

GENERAL SYNOD

The Ethics of Nuclear Weapons

Summary

In September 2018 the United Nations General Assembly is set to approve a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and with only 50 countries needed to ratify it to give it effect, the Treaty is likely to enter into force shortly afterwards.

In an uncertain world where nuclear weapons and attempts to control their proliferation have become ever more prominent, how might the Church speak with confidence into this context?

The Ethics of Nuclear Weapons is a response to these developments.

It looks again at Britain's own nuclear deterrent capability and explores the ethical arguments for and against maintaining it today.

It examines whether Britain should sign the 'Ban Treaty' and take more purposeful steps to dismantle its nuclear arsenal.

It acknowledges that this is an issue on which Christians have in good faith found themselves on both sides of the argument.

It makes the case, however, that there is widespread agreement amongst Christians that nuclear weapons are, as a class, uniquely terrible and that there is a legal and moral obligation upon the international community to take all practical and prudent steps towards achieving a situation in which none remain in existence anywhere.

Whether the 'Ban Treaty' offers the best means to secure a world without nuclear weapons remains a matter of debate, but as this report makes clear the Treaty is a remarkable diplomatic achievement reflecting the views of the majority of UN member states which the British Government and other Nuclear Weapon States should engage with.

Overview

1. At first glance, 2017 was a good year for nuclear disarmament. On 7th July 2017, 122 states voted to adopt a Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. In November, the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its efforts in pressing for such a Treaty.
2. And yet, the campaign to eradicate nuclear weapons has never looked so far from achieving its goals. Nuclear weapon states are modernising their arsenals, smaller nuclear powers are building their capacity, while others are trying to cross the nuclear threshold. A second nuclear age with more actors and less stability is beginning to take shape.
3. The widespread belief that the so called liberal international order is eroding is nowhere more noticeable than in the field of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. Landmark arms control treaties, like the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty and START, are at risk of unravelling and triggering a severe crisis in European security that will pose difficult questions for the future of arms control in Europe.

4. Over the last year, the world has got closer – much closer – to the brink of a significant conflict. The prospects of a nuclear war between North Korea and the US might have diminished, but relations between Iran and the United States have worsened significantly in recent months following the US withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal. This is all taking place against the global backdrop of a rising nationalism and illiberalism. The world fixates on the latest tweets from President Trump, but he is one symptom of a broader trend.
5. How might the Church speak into this context? How might it offer a Christian hope – a hope that is not naïve and imprudent, but one that is rooted in the present, in God’s today - to those that feel threatened by a world in flux? How might the Church encourage the British Government to give added momentum to efforts to control or prohibit the possession of nuclear weapons?
6. With the world in such a heightened state of insecurity it is right for the Church to reflect on whether Britain’s own nuclear capability is a destabilising factor. Should Britain sign the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and in so doing jettison the Trident renewal programme, even after all the key gateway decisions have been made? Would this make Britain safer and act as a wider catalyst for international peace? Such reflections are especially timely given the ongoing review of Britain’s defence capability and the wider debate as to Britain’s role in the world post-Brexit.
7. To help address these questions this report takes a fresh look at Britain’s independent nuclear capability (paras 21-33) and the ongoing Trident renewal programme which is due for completion in the early 2030s (paras 34-46). Against this background, the report then proceeds to look again at the Church’s own engagement on this issue from the Church and the Bomb debate in 1983, through to the debate on Trident renewal in 2007 and the House of Bishops pastoral letter at the time of the 2015 General Election (paras 47-56).
8. The question of whether Britain should possess let alone renew its nuclear capability has been a source of intense debate over years. Christians have in good faith found themselves on both sides of the arguments, even if there is substantial common ground between positions which is often overlooked. The ethical arguments for and against nuclear weapons, and in turn the case for unilateral versus multilateral disarmament, have however remained constant over time even if the weight of opinion has shifted back and forth.
9. This report takes a closer look at the ethical positions that Christians have held on this subject and explores how they have each been given renewed meaning in today’s context (paras 57-94). Much here depends on competing understandings of security. To some the international security situation is much changed from the height of the Cold War, and with it the need for Britain to retain a nuclear capability. For these advocates the Trident renewal programme is both unnecessary and dangerous amounting to an expensive folly that drains the Treasury and/or the defence budget of much needed resources that could be better invested in hospitals

and schools or in correcting the chronic underfunding in Britain's armed forces. Seen from this position a case can be made that Britain should press to be an early signatory of the Treaty on Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

10. To others, however, the international security environment is far from benign. Any short term financial and political dividends to be gained from unilaterally disarming or by signing a hastily put together Treaty do not make up for the long-term security guarantees that an independent nuclear capability provides against a regionally resurgent Russia and a China flexing its muscles in the South China Sea, across Asia and parts of Africa. Seen from this perspective, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, whatever its limitations provides the best chance to prevent wider proliferation while also offering a framework for nuclear weapon states to move incrementally through multilateral negotiations towards a world without nuclear weapons.

