

## A behind-the-scenes take on Question Time, York

Defence and security will play an important role in the Tory endgame

By Joseph Silke, Editor  
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Image: BBC

Both the Prime Minister Theresa May and the Leader of the Opposition Jeremy Corbyn faced tough questioning during the Question Time special in York tonight. *Nouse* was able to secure access to the media room, also known as the “spin room”, for the event and can bring you this report about the programme and the fallout behind the scenes.

The Prime Minister faced particularly difficult question on issues of health and social care however it was accusations relating to defence and security directed at Mr Corbyn which proved to be the most scathing moments of the programme. Hammered on the issues of the nuclear deterrent and terrorism, Mr Corbyn came out bruised.

Pressed on the use of the nuclear deterrent the Leader of the Opposition stressed that he opposes “first use”, much the same as others, but repeatedly refused to say whether or not he would authorise a retaliatory strike in the event of a nuclear attack by enemies of the United Kingdom. Mr Corbyn instead emphasised the horror that would befall the globe as a result of a nuclear war.

Despite an interjection by David Dimbleby in an attempt to extract an answer, Mr Corbyn continued to simply state that he would use diplomatic means to secure a nuclear free world and therefore prevent any scenario under which the United Kingdom would be inclined to use its Trident nuclear weapons system.

Touting the success of the Iran nuclear deal secured during the tenure of President of the United States Barack Obama, Mr Corbyn insisted that such a deal is an example to follow when dealing with other threats such as that of the DPRK. He claimed that a government led by him would work with China to

resolve the crisis in the Korean peninsula. This led to a cry of “impossible!” from one member of the audience.

The United Kingdom’s nuclear deterrent system operates using “letters of last resort”. These are handwritten letters produced by a new Prime Minister on the day they enter Number 10. These letters are submitted to the nuclear submarine fleet and are only read by the commanding officers of those submarines in the event of a nuclear strike on the United Kingdom. This means that the Prime Minister must decide well in advance of any potential scenario what their response to an attack will be, making Mr Corbyn’s position difficult to put into practice.

The Leader of the Opposition also faced difficult moments when questioned on the issue of terrorism and his controversial relationship with terrorist organisations like the Irish Republican Army. When asked to specifically condemn the group, Mr Corbyn opted instead to generally condemn the use of bombing and praise the success of the Good Friday Agreement which secured peace in Northern Ireland. This response led to jeers from a number of reporters inside the spin room.

*Nouse* spoke to Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson after the event who claimed that the United Kingdom has a responsibility to be strong on issues of defence and security not just for the safety of the people of this country but also for the safety of our allies. Mr Johnson specifically noted Britain’s role in using the nuclear deterrent to discourage strikes on allies without nuclear weapons of their own.

Mr Corbyn was not without allies, however. One audience member protested at the focus on “killing millions of people”. *Nouse* spoke to one other audience member who agreed. Kieran, a 20-year-old undergraduate at the University of Manchester, thought that the issue of Trident occupied too much time during the questioning and dismissed the potential damage to the Labour campaign.

It is clear what the Conservative line of attack will be in the final week leading up to polling day on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June. Theresa May will insist that she is the best candidate to protect the United Kingdom and its citizens from threats both abroad and at home. It is clear from speaking with the Foreign Secretary among others that defence and security will play an important role in the Tory endgame. Whether or not voters will be entirely receptive to these issues versus other concerns could very well determine who forms Her Majesty’s next government.



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