








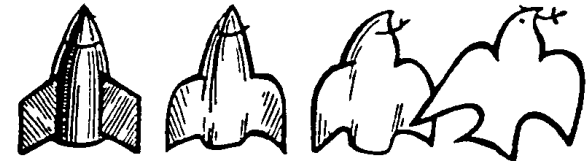
Action ideas

-  **Look for opportunities to ask questions** of friends, family, politicians etc. to raise awareness of the ways in which war is discussed and described
-  **Keep an eye on news media:** if there seems to be a trend towards a sanitised view of war, contact editors and journalists to point this out and ask them about their approach.
-  **Look out for publications and publicity events by the military:** how does the military describe itself to the general public? Are there ways in which we might engage in dialogue with them at events or in other ways?
-  **Try to get hold of copies of literature produced by the defence industry:** this can be chilling and enlightening, with weapons being marketed in much the same way as domestic appliances. It may provide scope for dialogue with people in the industry and with decision makers.
-  **Broaden acts of remembrance:** Remembrance events are typically held in early November in the UK and other countries. Can we find ways of broadening the focus of these and of other events at different times in the year, to include people in other parts of the world?
-  **Support non-military peace work:** *Peaceworkers UK* is part of a wider global movement to promote government-funded civilian, non-military ways of engaging in situations of conflict. Contact them at: Peaceworkers UK, 18a Victoria Park Square London E2 9PB Email: info@peaceworkers.org.uk Telephone 020 8880 6070 <http://www.peaceworkers.org.uk>
-  **Talk with children about war:** The Peace Pledge Union has an excellent range of resources on war and peace issues: Peace Pledge Union 1 Peace Passage London N70BT Tel: 020 7424 9444 <http://www.ppu.org.uk>

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Challenging Militarism Project
Signpost leaflet – November 2003

“Fire and Forget” – misguided missiles?

Fire and forget.... This chilling phrase is used in military and arms manufacturing circles to describe a missile system that is fired and then becomes ‘autonomous’, working out the co-ordinates for where it should be going for itself. This ‘smart weapon’ terminology challenges us to consider the real nature of modern warfare.

The worst sin towards our fellow creatures is not to hate them but to be indifferent to them; that’s the essence of inhumanity.

George Bernard Shaw

Around remembrance time in the UK and other parts of the world, families and friends rightly grieve for those who have died in war. But the fact that the term ‘fire and forget’ is even used is disturbing: how can there be any morality in war when such concepts are the currency of military vocabulary?

There are troubling contradictions. The military establishment takes great pains to join with the public in acts of remembrance a few days in the year, at the same time as creating euphemisms to separate us from the human reality of modern warfare.

Another bit of jargon related to 'guided missiles' is 'Man in the loop', or MITL for short. This is, apparently, a guidance feature that allows human intervention (corrections, etc) as the weapon closes in on the target. Perhaps all missiles should be labelled 'MWCITL' – men, women and children in the loop. All people are potential recipients of such guidance. The military strikes by the US and UK against Iraq between 1998 and 2003 found many such people.

Some more terminology to ponder:

Surgical strike *Body-bag syndrome* Shock and awe *Ethnic cleansing*
Degrading enemy capability *Collateral damage* Daisy cutter
Maximum lethality Decapitation strike *Neutralise* Non-lethal weapons
Bunker busters *Axis of Evil* Rogue state *Catastrophic success*
Soft target High kill probability *Peace enforcement...*

Bombs for peace?

The concept of 'peace enforcement' reminds us that, while there is one trend in military and weapons-industry circles to find ways of sanitising the act of warfare, there are also people in the military whose motivation really is to act in the interests of peace. The question is whether long-term peace can ever be built on the foundations of short-term hi-tech military intervention. Pilots launching guided missiles *may* be able to fire and forget, but the friends and families of those killed by these same missiles will find it much harder to forget. History has shown us time and time again that violence leads to more violence.

Others who seek peace talk about 'peace building' rather than enforcement. These are not naïve idealists, but people with real, 'on the ground' experience of working alongside others to support the frameworks of processes of building peaceful relationships within and between communities. Such work takes longer, is slower and less glamorous than hi-tech bombardment. It is unlikely that video games about conflict resolution will be flying off the shelves of toy-shops at Christmas. And the 'fireworks' that TV reporters witnessed over the skies of Baghdad in 1991 and 2003 will have to be sacrificed for far less spectacular reportage.

But we owe it to future generations to support processes and skills for genuine peace-building. This is not easy. One Quaker peace poster had the following (source unknown): 'Let us take the risks of peace upon ourselves, not impose the risks of war upon others'. Can we, as a society, put more energy into preparing to take such risks rather than preparing for war?

Remembering for the future

One writer in the Peace Pledge Union's newsletter in 1989 wrote:

"War continues to be seen as an aberration in the normal flow of 'ordinary life'. Like a multiple crash on a motorway, something undesirable – but that's the price we have to pay for freedom. But compared to the motor car the vested interests in war are astronomical and touch everyone's life in a very visible way. The scale of carnage in war thus needs exceptional efforts to explain and justify it."

As another leaflet in this series highlighted, the level of UK government support for the arms industry remains very high. Will the vested interests of arms-dealers ever allow them to do anything other than forget the consequences of their trade? If, instead, they could regularly bring to mind images of shattered limbs, would they be able to continue to ply their trade?

The use of 'die'-ins' and fake blood at protests at arms fairs and the like is one way in which people try to remind participants of that which they might prefer to forget. Are there other ways in which the act of remembering can be a tool for transforming our country's involvement in promoting weapons sales around the world?

We must find honest and compassionate ways of describing and understanding the true nature of war as experienced by 'allies' and citizens of 'rogue states' alike. We cannot each carry the pain of every victim of every war, but we should be ready to extend our acts of remembrance to include those so often ignored by news media.

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Other leaflets in this series have looked at cluster bombs, at missile 'defense' plans and at nuclear weapons. At the heart of these, as with so much modern warfare, is thinking that is able to justify acts that have massive human and financial costs. The process of war involves destruction – of property and of life. It is irreversible. There can be no forgetting. What would we like to remember in the future? Answering that question can help us plan and act for positive change today.