Theological reflections

11. It is not surprising that questions concerning war and armaments – intensified by the extraordinary destructive power of nuclear warheads – continue to divide Christians, for they touch on something fundamental to the theological era the church inhabits. For we live in the theological interim – the period between Pentecost and the Parousia, marked by the presence of the Holy Spirit among us and the inauguration of Christ's Kingdom, and simultaneously by the persistence of sin and the incomplete revelation of the Kingdom.
12. Although it is possible to read a degree of ambiguity about violence and war in the New Testament texts, the early Christian community was distant from the affairs of rulers and most New Testament theology anticipates an imminent return of Christ. If the tendency in the New Testament is toward what, today, we call pacifism, the fact that the Parousia did not come as quickly as expected, coupled with the growth of the Christian faith to embrace rulers and nations, changed the nature of the question. The ethical problem turned upon the difficulty of maintaining an expectation of the Second Coming when 'God's time' was turning out to be a very long time in human terms and the problem of great evil in human affairs remained.
13. In modern Christian ethics, this tension re-emerged in the 20th Century. On the one hand, the Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr has been enormously influential in America, and in the UK. Faced with the carnage of the First World War, Niebuhr and others understood that Christian theology must not treat sin as superficial but must factor into its ethics the appalling capacity for destruction that humanity had exhibited. Niebuhr's work came to maturity in the dark days of European totalitarianism and, in attempting to recognise the persistent power of human sinfulness, concluded that violence may be justified if it prevented great evil from entrenching itself and taking over human societies. From this root comes the pragmatic ethics of today which accepts that nuclear weapons cannot be un-invented and which seeks to live with the deterrent principle.
14. But Christian Realism has been attacked vehemently from within another deep-rooted tradition within Christian ethics – the pacifist communitarianism epitomised

today in the work of Stanley Hauerwas in the United States and, in England, John Milbank. For Hauerwas, the church's vocation is emphatically not to be accommodating to the reality of sin but to witness to the demands and new life of the Kingdom of God in its fullness – to be the precursor and epitome of what that Kingdom offers as transformative potential to the world.

15. The Hauerwas/Niebuhr conflict captures something of the deep paradox of discipleship in that Christians are called to witness to Christ's new dispensation whilst living in, and for the benefit of, the still-fallen and sinful world. This tension is found in the approaches to nuclear arms (among other topics) which characterise themselves as "realistic" and "prophetic". Both stand within honourable and deep-rooted Christian schools of thought and – more than thought – of Christian fidelity.
16. Can they be reconciled? Not until God's Kingdom is completed on earth as in heaven. But it may be helpful to reflect on an insight from the theologian, Nicholas Lash, who notes that theologians like Hauerwas or Milbank seek to locate Christian theology "on the other side of the cross" where, "the absolute Christian vision of ontological peace now provides the only alternative to a nihilistic outlook" (Milbank, 1990 p.433). Many who seek to embody a prophetic voice on nuclear arms would identify with that position, and Lash sees it embodied, for example, in groups as diverse as the desert fathers and the Amish.
17. However, Lash goes on to say that this perspective requires, "for its own integrity, the continual corrective pressure of another reading, a reading which would place us still ... on this side of the Cross, set in Gethsemane; a reading which demands an appropriate engagement with destructive violence, the strenuous exercise of a kind of power set to the service of a kind of politics, construction of the kind of culture of reconciliation ... which might embody, sustain and publicly communicate the announcement of God's peace." (Lash, 1992 p.363)
18. This corrective reading is necessary, says Lash, because it would "remind us that, though Christ has come, although salvation has occurred, the classic Christian grammar of these things requires us also to say: salvation is occurring now and is still awaited, eagerly, in hope" (p,362)
19. So, whilst members of a church may legitimately and honourably seek to stress the realistic or the prophetic in their approach to public ethics, especially on so awe-inspiringly significant issue as nuclear weapons, it may be the task of the church as a whole to seek to capture that "classic Christian grammar" and to honour both perspectives, whilst recognising that they must always be held in tension as correctives to one another, so long as we conduct our discipleship on both sides of the Cross.
20. Within the Church of England can be found both the pacifist and the realist position on issues of nuclear armaments. Both positions have a long lineage. However, neither regards nuclear weapons, with their unprecedented destructive power, as intrinsically good. That is why the motion now before Synod is couched in terms which may be supportable by Christians standing in both theological traditions. This is not a unilateralist versus multilateralist zero-sum game. The proliferation of

nuclear weapons jeopardises the future of the world and the flourishing of its peoples. Reducing our dependence upon them is an imperative recognised across political and theological spectrums and, in this centenary year of the Armistice, it is a reminder that building and sustaining peace is an unceasing responsibility

