



# Nuclear weapons are back

The government's *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* was published on Tuesday and featured this detail: that the number of Trident nuclear warheads was to be increased from 180 to 260.

As the Bishop of Burnley tweeted:

"I'm trying to understand the thought processes that led to the conclusion that 80 nuclear bombs are a higher priority than the UK aid budget. But I can't."

All too predictably, a (nameless) Twitter respondent replied to him:

"I really think Church leaders should stay out of politics and concentrate on feeding their flock."

Now, there's an understandable scepticism from the right wing that the Church only enters politics to say left-wing things, that it is biased against the Conservatives. It's far easier to criticise, say, cuts in public funding, than to justify them.

But when a government cuts international aid to the poorest, 'because of the fiscal situation' but somehow finds the money to build 80 new monumentally expensive weapons of mass destruction, I don't know what they think the Church is supposed to do. Say that that's fine? "Jolly good: it must be tricky being in government but if those are the decision, those are the decisions. Let's get behind Britain."

The puzzling thing about this one is that, to absolutely any priest, this is so obviously evil, that it's hard to

know where to begin. And, really, this can't just be priests thinking that. How can anyone argue that case? This isn't a tricky moral issue that needs teasing out. It's just monstrous.

Fine, you can have a debate about nuclear weapons per se: was the horror of Hiroshima and Nagasaki justified because the War came to a close sooner? Did the Cold War remain cold because of nuclear weapons rather than despite them?

But, in this day and age, what precisely do the government plan to do with bomb number 181? Where is it even going to go? Would annihilating the 200 million people who died in the first 180 bombs not be enough?

In many important ways, this is not a heartless government. The state intervention behind the furlough scheme, saving millions of livelihoods, is admirable.

Yet when it comes to foreign policy, it feels like we're being run by dementors. Moreover, illogical dementors. The same document in which we commit to increasing our nuclear arsenal says that the UK remains committed to "a world without nuclear weapons". How is increasing our nuclear weapons by 40% supposed to achieve that?

China and Russia are far from benevolent players on the world stage: you can be in Salisbury and still be attacked... all this is true. But what that's got to do with building nuclear bombs? I just don't understand.

*March 2021 Thought for the Train is a short column by the Rev'd Robert Stanier, vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at [www.surbitonchurch.org.uk](http://www.surbitonchurch.org.uk).*