

Medact submission to Labour Defence Policy Review – summary

This response to the Labour Party's call for submissions to advise it during its Defence Policy Review is provided within the context of Medact's overall objectives. As health professionals we are primarily concerned about the impact of war and militarisation on human health, economic justice and human rights. Human activities – over-consumption of the biosphere's resources and anthropogenic climate change – are threatening the security and health of the whole planet, and the UK could contribute very effectively to the alleviation of these threats. We are aware of the ways in which each of these impact on the other and see that the defence policy of any government needs to take into account the wider picture. In this submission we have touched on what we consider to be some of the key issues. This summary of our recommendations is presented in the order of the questions posed by the call for submissions.

Introduction

The UK can and should make a major and practical contribution to a system of global security, accepted and regulated by good governance. This system needs to recognise diversity within the universality of humankind, to promote human rights (freedom from want and fear) and our impact on global ecology. UK defence and foreign policy should take into account the global challenges posed by continuing warfare, increasing militarisation, climate change, the diversity of human populations, economic inequalities, population movements. Our forces could and should make a much greater contribution in disaster relief, post-conflict reconstruction and on non-military aid.

Britain's Place in the World: Values, Principles and Objectives

1 What role should Britain play in building a world that is more peaceful, more just and safer, how can we make a greater contribution to international peacekeeping and strengthen the capabilities of the under-performing UN system?

- The UK
 - should increase its annual contribution to at least 10% of UN annual peace-keeping budget, i.e. about \$850mn (still less than 2% of UK defence budget)
 - should exercise 'soft' power, e.g, cultural and educational exchanges; aiding international development 'without strings', thereby supporting measures to decrease the global poverty gap. The Labour Party should conduct a close inquiry into the degree and types of non-military aid suitable for the UK government to support, with every expectation of a recommendation that this would increase substantially.
 - help create a more socially and economically just world: address the democratic deficits of neoliberal globalisation, and reduce the UK's disproportionately heavy ecological footprint.
 - support a radical reform of the UN, including membership of the Security Council and the function and funding of its organs, including the WHO.
- UK's 'soft' power would be enhanced by nuclear disarmament.

1 What values and principles should drive Britain's strategic defence policy?

- Equity and social justice; respect and care for nature.
- Global systems of cooperation and governance which emphasise 'building for peace' rather than preparing for war

2 What objectives follow from these values for Britain's defence and foreign policy, and how can our objectives best be achieved

- The prime purpose of Britain's defence forces should be true defence. Overseas commitments limited to post-hostilities' reconstruction, and the defence of our embassies and their personnel.
- Strengthen UK's diplomatic corps
- Stop UK diplomatic corps from promoting the UK arms industry
- Develop a 'new economics' based on the finite limits of the planet and the need to redistribute wealth.
- Improve multilateral forms of development assistance; more principled, ethical and consistent foreign policy; ensure UN is adequately funded and resourced.
- Stop UK companies trading in arms, and do not replace Trident
- Full and rapid decarbonisation of our energy system; thorough and unbiased re-appraisal of our nuclear industry and full support of IAEA's regulatory function. Fair and sustainable trade
- respecting and caring for others and tolerance of other cultures and traditions
- universal access to a good education
- a 'public order' system in which the courts and law-enforcement officers are fair and just access to free health care supplied by publicly accountable professionals.
- UK should, along with all major nations, provide effective support to the 2014 Arms Trade Treaty
- UK companies should be prevented from trading in arms
- UK's nuclear industry should be reappraised and Britain should consider how to maximise its support for the work of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

3 *What are the strategic assets that Britain needs in order to protect our common security?*

B Britain's Diplomatic Corps

- Training of diplomatic corps to include language and interpersonal skills, sensitivity to culture and legal and personal rights in countries where they work.

C Material

- Equipment; IT systems; ordnance; infrastructure such as transport and energy systems; demographic features such as the siting of security and military bases and the supporting industries.
- These should be maintained at the highest standards and operated responsibly.
- Military operations should be more accountable for their impact on climate change.