Britain's current nuclear capability

21. The UK's current nuclear capability was ordered in the early 1980s and progressively came into service from 1994. It comprises four Vanguard-class nuclear powered submarines, each with 16 launch tubes for Trident D.5 missiles carrying multiple independently targetable entry vehicles.
22. Successive Governments have declared reductions in the total holding of operational warheads and in the number of missiles carried in each submarine. The 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) said that submarines on patrol will carry no more than 40 nuclear warheads and 8 operational missiles. By the mid-2020s the Government is committed to reducing the overall nuclear weapon stockpile to no more than 180 warheads. Details regarding the destructive capability of the size of the warhead carried by each missile have not been disclosed.
23. There is always one submarine at sea, but operational readiness has been much reduced since the end of the Cold War: the readiness to fire is no longer of the 15-minute order and missiles are not held ready-programmed for delivery to pre-determined targets. The submarines are based at Faslane and Coulport in Western Scotland. Missiles undergo periodic servicing at Kings Bay on the US Atlantic coast as part of a common US-UK stock. The UK share is owned, not leased.

An independent nuclear capability

24. Britain has possessed a strategic nuclear weapons capability since the 1950s. From 1958 onwards, however, there has been increasing co-operation with the United States in warhead design. Final responsibility for design remains with the UK, with expertise centred at the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) at Aldermaston in Berkshire. From 1960 onwards, Britain decided to buy American missiles for its strategic capability. After some early US help over propulsion, submarines have been fully designed and built in the UK.
25. Operational decisions on the use of the capability remain entirely with the UK government. Neither the US nor NATO has either a legal or physical power to override such authority. Britain has decided to accept dependence on US supply for some key elements of its capability, and the US would be able, if it went back on its commitments, to pose over a period of years increasingly severe difficulty for the maintenance of Britain's capability. France, by contrast has chosen to maintain national independence in procurement, as well as in operation, at a longer-term cost several times higher than the UK.

The political logic of a nuclear deterrent

26. The UK's nuclear arsenal is small in comparison with other established powers. It provides the UK with a strategy of minimum nuclear deterrence. The Government has consistently argued that it sees Trident as having a fundamentally political role in deterring aggression, not as a weapons system for fighting wars. The Government would only ever contemplate its use in extreme circumstances of self-defence.
27. The 2015 SDSR confirmed the "UK will not use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons against any non-nuclear state party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)". This assurance does not apply, however to any state in material breach of the NPT. The UK also maintains a position of ambiguity of when, how and at what scale the UK may consider the use of its nuclear weapons capability, although the Government has stated that nuclear weapons would only be used in "extreme circumstance of self-defence."
28. Trident was developed during the final decade of the Cold War, as a successor to an earlier capability. It was designed to counter the threat posed by the size and technical capabilities of the Soviet strategic nuclear arsenal. Following the end of the Cold War discussion has centred on whether the retention of even a minimum nuclear deterrence is necessary. Successive governments have consistently argued that the international security environment remains inauspicious to allow the UK to dispense with its nuclear deterrent.
29. The most recent SDSR concluded in 2015:

Other states continue to have nuclear arsenals and there is a continuing risk of further proliferation of nuclear weapons. There is a risk that states might use their nuclear capability to threaten us, try to constrain our decision making in a crisis or sponsor nuclear terrorism. Recent changes in the international security context remind us that we cannot relax our guard. We cannot rule out further shifts which would put us, or our NATO Allies, under grave threat.

Past and future disarmament

30. The UK is a signatory to several treaties and agreements relating to nuclear weapons and their delivery systems which confer a number of obligations on the UK with respect to its nuclear polices. The most significant are the disarmament obligations stated in Article VI of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation on Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Under that article the five recognised nuclear weapon states are permitted to possess nuclear weapons, but only if they commit themselves to the principles of nuclear arms control and eventual disarmament.
31. Since the end of the Cold War the UK has progressively sought to meet its obligations under the NPT. It has withdrawn and dismantled the RAF's WE177 nuclear bomb without replacement so making Trident the UK's only nuclear weapons system. In this respect the UK is the only state with nuclear weapons to

have reduced its capability to a single platform, single delivery system and a single warhead design.

32. Similarly, the UK has dismantled all its remaining Chevaline (Polaris) warheads. The UK has reduced its operationally available stockpile of nuclear weapons to fewer than 200 warheads, which amounts to a 70% reduction in the potential explosive power of its nuclear forces since the end of the Cold War. It has also reduced the readiness of its current nuclear forces. By the mid-2020s the UK will have achieved a 65% reduction in the size of its nuclear stockpile, making it the smallest of all the NPT nuclear weapons states.
33. The 2015 SDSR notes that Britain is “committed to the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons and that it will work with its international partners to tackle proliferation and “press for key steps towards multilateral disarmament, including the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, and successful negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty in the Conference on Disarmament.”

