

## WHY TRIDENT?

Faringdon Peace Group has resumed monthly meetings through the magic of Zoom and we were very grateful to Commander Robert Forsyth RN (Ret'd) for joining us on Feb. 3<sup>rd</sup> to talk about his career in nuclear-armed submarines and, since his retirement, his questioning and research into the cost, purpose, legality and morality of our Trident nuclear weapons system.

When he was first drafted into submarines in 1961, like most of the crew Robert was young (22), trained to obey orders, and, in the face of the Soviet threat, accepted without question the value of a 'Continuous at Sea Deterrent', including the ability to fire a nuclear missile at 15 minutes notice.

Having spent 20 years 'in a tube', and after teaching on a programme for future submarine Captains, Robert pursued a career in industry, experiencing a wider view of the world than that seen through a periscope. In his retirement he has become increasingly concerned about the steady decline in the conventional capability of the RN, due to funds being diverted to Trident and its replacement. He resolved to get to the truth of our government's nuclear defence policy and his forensic research has thrown up some worrying questions.

Like many, Robert assumed we would abandon nuclear weapons after the fall of the Berlin Wall as they serve no purpose in tackling present threats such as cyber-warfare and terrorism. His greatest anxiety is that the immense cost of Trident replacement (estimated £200 million over its lifetime) is ripping the heart out of the conventional navy leaving it dangerously short of submarines, ships and personnel. In the case of the navy, quantity is as important as quality. With such a reduced capability to respond to a conventional attack, he worries that the point at which the nuclear option is considered will be reached much sooner. This is a highly dangerous situation considering the willingness of Theresa May and others to authorise a nuclear strike. Although the policy of last resort in self-defence has not been officially abandoned the policy is now one of 'deliberate ambiguity' regarding first use of nuclear weapons.

The chain of command authorising a nuclear strike is very short in the UK with the PM making the decision alone without any military intervention. This requires total trust from the submarine Commander, whatever their personal politics. Robert has found evidence of the UK and US governments' manipulation and blatant misuse of international law regarding the use of nuclear weapons and this is what finally turned him against Trident. The Commander could be prosecuted if the act of firing a nuclear missile is later deemed illegal.

Robert has come to the conclusion that Trident is unaffordable and neither legally nor morally justified. He does not think it has been properly discussed in parliament with jingoistic rhetoric stifling proper debate. There are others like Robert who are brave enough to speak out, but they are ostracised by the political establishment.

If you would like to know more about Robert's experience and research, his book 'Why Trident?' is very readable and is available through Faringdon Peace Group.

Karen Vogt, Faringdon Peace Group