Threats to Britain's Security

1 *What are the key security challenges facing the UK?*

D Cyber-security

- All the major spheres of societal functioning are susceptible including military, power supplies and health services
- Mitigation:
 - Training of military and security staff
 - Military strategy has to adapt to advances in cyber and related technological developments and outmoded systems may need to be abandoned

E International Terrorism. Spin-off – population movements and refugees

- Mitigation:

- Priority given to the standards of selection, education, training (including psychological preparation) and physical fitness of firearms officers. Information made available to them should be reliable and free from personal bias
- Create and maintain good relations with and within the implicated minority communities, with suitable funding
- A generous attitude to refugee relief, including acceptance into UK.
- An immediate active programme of reconstruction of the shattered communities in North Africa and Western Asia (approach like that of the ‘Marshall Plan’).

F i Nuclear war - by accident or design

- Mitigation:

- Greater recognition of the very high impact of any military nuclear detonation, and for the UK to actively and immediately accelerate its diplomatic obligations to the NPT
- Greater public awareness of the devastating effects of nuclear war, the immediate and longer term deaths and casualties, the effects on climate and food production; and that health services would be overwhelmed by exploding even a single nuclear weapon on a city
- Development of mitigation measures against a nuclear-weapon-related EMP
- UK should support processes towards an international ban on the possession and use of nuclear weapons, including the current UN Open Ended Working Group
- No replacement of UK’s Trident system on a like-for-like or any other basis involving the continued possession of nuclear weapons, and stopping the current deployment of Trident forthwith. The first step in this process could be ceasing Trident’s continuous at sea ‘deterrence’. This would enhance world security by removing some nuclear weapons from the global stockpile.
- Diplomatic measures to reduce the risk of nuclear attack:
- UK should leave the US to manage its own defence against N Korean nuclear attack although if any such attack were attempted, effective US-led counter-measures short of the use of nuclear weapons could be justified.
- UK should realign its relationship with Russia and develop cordial relations.

C ii Chemical and biological war

- The risks of immediate or near-future of use of chemical and of biological weapons is quite low, but any such use would be horrific and immoral. Vigilance and full support of monitoring systems must be maintained. The risks of ‘Gain of Function’ research into microbial organisms which could be bioengineered to enhance pathogenicity should be thoroughly assessed.

2 What are the more fundamental, long-term threats to our common security, what or who is driving them?

- **Effects of climate change** on UK and beyond - storms, floods, droughts, heatwaves, air pollution, ocean acidification, loss of biodiversity, population movements and migration, energy security; - UK should apply measures to mitigate floodings, and rapidly introduce transport powered by low-carbon renewable electricity.
- **Democratic freedoms and civil liberties** - Major adjustments of the world’s political power structures and erosion of the political sequelae of inequity and the democratic deficits arising from current patterns of globalisation need to be anticipated and addressed by foreign policy which strengthens human rights and democratic governmental accountability.

- **More automated systems of warfare** which may involve 'swarm attacks' operating outside conventional 'Command and Control' structures

3 *How can we improve our ability to identify, predict and act upon underlying threats to Britain's security, and work to prevent them developing?*

- maintain and further develop our security services
- harden our services against hacking and cyber attack
- retain and sustain low-technology alternatives in the event of 'outages' etc.
- rapidly develop low-carbon renewable sources of energy to become self-sufficient in energy requirements, accompanied by efficient ways of storing energy
- maintain our industries and develop new ones in order to foster international trading
- secure adequate supplies and stockpiles of materials including food
- have a well trained and dedicated military capacity which can be used for international security and post-hostilities reconstruction activities overseas
- well trained diplomatic corps to improve relations especially with Russia and with China,
- Increased expertise in artificial intelligence and engineering, including nuclear engineering in order to cope with nuclear waste
- work with allies to reform NATO or consider whether NATO should be disbanded and re-created as a new UN-controlled world 'police force'. NATO needs to address fundamental issues such as Missile Defence and the avoidance of civilian war-casualties.