The Trident renewal process

The political decision

34. A commitment to maintaining a nuclear deterrent was included in the Labour Party manifesto in 2005. The Labour Government’s 2006 White Paper, *The Future of the United Kingdom’s Nuclear Deterrent*, concluded that the international security environment was not conducive to justify complete disarmament and that, in terms of both cost and capability, retaining the submarine based Trident system would provide the most effective deterrent.
35. The current Trident missiles have a design life extending at least until 2020. The US has undertaken a life extension programme to maintain the D.5 system in operation into the 2040s. This will entail a slightly improved missile (D.5A). More significantly, the four British submarines that entered service over the period 1994-2001 have a design life of 25 years. The submarines could be sustained into the mid-2020s, but given that some 14 years elapsed between the initial decision to acquire a Trident based force and the entry of the first submarine into service a decision as to Trident’s future was politically unavoidable.
36. The Labour Government took the political decision to maintain the UK’s existing nuclear capability by replacing the Vanguard class submarines (SSBN) and participate in the current US service life extension programme for the Trident II D5 missile. A debate and vote in the House of Commons on the general principle of whether the UK should retain a strategic nuclear deterrent beyond the life of the current system was held on 14 March 2007. The motion passed by 409 to 161 votes.
37. Successive governments have maintained that the UK’s nuclear deterrent is fully consistent with all the UK’s international legal obligations. They argue that the

current programme to replace the nuclear deterrent is compatible with the UK's obligations under the NPT, insisting that the Treaty contains no prohibition on updating existing weapons systems and gives no explicit timeframe for nuclear disarmament.

Delivery of the Dreadnought programme

38. Shortly after the 2007 vote, work began on the concept phase of the 'Successor' programme, with the project passing its Initial Gate in April 2011. A five-year assessment phase followed which largely focused on the design of the successor platform. Several contracts were awarded to the main industrial partners on this project (BAE Systems, Rolls Royce and Babcock) to deliver on each of the stages of the assessment phase. Approximately £4.8 billion was assigned to the initial phases of the Successor programme.
39. In a vote in July 2016 the House of Commons approved the decision to maintain the UK's nuclear deterrent beyond the 2030s. The vote in Parliament on "the principle of continuous at-sea deterrence and our plans for Successor", was passed by 472 to 117 - a majority of 355. After almost a decade of work on the project, that vote subsequently enabled the programme to move forward into its manufacturing stage, which will see the construction of four new Dreadnought class ballistic missile submarines over the next 15-20 years. Construction of the first submarine formally began on 5 October 2016 with the cutting of the steel for the first submarine.
40. The Ministry of Defence has refused to be drawn on specific dates for when the first submarine will enter service stating that "detailed planning assumptions for Service Entry are classified." It is widely anticipated that this entry date will be in the early 2030s. At 152.9 metres long and with a displacement of 17,200 tonnes the Dreadnought class will be the largest submarines ever built for the Royal Navy. The overall life span of the Vanguard Class submarine is approximately 37-38 years.

Financing the Dreadnought programme

41. The 2015 SDSR confirmed the costs of design and manufacture of the Dreadnought programme would be £31 billion, an increase of £6 billion on estimates set down in the programme's Initial Gate report in 2011. A £10 billion contingency fund has also been set aside
42. At, potentially, £41 billion the Dreadnought programme is one of the most expensive Government projects going forward. Its budget is twice that of Crossrail and three times that of the London Olympics. Once the new nuclear deterrent comes into service the annual in-service costs are expected to continue at approximately 6% of the defence budget.
43. Recognising the scale of the Dreadnought programme, the 2015 SDSR made several changes to the structure of the project, specifically with reference to governance and oversight of delivery. The new Submarine Delivery Agency was established within the Ministry of Defence's Equipment and Support (DE&S) on 3

April 2017 with a remit to manage the procurement and in-service support of all nuclear submarines, including Dreadnought.

44. In its 2017 Update to Parliament, the Minister of Defence confirmed that the programme remained within budget and that £4.3 billion had been spent on the design and early manufacture phase, thus far. In line with convention, the Dreadnought programme will be funded from the Ministry of Defence's core equipment procurement budget. In January 2018, the National Audit Office raised concerns over the impact of the Ministry of Defence's nuclear programmes, including Dreadnought, on the affordability of the Department's overall equipment plan.

Warhead renewal options,

45. Decisions on a replacement warhead were deferred in the 2010 SDSR until 2019/20. In its 2017 Update to Parliament, the Ministry of Defence confirmed that a decision on whether to refurbish or replace the existing warhead will be made during this Parliament and that work continues developing replacement options including through the UK-US Joint Technology Demonstrator project examining warhead safety, security and advanced manufacturing technologies.

46. The Ministry of Defence has not stated, however, whether this decision will be subject to a vote in the House of Commons, which some have called for. When asked about this in a Parliamentary Question in January 2018, the Defence Secretary replied "work is ongoing on replacement options. I will continue to provide updates as appropriate."

The Church and the bomb: reflections past and present

47. In the past, the Church has given considerable thought and reflection to the question of Britain's nuclear capability, most notably in the early 1980s when the Government first decided in favour of Trident.

