

Dear Candidate

I am writing to you as a member of Medact, a UK based health charity with a membership of a 1000 health professionals. Medact campaigns for peace and a demilitarised world. I would like to know please what your position and voting stance is on:

- The renewal of the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent Trident
- The lethal use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (Drones)

Trident

As a health professional I am all too aware of the terrible consequences to health, humanity and the environment of the development, testing and use of nuclear weapons. 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.

I am particularly concerned because a decision on whether or not to replace Trident – at a cost of £100bn over 30 years – is due in 2016 and successfully elected Members of Parliament will have to vote on this.

I believe that maintaining Trident is irrelevant to modern security threats; runs counter to our Non-Proliferation Treaty commitment to nuclear disarmament; and is not the best use of tax payers' money, especially given the cuts deemed necessary in other areas of public spending and the need to invest in climate change adaptation and mitigation. It is therefore important to me that you set out your views on Trident.

In particular, before deciding how I will vote, I would like to know your views on the following four questions:

1. The UK's submarine-based Trident nuclear weapon system is approaching the end of its operational life. Do you think the UK should replace its nuclear weapon system?
2. The next government will conduct a Strategic Defence and Security Review. Do you think that should consider the possibilities and implications of scrapping and not replacing Trident?
3. The next government will need to attend the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference in New York. Do you think it should support a nuclear weapons convention or ban, similar to those for chemical or biological weapons?
4. The next government will have to decide whether to carry out the current coalition government's projected austerity programme. Do you think spending £100 billion on Trident replacement can be justified?

Many politicians, as well as the general public, support the ultimate abolition of nuclear weapons. I would like to know if you share this view, and, if so, how this can be achieved.

Drones

Health professionals are concerned with the increasing use of drones for many reasons: In addition to the high number of deaths and injuries sustained by innocent civilians, we have concerns about the psychological damage to people living under the constant threat of drone attack, and also to service personnel who carry out the assassinations.

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) repeatedly states that the primary mission for its Reaper drones is intelligence gathering. However their own figures show that while on operations in Afghanistan on average weapons were launched from UK drones on average eight or nine times per month. As combat operation in Afghanistan drew to a close in 2014, the UK doubled its armed drone fleet and these drones have now been deployed to the Middle East for operations in Iraq and Syria.

This rapid redeployment shows the underlying problem of drone warfare; that it is asymmetrical in nature and enables so called 'risk free' war. In an increasingly war-weary era, the use of drones sanitises war. Politicians can opt to engage in warfare overseas with little political risk at home, as there are no 'boots on the ground' and the pilots remain stationed thousands of miles away in safety.

Drone strikes, already far from the last resort are fast becoming just another option in the political toolbox. This is despite counter terrorism experts expressing concerns that drone strikes increase rather than reduce the threat of terrorist attacks.

Greater accountability and transparency is the only way to address this underlying issue and it is therefore important to me that you set out your views on the use of drones.

In particular, before deciding how I will vote, I would like to know your views on the following four questions:

1. To enable greater accountability over their use: What steps will your government take to formulate and articulate a clear policy on the use of its armed drones in overseas intervention?
2. To ensure that the UK is not in contravention of international law: Will your government order an urgent review of the UK's use of drones and the sharing of intelligence gathered with their use in relation to international human rights and humanitarian law?
3. To enable an informed debate and comply with the need for transparency: Will your government release information about the approximately 500 British drone strikes that have taken place in Afghanistan now that UK forces have departed?
4. To help foster peace and counter growing militarism in the Middle East: Will your government end all export licences and co-operation between the UK and Israeli drone programmes?

I hope you can set out your responses, either in a simple yes or no form, or in greater depth if you have time.

I look forward to discussing this with you further on the campaign trail.