



Debunking common myths about nuclear weapons

Myth #1 - Nuclear weapons protect us

Nuclear weapons are useless against terrorism - they don't prevent attacks but instead make us a target. Security at our nuclear weapons facilities has even been breached by peace protesters and journalists.

In 2002, newspapers led with "Brits 45mins from doom" about the WMD threat from Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The UK government did not say we were safe because of our nuclear deterrent - it instead took us into the Iraq War.

Nuclear weapons are not a useful or credible deterrent - our opponents know this is an illegal weapon which can never be used – giving us a very expensive and completely false sense of security.

Myth #2 - Nuclear weapons ended WW2

Japan and the US had an interest in attributing the end of WW2 to the new 'miracle weapon', while the declaration of war by the Soviet Union was likely the real reason behind Japanese surrender. Tokyo suffered higher casualties from conventional bombing than from the Hiroshima or Nagasaki nuclear bombs and 1945's massive firebombing of Dresden did not force Germany to submit. Building ever more destructive weapons simply increases the horror of war, not the certainty of ending it.

Myth #3 - Nuclear weapons 'keep the peace'

A commonly held myth is that nuclear-armed states don't go to war as they are holding a 'big stick' that keeps the peace. In 1973, after troop losses, Israel considered using nuclear weapons against Syria in the Yom Kippur war. In 1982, the Falkland Islands were invaded by Argentina despite the UK having nuclear weapons. In 1999, India and Pakistan - two nuclear armed states - went to war.

Myth #4 – You can't put the genie back in the bottle

Technology is never un-invented, but often becomes obsolete and discarded. New technologies make nuclear weapons less of a credible threat – a network of cheap drones could track Trident submarines and cyber warfare could also potentially disrupt weapons and communications systems - rendering them useless.

Biological weapons, Chemical weapons, Land mines and Cluster munitions are now all banned – leaving Nuclear weapons as the only WMD not yet prohibited by treaty. Their use would violate international law because they indiscriminately kill civilians and cause long-term environmental harm.

'Rogue' nations are often quoted as a reason for us to keep our nuclear weapons. Iran was top on the list of rogue nations until in 2013 they decided to limit their nuclear program to civilian use in return for the lifting of sanctions. Even the most isolated countries are part of the international community and a ban can serve to increase pressure on them.

The vast majority of countries in the world don't have nuclear weapons. Apartheid-era South Africa had a nuclear-weapons program in the 1970s but came under serious

international pressure and gave it up. Canada has not possessed nuclear weapons since 1984 while still maintaining membership of NATO.

Myth #5 - Nuclear weapons are needed because of Russia

It is sometimes suggested that had Ukraine kept its arsenal of nuclear weapons it could have deterred Russia from annexing Crimea. The nuclear missiles were in fact Russian, and under Russian control. The last thing needed in a conflict zone are WMDs on hair-trigger alert.

Arguing that Ukraine would be better off if it had kept its nuclear weapons undermines the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and encourages proliferation. The logical outcome of this argument is to give nuclear weapons to all countries.

Myth #6 - Nuclear weapons are safe and secure

Nuclear weapons add a huge and hidden element of risk to our lives – accidents with nuclear weapons almost turned the Cold War ‘hot’ on dozens of occasions. Due to the great secrecy surrounding nuclear weapons we often don’t hear of accidents and mistakes. In 1983 a Soviet satellite indicated five US nuclear missiles had been launched and Lieutenant Colonel Stanislav Petrov had minutes to respond to the supposed attack. Petrov deemed the readings a false alarm thus averting a nuclear war. In 1995, Russian President Boris Yeltsin was advised to retaliate immediately against an incoming NATO missile, which proved to be a Norwegian scientific rocket. In 2000 President Clinton mislaid his nuclear code card for several months and in 1981 after an attempted assassination President Reagan’s nuclear codes were lost and later found dumped in a hospital plastic bag.

The existence of nuclear weapons in unstable regions of the world also leads to the risk that a group of terrorists might acquire nuclear weapons. Even if they couldn’t detonate a large device, nuclear materials could still be used in a ‘dirty bomb’ that would spread contamination and panic.

Even a relatively “minor” exchange of only a few hundred nuclear weapons, aside from killing millions of people, might alter the global climate and crop production.

Myth #7 – Our independent deterrent makes us important

Trident missiles are made by Lockheed Martin in the USA and are maintained by the US Navy at Kings Bay, Georgia along with Trident missiles for US submarines. Guidance systems used by the missiles, known as “inertial” and “stellar guidance” do not give the accuracy required for certain precise targeting such as guaranteed destruction of hardened missile silos –this is only available via the US military’s GPS satellite system. UK politicians avoid admitting dependence on US suppliers, components, maintenance and telemetry by referring to Trident as “operationally independent”. However, despite the ability to order an attack independently, without on-going support from the USA the UK’s Trident system would only survive for a matter of months.

It is claimed that scrapping Trident would lose our “seat at the top table” of the UN security council. The structure of the UN, and who would sit as permanent members was decided before Britain even became a nuclear power. It was only by the 1970s that the other permanent members became nuclear powers, and it has never been suggested that only countries with nuclear weapons should have permanent seats on the Security Council - that would violate the principles of the organisation, encouraging countries to develop their own nuclear weapons and rewarding them for doing so.