48. *The Church and The Bomb*, a report commissioned by the then Board for Social Responsibility, was debated in February 1983 amidst wide publicity, in view of its recommendation for the UK unilaterally to renounce its deterrent. The recommendation was criticised by Archbishop Runcie and rejected by the Synod. Instead the Synod passed an amended motion that said it was not the task of the Church to determine the country's defence strategy, but rather to give a moral lead to the nation by asking those moral and ethical questions that needed to be addressed before a decision was taken.

49. The Synod recognised, however, that it is the duty of the Government and her allies to maintain adequate forces to guard against nuclear blackmail and to deter nuclear and non-nuclear aggression. These forces, it suggested, should be "unmistakably defensive" since even a small-scale first use of nuclear weapons could never be morally justified in view of the high risk that this would lead to full-scale nuclear warfare.

50. The Synod therefore pressed all countries publicly to foreswear the first use of nuclear weapons in any form (a cornerstone of NATO's then strategy, given the overwhelming Soviet conventional superiority). It called on the Government to take steps in conjunction with her allies to reduce progressively NATO's dependence on nuclear weapons and to decrease nuclear arsenals throughout the world. The General Synod left open how NATO should compensate for this diminishment in security given the massive numerical superiority of Russia's conventional forces.
51. On the eve of the end of the Cold War the Synod again debated the issue. The focus of the debate in November 1988 was a report published by a Working Party of the Board for Social Responsibility, *Peace-making in a Nuclear Age*. The motion passed by the Synod welcomed the more helpful relationship between East and West and urged the Government to take initiatives necessary to achieve major reductions in nuclear and conventional armaments, including working for agreement between the nuclear nations on a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.
52. Following the 2003 Iraq War the House of Bishops set up a Working Party to consider the issue of international security. The Working Party's reflections on what peace and security means in a post 9/11 world was published in September 2005 with a report titled, *Countering Terrorism: Power: Violence and Democracy Post 9/11*. Although the report did not specifically address the question of the UK's nuclear capability it did consider the deteriorating relationship between Iran and the wider international community.
53. In its concluding section the 2003 Report noted:
- The debate on nuclear weapons needs to be conducted with much greater honesty and consistency. If certain countries retain their nuclear weapons based on the uncertainty and potentially violent volatility of international relations, on what basis are the same weapons denied to other states? The non-nuclear weapon states need to be presented with rather more convincing arguments and incentives than they have been up to now as to why it might be in their best, long-term interests not to go nuclear.
54. In January 2007, the Mission and Public Affairs Council submitted written evidence to the House of Commons Defence Committee's inquiry on the Government's White Paper on "The Future of the UK's Nuclear Deterrent". The submission reiterated the case first made in 1988 that while it is the fundamental responsibility of any Government to provide for the security of the UK and its citizens now and for the future, against both real and potential threats, including nuclear aggression and blackmail, the Government needed to demonstrate more convincingly than it had in the White Paper how the proposed deterrent would add to the security of the UK and to the UK's ability to act effectively in the service of peace, justice and prosperity in the wider world.
55. The ethical reasoning set out in the 2007 submission, consistent with the line taken by the General Synod since the early 1980s, was subsequently approved by the General Synod when it considered the matter in February 2007. The motion made

clear that the General Synod had serious questions about the proposed renewal of the UK's minimum deterrent and called on Christian people to make an informed contribution to the issues raised in *The Future of Trident* in the light of Christian teaching about Just War. An amendment to the motion was passed by 165 to 149 votes suggesting that the "proposed upgrading of Trident is contrary to the spirit of the United Kingdom's obligations in international law and the ethical principles underpinning them"

56. Prior to the 2015 General Election, the House of Bishops published *Who is My Neighbour: A Letter from the House of Bishops to the People and Parishes of the Church of England for the General Election 2015* calling for a new direction the bishops believed the country's political life ought to take. When looking at the relationship between nations and peoples this wide-ranging document made the following observations regarding Britain's nuclear deterrent:

The sheer scale of indiscriminate destructive power represented by nuclear weapons such as Trident was only justifiable, if at all, by appeal to the principle of mutually assured destruction. For many, including many Christians, that in itself was a deeply problematic argument, although there were also many who were prepared to live with the strategy because it appeared to secure peace and save lives. Shifts in the global strategic realities mean that the traditional arguments for nuclear deterrence need re-examining. The presence of such destructive capacity pulls against any international sense of shared community. But such is the talismanic power of nuclear weaponry that few politicians seem willing to trust the electorate with a real debate about the military capacity we need in the world of today.

Arguments for and against

Revisiting fundamental ethical arguments

57. There are three competing ethical positions on the question of the possession and use of nuclear weapons. Position One holds that the use and very possession of nuclear weapons by any state is wrong and can never be justified. Some adherents argue that God's commandment that we should be peacemakers requires individuals and states alike to renounce the instruments of violence and invest instead in non-violent mechanisms of conflict reconciliation. Others, that would not necessarily categorise themselves as pacifists, would argue that the destructive consequences of this method of warfare are so grotesque and so threatening to the very integrity of God's creation that this category of weaponry should be abolished.