Britain's Military and Security Forces: Capabilities, Spending, and Choices

1 *What level of defence spending is required to keep Britain safe and help us promote a more peaceful and safer world?*

2 *What are the lessons from recent conflicts about the equipment and military capabilities required for the deployments Britain may face in the next few decades?*

3 *What training do our military and security forces need to carry out operations that protect Britain's security and pursue the values that guide our defence policy?*

- UK should accept a diminished role in world military affairs and consider most carefully any future action overseas which risks overcommitting our forces' personnel and materiel, reserving its contribution for more realistic targets such as disaster relief, post-hostilities reconstruction and securing non-proliferation

4 *How can Britain help to effectively stem the flow of weapons – chemical, nuclear, and military – around the world and promote non-proliferation and disarmament?*

- Full and active support and compliance with the Chemical Weapons Convention, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and the Arms Trade Treaty
- Honouring our 'good faith' obligations to the Non Proliferation Treaty
- Supporting the UN Open Ended Working Group process towards a ban on nuclear weapons.
- Regulatory regimes, particularly of the IAEA need to be properly supported and regularly reviewed and the skills required to operate these maintained through the recruitment of personnel given appropriate and adequate training.

5 *Will renewal of Britain's nuclear capability aid us in protecting Britain's security and pursuing the values that guide our foreign and defence policy?*

- Renewal of Britain's nuclear capability will not help to protect our security or to pursue any sensible foreign and defence policy. Retaining nuclear weapons will increase risks and uncertainties, particularly as cyber technologies advance
- There should be no replacement of the Trident system on a like-for-like or any other basis involving the continued possession of nuclear weapons. The first step in this process, the ultimate aim of which would be a nuclear-weapon free world, could be ceasing Trident continuous at sea deterrence. This would enhance world security by removing some nuclear weapons from the global stockpile.
- UK should support the current UN Open Ended Working Group process towards an international ban on the possession and use of nuclear weapons

6 *What new capabilities will our armed forces require to address the complex and dynamic threats facing our common security, especially the growing threat of cyber attacks?*

- UK needs to develop an expertise in the dangers of cyber-attack and methods of cyber protection including costs involved. This may lead to a thorough reappraisal of our modern security needs, including military deployments and Trident.

Protecting British Jobs and Skills

1 *Are the UK's armed forces equipped with the full range of skills they need to tackle the threats Britain faces in the 21st century? Or do we need to do more?*

2 *What are the central economic challenges our domestic defence industry will face in the next few decades and what must be done to overcome them?*

3 *What implications would any changes to current policy have in terms of jobs and the wider economy? Where jobs are lost, how could the impact best be mitigated?*

4 *How can we combine value for money on all military spending programmes with secure and sustainably high-skilled jobs?*

5 *How can we protect the wider supply chain required for our domestic defence industry to flourish?*

- Medact appreciates that these questions are central to this review, but our expertise is directed toward relieving the medical effects of war rather than the conduct of war and, by applying *prophylaxis*, anticipate and prevent the diseases resulting from war. Our principal approach is to address the fundamental causes of war. Hence, the five questions above are not answered directly.
- As war is a major determinant of health, its fundamental causes, which include greed, fear and corruption, need to be addressed.
- UK forces need high calibre personnel who are well trained and equipped.
- A reappraisal of the current and future requirements for military equipment is required, with a review of how best to downsize the military to levels that the nation can afford. This should include abandoning Trident replacement and decommissioning Trident.
- The prospect of job losses in relation to such downsizing should be confronted honestly and constructively; jobs in new industries such as in the renewable energy sector would combine addressing the nation's energy needs with gainful employment.
- UK's domestic defence industry should have highly trained staff and leaders, and take advantage of Britain's skills in artificial intelligence and related sciences. High standards of ethics and accountability should be observed.

- As health professionals we can also comment that the UK's health and health-care industries can take a leading and beneficent role in global health, and UK employment prospects in health and welfare could be excellent.

A Comments on UK Energy supplies and employment prospects

- We are very aware that any threat to the UK's energy supply is a threat to national security
- The national electricity grid is too centralised and relies heavily on large capacity fossil-fuelled generation plants to reach the required capacity of 85GW. It is not well suited to accommodate the more variable characteristics of renewable electricity generation. The very heavy investment required, if planned well, would be justified
- Total demand for energy must be reduced - this would require a fundamental change in the mindset of a public used to profligacy.
- Shale gas is not a clean energy source and will hinder transformation to a decarbonised energy system
- Job losses from the current fossil-fuel dependent UK energy industry could be more than compensated by new jobs in a vibrant and more locally accountable renewable energy industry.