



The Grammar of Satire

Frankie Boyle:
Trident

"Persuading Britain to spend billions on Trident is like convincing a tramp to buy a bazooka"

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<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/may/17/britain-spend-billions-trident-government-cyber-attack>

KEY FOCUS:

I wrote a joke the other day, along the lines of: "Our greatest fear is that we die alone – which is why I intend to take quite a few people with me." And it would be funnier, I suppose, if it didn't constitute Britain's actual policy on defence. It's hard to make a moral or strategic case for Trident, so its cheerleaders have resorted to metaphor. Trident, we're told, symbolises Britain's place in the world. Of course, I understand Cameron saying he thinks Britain is still a great country (talking something up is a good way to get the best price when you're selling it), but we don't actually have much sense of history, and don't really travel, so it seems odd that we're being told to spend hundreds of billions of pounds projecting a version of ourselves that we barely understand on to people we will never meet. Perhaps Trident is really a symbol of the era of late capitalism, where most things we buy are unnecessary to the point of ludicrousness. Persuading austerity Britain to spend billions on Trident is like convincing a tramp he needs a bazooka.

What is the British way of life? What do we value? Daytime drinking; freedom of speech (for anybody who isn't joking); a big centre-forward who can hold the ball up; making drunken, sexual online threats to respected academics; hating people from a broadly similar town 30 miles away; watching strangers bake; watching someone we know fail; and whatever the opposite of reading a

history book is. I'm not saying it's all bad, I'm just saying it doesn't justify heating up a 100 million civilians to a temperature where their shadows catch fire. Perhaps we need to face up to the fact that Britain is becoming a sort of redneck country that doesn't give a shit about education or health, but needs to have the latest weapons; the renewal of Trident casts Scotland as the wife who has given you one last chance, listening wearily to your story about how you've blown the benefits money on booby-trapping the driveway and a new sniper rifle.

Cameron has eroded so many flood defences it might just be an act of tactical military genius. Which of our enemies would expect a Trident submarine to be bobbing around a Morrisons car park in York? The PM has derided Jeremy Corbyn's idea of keeping the subs without missiles as patently ridiculous, and in no way comparable to building two huge aircraft carriers with no aircraft. Scaling down Trident might actually better suit our military requirements over the next century, as it has to be easier hauling two submarines through a desert rather than four. Or maybe the subs could find a non-military role: becoming a place where we put Britain's worst sexual deviants, perhaps eventually replacing the Premier League.

If we are wiped out in nuclear war, the planet will need to be repopulated by the staff of the submarines, so the fact that they now let women serve could actually be seen as a deeply pessimistic move. The officers in charge of launching the missiles are trained to "fire and forget". That's fire up to 160 nuclear warheads, and forget that the world has been reduced to a cursed sandscape where the strongest mutants will rule as Petrol Sheriffs. The government insists that we are prepared for cyber attack, but to be

honest we're rarely prepared for snow in winter. Having Trident (which genuinely has an operating system called Windows for Submarines) might almost be like a half-hearted suicide attempt. As for the supposed threat of North Korea, with their current missile delivery technology it would take years for them to save up for the necessary stamps. Yes, they launched a satellite recently, but remember that it's much easier to hit a target that is basically The Universe. I'm going to stick my neck out and say that people doing eight hours of gymnastics a day while living on acorns aren't going to build a viable, targeted intercontinental missile. And if they do, it's going to be an absolute coupon buster if they decide to send it 3,000 miles to Britain rather than – just to pick a country at random – South Korea.

Corbyn said he would never launch nuclear weapons. He has commissioned a report into the renewal of Trident, and hopefully it will change his mind. It takes a truly humble and magnanimous man to say: "Well, I have to respect the decision of the committee and, if the occasion arises, I will now destroy all life on Earth." In any case, launching Trident is surely too big a responsibility for one person. The truly democratic method would be to have a giant button somewhere that can only be pressed by the weight of 51% of the population. Think of the fun we will have coming from all over the country to fire our missiles. Peace campaigners waving bedsheets with sad-face emojis from motorway bridges at jeering megabuses of drunken pro-war monsters. Hordes of people living for days on the open Bakelite savannah of the button waiting for their numbers to build. The cheer going up as they finally reach critical mass with the screeching arrival of the Chelsea team coach. It will be an event that the

whole country will talk about for ever, which will be a matter of a few minutes.

In the final moments of life on Earth, someone will think of arranging their hands to make a shadow puppet, creating a dragon or a dove to be immortalised by the bomb. They'll know that nobody will ever see it, but they'll do it anyway. And this, I think, is what it is to be any kind of artist these days, with no posterity to address but still compelled, for reasons you don't understand, to work in the terrible now.