58. Position Two holds that while the use of nuclear weapons can never be justified the possession of such weapons for deterrence can be morally tolerable. Historically, the maintenance of lethal force to deter aggression and the use of such force to counteract it has been considered morally justifiable according to the just war tradition. The destructive nature of these weapons does not change this calculation. Although it is hard to prove cause and effect, advocates of deterrence would claim that nuclear weapons have contributed to peace amongst the major powers. While

conflict remains an inherent part of human nature in none of the cases where nuclear weapon states and nuclear non-weapons states were in conflict were nuclear threats ever in play. Deterrence works, because, nuclear weapons are dangerous by their nature and few wish to take risks that would inadvertently result in nuclear exchanges.

59. Position Three holds that under certain extreme and emergency circumstances some use of nuclear weapons is justifiable. This position underpinned the decision to drop atomic bombs with devastating effect upon Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Advocates hold that the language of 'weapons of mass destruction' is distorting as technology has now moved considerably since 1945 such that it is not impossible to envisage uses of nuclear weapons that could gravely damage an aggressor state by assailing legitimate targets while killing as few non-combatants as possible. Russia has long possessed smaller nuclear weapons, with a military doctrine that conceives of their tactical use to counter-conventional threats. More recently, in February 2018, the US published its National Security Strategy and its Nuclear Posture Review calling for two new nuclear capabilities – a sea-launched cruise missile and a lower-yield warhead for existing submarine-launched ballistic missiles – and expanding the conditions under which the United States would use nuclear weapons to encompass more non-nuclear attacks, including cyberattacks and attacks on nuclear command and control.
60. For Position Two and Three there then follows a wide range of questions with much scope for differing judgements about national policies, weapons systems and targeting concepts and about whether in practice nuclear weapons are truly helpful to security. These concerns and dilemmas are by their very nature absent from Position One and even to be seen to be grappling with them is seen by many as a dilution of the moral obligation to disarm.
61. Each of the above positions is ethically and politically problematic and poses, as the distinguished Quaker pacifist Sydney Bailey wrote many years ago "appalling moral and practical dilemmas." Position One must explain how it can be reasonable to require that the possession of nuclear weapons only be regarded as the preserve of the unscrupulous be they another Hitler, Pol Pot, Stalin or Saddam Hussein. Position Two must explain how it can be intellectually and morally sustainable to construct and maintain a destructive capability, which should never be used. Position Three, needs to explain how the use of nuclear weapons is compatible with the just war tradition's understanding of proportionality and discrimination – that is, no directly intended attack on non-combatants.
62. Despite the differing range of ethical dilemmas that each position is charged to address, there exist substantial areas of common ground between the positions. First, nuclear weapons are, as a class, uniquely terrible. Second, there is a legal and moral obligation upon the international community especially those states possessing nuclear weapons, to take all practical and prudent steps towards achieving a situation in which none remain in existence anywhere.

63. While Position One and Two share much common analysis the point of divergence is the proposition that the possession of nuclear weapons is always and unconditionally wrong, regardless of circumstances or consequences. In considering whether Position Two remains tenable today consideration needs to be given to a further proposition namely that whatever may have been the case in the past, there is no longer any present or future justification for any state in the world to continue to possess such weapons so that every effort must now be taken to accelerate the considerable progress that has already been made in ridding the world of nuclear weapons.

Competing understandings of security

64. At the time of the 1983 debate, the General Synod held that ethically and morally a case could be made for possessing nuclear weapons as a tool of deterrence, but it left it to the government of the day to judge whether the security environment was such that a deterrent was needed. In 2007, the General Synod skated over the question of deterrence by recognising instead the “fundamental responsibility of Her Majesty’s Government to provide for the security of the country”. In 2015, the House of Bishops pressed for a re-examining of traditional arguments for nuclear deterrence considering shifting strategic realities, but it did not spell out what those realities were nor did it offer its view on whether nuclear deterrence should be jettisoned.

65. On one side of the security argument are those that hold that traditional options of deterrence are no longer credible against non-state actors like Daesh or in an age of hybrid or asymmetrical warfare in which cyber-attacks and operations are increasingly becoming the norm. Proponents of this view also argue that the evolution of underwater drone technologies and cyber capabilities could render submarine-based nuclear systems obsolete at some point in the future, and highly likely within the lifetime of Successor. Even in the last two years the global security situation has arguably changed. The nature of the threat to every day citizens’ lives is not necessarily a resurgent Russian military, or a nuclear capable Iran or North Korea, but more realistically a radicalised individual driving an old van down a crowded inner-city pavement.

66. On the other side of the argument are those that hold that while there is currently no direct threat to the UK, there is no way of predicting the security environment over the next 40-50 years. The possibility of non-state actors acquiring the knowledge and capability to develop weapons of mass destruction cannot be discounted and so makes it necessary that nuclear weapons be retained. Similarly, there can be no guarantee that an emerging threat might not materialise from an existing nuclear weapon state such as China or Russia, that would do the UK ill. Nor can it be assumed that aspiring nuclear weapons states such as North Korea would give up their arsenals or plans solely because the UK had decided to forgo its nuclear capability by deciding to unilaterally disarm.

