

## Editorial

# Underwater Battlespace

Jeremy Corbyn's refusal to threaten to use nuclear weapons excites attention around the world. In September 2015, shortly after he was elected by a huge majority as Leader of the Labour Party in Britain, Mr Corbyn told the BBC:

'I am opposed to the use of nuclear weapons. I am opposed to the holding of nuclear weapons. I want to see a nuclear-free world. I believe it is possible.'

Asked if he would use nuclear weapons, Mr Corbyn said 'No'. He continued:

'There are five declared nuclear weapon states in the world ... one hundred and eighty-seven countries do not feel the need to have nuclear weapons to protect their security. Why should those five need them to protect their security? We are not in the Cold War any more ... I don't think we should be spending £100bn on renewing Trident. That is a quarter of our defence budget. There are many in the military that do not want Trident renewed because they see it as an obsolete thing they don't need. They would much rather see it spent on conventional weapons.'

Katrina vanden Heuvel, editor of *The Nation*, writes in the *Washington Post* (12.1.16):

'Corbyn is now taking a beating in the conservative tabloids for his blasphemies. Yet he is talking common sense. No leader in his right mind would use nuclear weapons. The British people would be better off spending the money that renewal would cost elsewhere. The reality is that the British nuclear arsenal will have greater global significance if it is dismantled rather than renewed. Corbyn is meeting fierce resistance, even inside his own party, but he is raising questions that deserve a full debate.'

New elements emerge in the public debate, albeit somewhat belatedly. In January 2013, the Defense Science Board of the US Department of Defense warned that the United States and its allies 'cannot be confident' that their defence systems would be able to survive an 'attack from a sophisticated and well-resourced opponent utilising cyber-capabilities in combination with all of their military and intelligence capabilities'. What does that imply for nuclear weapons? The question was raised recently by a former minister in Mrs Thatcher's government, at a Pugwash symposium to mark the twentieth anniversary of the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to

that organisation and to Joseph Roblat, Bertrand Russell's close collaborator in establishing what has become known as the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. This inclusive and influential association emerged in response to an appeal to the world to 'remember your humanity, and forget the rest', contained in the Russell-Einstein Manifesto of July 1955 (see *Spokesman* 85 and 127).

Drones also figure in recent discussions about Trident, as attention turns to the 'underwater battlespace'. With Trident in mind, Paul Ingram of the British American Security Information Council (BASIC) told *The Independent* newspaper (26 December 2015):

'There is a major transition taking place in the underwater battlespace and it is far from clear how the new submarine will be able to evade detection from emerging sophisticated anti-submarine warfare capabilities ... With satellite surveillance able to look further and further into the water, coupled with the possibility of "swarming" underwater drones which are likely to become cheaper and cheaper to produce, it raises serious questions about the wisdom of putting all your nuclear weapons on board a submarine. The only purpose for doing that, it is claimed, is to make them hard to detect, which could well be impossible to achieve by the time the new Trident programme is launched.'

During 2016, the debate about Trident has great salience as the British government seeks parliamentary approval for its intention to build four new 'Successor' submarines to replace the ageing and increasingly decrepit Vanguard class (see *Substandard*, *Spokesman* 129). This is a hugely expensive and technically challenging programme, vulnerable to cost overruns in a similar way to the programme to build the smaller Astute attack submarines at Barrow-in-Furness in northern England. Have such lessons about costs really been learned? Certainly, George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer and keeper of the purse strings, budgets for £30 billion expenditure on construction of the submarines plus a contingency fund of £10 billion, in case of overruns. In addition, there are running costs once built, so that the lifetime budget has now reached £167 billion and rising. This represents extraordinary profligacy, made all the plainer in times of acute austerity for many people. It also consumes something like a third of the overall military procurement budget, diminishing the UK armed forces' capabilities in other areas. This has not gone unnoticed in the United States where officials warned that if Britain decides to replace Trident, it will become '... a nuclear power and nothing else ...' Indeed, apparently it is rumoured that the Americans would not hesitate to stop supplying the British with Trident if they felt that UK defence forces would be of more use to them deploying more conventional capability.

In addition to probing Trident further in the current issue of *The Spokesman*, developing our coverage in issues 127 and 129, we examine some other key domestic issues which Jeremy Corbyn and a re-invigorated Labour Party now confront. These include the Conservative government's sustained attack against trade unions, and how unions might respond, as set out by Len McCluskey of UNITE. Meanwhile, TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady celebrates Mike Cooley's pioneering work on human-centred systems, keeping in mind how work changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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**“As soon as we abandon our own reason, and are content to rely upon authority, there is no end to our troubles.”**

*Unpopular Essays* [1950]

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