

MEDACT POSITION PAPER ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Medact calls for the urgent abolition of all nuclear weapons, including UK's Trident

*The terrible consequences to health, humanity and the environment of the development, testing and use of nuclear weapons are well known. Any further use, especially the hostile use of even a small fraction of the current global arsenal of nuclear weapons, would threaten a global catastrophe.*¹

1. Medact condemns not only the use of nuclear weapons but also their possession by any state, power or authority. Those states, powers or authorities which currently possess nuclear weapons must commit to disarm, dismantle and dispose of them all.
2. Medact calls for a return of all UK Trident submarines² to base so that a controlled process of complete decommissioning of their missiles and nuclear weapons can start immediately.
3. As the UK affiliate of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, Medact supports the work of all organisations and coalitions which oppose nuclear weapons, and we join with those who call for a treaty to ban nuclear weapons.
4. Medact rejects the doctrines of deterrence and mutually assured destruction (MAD) as a basis for genuine security. Although no nuclear weapon has been detonated as an act of hostility since 1945, there is clear documentary evidence of many miscalculations and errors, often at times of heightened international tension, which very nearly led to nuclear weapons being used.³
5. The world now has about 16,000 nuclear weapons of which 4,000 are deployed on high alert – that is, ready on command within days, hours or even minutes – for firing on strategic targets (cities, military installations, etc.)^{4,5} All deployed weapons are held either by Russia (c 1,600) or by NATO (1,900 by the US).
6. We recognise and therefore advocate the place for alternative negotiating approaches, based on trust and mutual understanding among all parties; and the need to work with all sections of international society – governmental, civil, military and non-governmental organisations – to develop such approaches.
7. Medact therefore calls upon NATO and its partners, Russia and its partners and all other nuclear weapons states to proceed in genuine good faith and with a sense of urgency towards the goal of a nuclear weapons-free world. A good start might be the establishment of reciprocal protocols to build confidence in, for example, “de-alerting” and “no first use” policies.

Further Comments

Well over 2,100 nuclear devices have been tested since 1945 and every State possessing nuclear weapons has programmes to upgrade, or 'modernise', them: it is a moot point where 'upgrading' (to keep them usable) merges into 'modernising' (to improve them).^{6, 7}

The risk of catastrophic consequences of near-simultaneous detonations of up to 100 Hiroshima-sized weapons, however unlikely any such use would be but which would affect many millions of people including those in non-belligerent states, are so 'close to comfort' as to be utterly unacceptable.³

Although the bilateral START Treaties⁸ involving the arsenals held by Russia and by NATO have reduced the deployed nuclear arsenals on both sides, much remains to be done before the world is substantially safer.

In a somewhat disquieting development, China may be considering renouncing its so-far unique policy of 'no-first-use' of nuclear weapons, in spite of it being 'a good place to start'.⁹

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