of course, they will not reflect the entire population’s view on Trident, and they are done independently. The Times - 26.01.15. Approximately 31% of people, the most popular option, said that, “Britain should retain a nuclear missile system, but it should be less powerful and cost less than replacing Trident.” The Guardian - 14.07.13. It was approximately a three way tie with replacing Trident, replacing with a slimmed down version and no deterrent. YouGov - Election Data, 23.11.15. Approximately 50% of people said that we should renew the 100 billion pound nuclear Trident, out of 7,412 respondents. (See Appendix). The population mainly agree that we should renew Trident. However, there are a fair amount of people and organisations say that renewing is a very bad idea. An example of this is the recent protests in Trafalgar Square on the 27.02.16. Over 300,000 people arrived in Trafalgar Square to protest against Trident and other changes being made by the Government. The leaders of Plaid Cymru, the SNP, the Green Party, and the Labour Party also arrived and expressed their views on Trident. This, however may not be enough to convince all the MP’s and the Prime Minister to change their mind and their opinion. Again, it is going to be down to the Prime Minister more than anyone.

CONCLUSION

In my opinion, the UK should not renew the nuclear deterrent Trident. I believe that the UK should be promoting peace among nations and trying to stop the world descending into nuclear warfare. People such as Jeremy Corbyn have been attempting to change the minds of politicians without lots of success. If we do renew Trident, we are sending out a bad message to other countries. Many of the other problems that the Government are facing can be solved with the extra money we can get by not renewing Trident. It is a waste spending money on something that may not even be used rather than the NHS, which will always be needed. We should be trying to stop nuclear war rather than preparing for the worst. However, we should bring a stop to wars to come and start making a positive impact on a troubled world.

\(^6\) [http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/sep/30/corbyn-i-would-never-use-nuclear-weapons-if-i-was-pm](http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/sep/30/corbyn-i-would-never-use-nuclear-weapons-if-i-was-pm) accessed 07.02.16
\(^7\) [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-13442735](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-13442735) accessed 07.02.16
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APPENDIX

YouGov - Election Data, 23.11.15.

YouGov - The Times, 26.01.15
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The Guardian - 14.07.13

http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-13442735

Poster from the protest in Trafalgar Square