67. Yet another line of argument suggests that even if the international security in the future proves conducive to nuclear disarmament the current situation looks far from benign. Russia’s annexation of Crimea, its support for the ruthless likes of the

Assad regime, its destabilising influence in the Ukraine and its recent war games across the border from Poland, that have used the aggressive tactical use of nuclear weapon, all point to a deteriorating security environment in Europe's neighbourhood. North Korea's ambitions in becoming a nuclear weapons state allied to the fragility of the 2015 nuclear deal struck with Iran all point to the wider problems in preventing further proliferation. The return of great power rivalry with both China, Russia and the US all modernising their nuclear weapons system and, in some cases, reducing the threshold for their use all point to the emergence of a second nuclear age.

68. Engaging with these strategic debates implies and requires judgments about circumstances and effects in the world, on which the Church cannot properly claim definitive expertise. Maybe the most the Church can do when faced with such divergent views is to raise those questions concerning the strategic environment that need to be answered by the government of the day to justify the continued retention of nuclear weapons.

Compatibility with international obligations

69. Many of those opposed to replacing Trident argue that a decision to renew or replace Trident would breach Article VI of the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This was a position that the General Synod edged towards but stopped short of fully embracing when it last debated the matter in 2007.
70. Article VI commits the recognised nuclear states, including Britain to a goal of abolishing all nuclear armouries, even if it left undecided whether this should be done unilaterally or multilaterally. This end goal has been reaffirmed by various Treaty review conferences and in the 1996 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice.
71. Successive British governments have argued that existing Treaty obligations are open ended and do not prohibit the upgrading of existing weapons system. This thinking is consistent with a strict legal interpretation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, but it is open to doubt whether it is sufficiently in sympathy with the spirit of this Treaty.
72. Others also point out that the commitment to the goal of disarmament envisaged a multilateral rather than a unilateral one where all Treaty partners progressively moved towards total disarmament under international supervision. Given that no other nuclear weapons state intends to move to abolition in the foreseeable future and given that some non-nuclear weapons states continuously flirt with the idea of crossing the nuclear threshold, it cannot be easily argued that an absolute obligation rests on the UK regardless of international circumstances and of the actions of others.
73. While welcoming the steps that have been taken to withdraw from all nuclear weapons systems, except for Trident, and the efforts that have been made to significantly reduce the size of the country's nuclear stockpile, some nonetheless think the Government needs to clarify whether it can envisage a situation in which Britain would give up its nuclear deterrent.

74. Does the Government believe that the possession of an independent nuclear deterrent is a temporary or a permanent feature of Britain's strategic capabilities? If the former, then it would be helpful to have further details as to the conditions under which such a capability would be surrendered and the steps that it is taking towards that eventuality? If the latter, it would be preferable if the Government was more transparent in its thinking.

Unnecessary and dangerous?

75. The apparent lack of progress towards the elimination of nuclear weapons as promised in Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty has led a significant number of non-nuclear weapons states to undertake negotiations for a nuclear 'Ban Treaty'. These efforts were authorised by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2016 and concluded on 7 July 2017 with 122 states approving the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

76. The Treaty is a remarkable diplomatic achievement reflecting the views of the majority of UN member states. The stated aim of the Treaty is to prohibit nuclear weapons and to close a 'legal gap' and to complete a general prohibition of all weapons of mass destruction, given the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention and the 1997 Chemical Weapons Convention.

77. The Humanitarian Campaign for the Ban Treaty drew inspiration from the 1996 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice, and from new research indicating that the effects of even a relatively small exchange of 'only' 100 nuclear weapons between India and Pakistan could produce a nuclear winter even worse than previously understood, with catastrophic consequences for world climate and agriculture.

78. Despite its laudable intentions there are some problems with the Treaty which reflect the fact that it was negotiated in haste, in a little over 6 weeks, without any participation by those states that possess nuclear weapons. The original intention was that the Treaty would be a short political and moral statement prohibiting and stigmatising nuclear weapons and that it would be followed later by a Nuclear Weapons Convention providing detailed procedures for the safe and irreversible elimination of nuclear weapons, along with a comprehensive verification regime to monitor the process. However, during the drafting process those that had wanted the Treaty to require the elimination of nuclear weapons prevailed thereby signally a path independent of the nuclear weapons states.

79. The Treaty leaves unresolved how the entry into force of the Treaty will work for signatory states, especially those that are nuclear weapon states. In terms of verification, the Treaty leaves it to each nuclear weapon state to decide for itself what its proposed elimination procedures should be and how these should be verified thereby creating the prospects of multiple verification regimes.

80. The Treaty also directs responsible states to aid and support those individuals affected by the use or testing of weapons of mass destruction. This commitment was included at the insistence of those that think the USA should pay compensation for its use of nuclear weapons against Japan. The Treaty also requires environmental remediation of contaminated areas, but it leaves open how this would apply to any atmospheric damage caused by nuclear explosions by several states.

