

Political Context of the Faslane 365 yearlong Blockade against Trident

Three political events formed the backdrop for Faslane 365's yearlong blockade – the UK White Paper (published December 2006) and debate on renewing Trident, Britain's submarine-based weapon of mass destruction; elections for the Scottish Parliament on May 3rd 2007; and the first meeting of the 2010 review cycle for the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), April-May 2007.

At a time when the majority of British public opinion is portrayed as uninterested in nuclear issues, a primary objective was to raise awareness and opposition to the government's precooked decision to renew Trident. But Faslane 365 aimed to do more than raise consciousness. We wanted directly to disrupt what we see as illegal nuclear weapon deployments and the military-nuclear machine, and stimulate a regrowth in nonviolent community-based activism on peace, justice and environmental issues.

Challenging Trident Renewal

Faslane 365 started on October 1, 2006, shortly before publication of the government's White Paper on Trident replacement. In bringing people from all over the world to close the base for however long they could, the blockades focussed opposition to Trident and highlighted how the continued deployment of nuclear weapons violates Britain's international legal obligations, notably the NPT and humanitarian law.

In the run-up to the vote on Trident in the Westminster parliament on March 14th, Faslane 365 kept up pressure to show the immorality, illegality and insecurity of Trident. Although Tony Blair won that vote with the help of David Cameron and a three-line whip imposed on both the Labour and Conservative Parties, he lost the argument and was heavily opposed within the Labour Party. MPs from all sides of the house challenged the 'insurance policy' and 'deterrence' justifications for replacing Trident, and argued that nuclear weapons provide neither genuine status nor security for Britain. They questioned the government's declared budget of £20 billion and showed that Trident replacement was likely to cost over £76 billion – a vast sum that would be better spent on conflict prevention programmes, education and alleviating poverty.

Most significantly, almost half of Labour's backbenchers – 88 – rebelled and joined the Liberal Democrats, independent parties and a few Tories in voting against Trident. In a courageous show of conscientious objection, the deputy Leader of the House of Commons, Edinburgh MP Nigel Griffiths, and several junior ministers and government aides also resigned their positions in order to vote against their own government's decision to procure the next generation of nuclear weapons.

Scotland Rejects Trident

The persistent blockades at Faslane generated press coverage and helped to raise awareness in Scotland in the run-up to the May 2007 elections, ensuring that opposition to Trident became one of the most important issues on which voters cast their ballots. For the first time ever, an anti-nuclear party was elected to government. A month later, on 14th June, 71 Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSP) voted on a Green Party motion against Trident replacement. Only 16 (all Conservative) voted against. The Scottish Labour Party split, with some voting with the majority in favour, while 39

MSPs abstained. This historic vote must now be carried forward by the Scottish government.

Scotland is not only part of the British Isles, but also in Europe. Over time, the European Union has forged a Common Foreign and Security Policy based around international cooperation and the consolidation of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. While seeking to develop a more independent agenda for peace and security may bring Scottish aspirations – especially the rejection of Trident – into temporary conflict with some of Westminster’s current foreign and nuclear policies, Scotland’s peace policies can be integrated more directly with European and United Nations principles, agreements and perspectives.

The 1998 Scotland Act does not make this easy, because it reserved powers to Westminster on matters relating to national security, defence and foreign policy; but this does not mean that Scotland should have no voice or policy on these issues. Schedule V of the Act specifies that “observing and implementing international obligations, obligations under the Human Rights Convention and obligations under Community law” are not reserved matters. Underpinning potential new Scottish legislation on preventing crimes committed by weapons of mass destruction is the understanding that Westminster cannot reserve and impose on Scotland something that is contrary to international law and Britain’s own international and treaty obligations. In other words, illegalities cannot be reserved. And there are strong legal grounds to argue that with regard to nuclear weapons, London is making an unlawful imposition on Scotland.

Furthermore, as set out for the ‘Prevention of Crimes Committed by Weapons of Mass Destruction (Scotland) Bill 2007’, sponsored by Michael Matheson MSP, the use or threatened use of Trident in accordance with UK doctrine and policy would be unlawful. Hence, not only the replacement, but also the current deployment of these nuclear weapons must be considered unlawful.

Scotland therefore has legal as well as moral and political grounds to reject having nuclear weapons. There are overwhelming environmental and safety grounds for refusing to have nuclear weapons as well. In addition to the nuclear-armed and nuclear-powered submarines deployed out of Faslane, live warheads are frequently transported on public roads from Aldermaston near London to RNAD Coulport, 40 miles from Glasgow. The Scottish government has the right and duty to insist that if Westminster wants to strut its nuclear weapons on the international stage, it should find somewhere else to put them. Contrary to the misinformation peddled by some Trident supporters, this will not cost jobs but could create new economic opportunities, as highlighted in the Scottish TUC/SCND study on ‘*Cancelling Trident: the Economic and Employment Consequences for Scotland*’. This report looked only at denuclearising Faslane, but if the naval base were also closed down, this would free up the prime loch-side location for alternative jobs and peaceful purposes, including sport, recreation and research and industrial development into renewable energy technologies.