81. The Treaty leaves undefined key sections which could become a later source of dispute. What exactly is a nuclear weapon? Does a dirty bomb constitute a nuclear bomb? The Treaty makes no mention of delivery systems, nor does it spell out what constitutes a 'nuclear weapons programme' or what its 'irreversible destruction' entails.

82. It is disappointing that none of the nuclear weapon states participated in the negotiations and none have indicated they will sign the Treaty. Nor does it look likely that any member of NATO or other 'umbrella' states that depends on nuclear deterrence will support the Treaty. Early claims that the Treaty will become international law binding on all states have been dropped, but some are characterising any nuclear state that refuses to sign as an 'outlaw state'.

83. The P5 nuclear weapon states (USA, China, Russia, France and the UK) made clear their opposition to the Treaty in a joint statement issued in Washington DC on 15 September 2016:

The P5 expressed their deep concern with efforts to pursue approaches to nuclear disarmament that disregard the global strategic context. Such efforts will threaten the consensus-based approach that has served for decades to strengthen the NPT regime and enhance the Treaty's contribution to international security and may negatively affect the prospects for consensus at future NPT Review Conferences. The P5 reiterated a call upon all members of the international community to engage in an open and constructive dialogue on nuclear disarmament, international security and stability that is inclusive of all states and focused on practical measures leading to a world without nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

84. The British Government set out its opposition to the initiative in a joint statement with the USA and France on 7 July 2017 saying that the Ban Treaty 'clearly disregards the realities of the international security environment', 'cannot result in the elimination of a single nuclear weapon and will not enhance any country's security, nor international peace and security.' To the contrary, it added that it 'will do the exact opposite by creating even more divisions' by contributing to the rejection of the customary consensus-based approach endorsed by the nuclear weapon states.

85. The Treaty's weaknesses and its rejection by the nuclear weapon states should not obscure the radical implication of the Treaty, namely that most nations believe that nuclear weapons are dangerous and unnecessary and should be eliminated to change the status quo of international security.

86. It is likely that the United Nations General Assembly will approve the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in September 2018. With only 50 countries needed to ratify it to give it effect, it is likely that the Treaty will enter into force shortly afterwards.

How much and who pays?

87. Since the acquisition of the UK's first strategic nuclear deterrent in the 1950s, the cost of procuring and maintaining it, and which Government department should finance it, has always been a matter of debate.
88. There has always been an argument that the money spent on Britain's nuclear deterrent could be better spent on other public policy priorities such as health, education, policing, or combating world poverty. For those who hold that using nuclear weapons under any circumstance would be wrong and that their possession can never be justified, the case for redirecting resources needs no explanation.
89. For others however, the matter is much less self-evident as providing for the security of the country is a precondition of most social goods, including aid to the poor. Although, it can be debated whether Britain's nuclear deterrence contributes to our national security, Britain's current nuclear capability currently costs about one pound in every thousand of gross domestic product. Should we regard such expenditure, rather than anything else in the other nine-hundred and ninety odd, as the crucial bar to our devoting as much as we ought to the relief of world poverty?
90. The question of how much the Trident renewal programme will cost has been drawn into focus given current pressures on the defence budget. The Brexit vote has seen a drop in the value of Sterling, causing significant increases in both day-day operating costs and a significant rise in procurement costs – particularly for projects sourced from the US, such as the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. The procurement costs of the Dreadnought programme have also risen.
91. A wider failure by the MoD to identify and deliver on stretching efficiency savings, which was agreed as part of the last spending round, with over £5 billion yet to be found, means there is a significant hole in the Department's short-term budget plans. The significant financial challenges experienced by the MoD led the Government to announce a stocktake of the 2015 SDSR findings in July 2017, barely 18 months after the last SDSR and nearly three and half years before the next one is due.
92. In many ways UK defence is returning to the 1980s – a financially cash strapped MoD trying to deliver a Trident replacement programme and ensure that it has sufficient maritime, air and land capability to deter a resurgent Russia. Arguments have intensified in recent years, even amongst the advocates of nuclear deterrence, for the cost of the renewal programme to be removed from the face of the defence budget. The Government has resisted this call, making the case that it has always argued that the full costs come from a defence budget that is increasing year on year.
93. An alternative approach, and one first raised by the report to the General Synod in 2007, is whether a case can be made for reducing the number of replacement submarines from 4 to 3, even if that means an end to Britain's continuous-at-sea nuclear deterrent capability. This would provide financial savings and ease, albeit only temporary, the pressures on the defence budget.
94. These calculations will be seen by those that take a principled opposition to Britain's nuclear deterrent as diluting the moral obligation to fully disarm, but to others such questions provoke different arguments. Some Christians will believe that the UK should maintain its capability at current levels; others that it should not; and others

again that no categoric conclusions can be prudently reached until the Government has put more solid facts into the public domain as a result of its current review process.

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12 June 2018

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