Renewal of Trident condemned internationally

Faslane 365 participants played an important part in keeping Trident very visibly on the table before and during the meeting of the Non-Proliferation Treaty parties in April-May. On the first day, civil society representatives distributed an open letter from the heads of Scotland’s Catholic and Protestant Churches, Cardinal Keith Patrick O’Brien

and the Right Reverend Alan D. McDonald. In it, these church leaders castigated nuclear weapons as “immoral, inhumane, and contrary to the teachings of all the world’s major faiths”. They also wrote, “Nuclear dangers and human insecurity will increase if nuclear weapons continue to be treated by some countries as a currency of power or as if they were an indispensable part of defence for the foreseeable future.” This is a point taken up by many non-nuclear parties to the treaty. A week later, NPT delegates were outraged to learn that nuclear warheads had been driven across Edinburgh by the MoD on the penultimate day of the NPT conference (one day after the new Scottish Parliament was sworn in).

The UK’s plans to build a new generation of nuclear weapons for the next 50 years was deplored by many countries at the NPT meeting. Ambassador Paul Kavanagh (Ireland) for the New Agenda Coalition of non-nuclear states said the “replacement or modernization of nuclear weapons” ran “counter to the agreement reached at the 2000 Review Conference ... to eliminate these weapons”. The UK diplomats defended Trident renewal, declaring: “The UK is retaining *not* modernising its deterrent. There is *no* change in the capabilities of the system, *no* move to produce more useable weapons and *no* change in nuclear posture or doctrine.” However, South Africa spoke for many when Ambassador Abdul Minty said: “We were disappointed to learn about the decision of the UK on the Trident to maintain its nuclear deterrent. This could have been a landmark decision for others to follow, which could have provided the necessary impetus to a disarmament process that desperately needs to be reinvigorated.”

In a real victory for the work of civil society, including Faslane 365’s strategy and persistence, the Chair of the NPT Conference, Ambassador Yukiya Amano of Japan, gave unprecedented recognition to the criticisms about Trident and other nuclear weapons developments in paragraph 12 of his Summary: “Concern and disappointment were voiced about plans to replace or modernize nuclear weapons and their means of delivery or platform, the increased role of nuclear weapons in strategic and military doctrines, and the possibility of lowering the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons...” The Indonesian Ambassador, speaking for the Non-Aligned Movement, reiterated the 1996 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, and recalled that the UK has a “legal obligation to pursue in good faith and bring nuclear disarmament negotiations to a conclusion”. He called for all the Nuclear Weapons States to eliminate their nuclear arsenals in compliance with the Programme of action (‘Thirteen Steps’) agreed at the 2000 NPT Review Conference.

Building a stronger peace movement

An important objective for Faslane 365 was to stimulate the building of communities of responsibility and resistance and to put the broader security picture into the frame. The White Paper called the renewal of Trident “a price worth paying” and advertised to the world that London considers nuclear weapons to be indispensable and expects them to retain a high political value for at least five more decades. At a time when Britain should be driving the agenda to devalue and eliminate nuclear weapons, the Labour Party bizarrely appeared to be trying to re-stage and win out-dated cold war battles.

Faslane 365’s strategy was based on breaking the nuclear chain in Scotland, where over 70% of people oppose nuclear weapons. If Trident cannot be deployed in Scotland, Westminster will have immense difficulty finding an alternative submarine port and would have to build warhead handling facilities to go with it, which would provoke widespread local opposition. Perpetuating illusions of nuclear deterrence distracts from

the real security measures that need to be undertaken to address global threats like climate change, poverty and disease.

With new administrations in Westminster and Holyrood, there is a historic opportunity to lay different foundations for peace and security in the 21st century and beyond. While closing down the Faslane base will take time and concerted legal and political pressure, there are initiatives that can immediately be embarked on that would prepare the way for dealing more appropriately with current and foreseeable security challenges.

In recent history, civil resistance has played a critical role in raising awareness of nuclear dangers and making certain weapons undeployable. Peace movements have also been a crucible for ideas about security alternatives. The Faslane 365 blockades have brought a diverse variety of peace and justice groups to the nuclear base. Together we have shown that in ridding Britain of nuclear weapons it will be important to put in place alternative peace and security policies and tools, paying greater attention to the environment, justice and a more equitable sharing of the planet's gifts.