

Guerilla woolfare: against the madness of mutually assured destruction

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Rolling out a seven mile knitted pink peace scarf between the Atomic Weapons Establishment complexes at Aldermaston and Burghfield on Nagasaki Day may sound crazy. It isn't as insane as letting the UK government spend another £100 billion on building a new nuclear weapons system to replace Trident.

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On 9th August – the 69th anniversary of the incineration of Nagasaki by a plutonium bomb code-named “Fat Man” – thousands of people will join the [Wool against Weapons](#) demonstration in Berkshire to link up a 7-mile pink knitted ‘peace scarf’ between the Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) complexes at Aldermaston and Burghfield.

It probably sounds crazy. Dreamed up by Jaine and Angie around a campfire at the Reclaim Hinkley camp in October 2012, this mad idea has led to 18 months of exhilarating, inspiring, and creative action that has involved thousands of people from all over the world. Wool against Weapons has got people all over the world knitting for peace - and talking again about nuclear weapons, and why we all have a responsibility to contributing to banning and abolishing them. Men as well as women, long time peace activists as well as craftspeople and Women's Institute knitters with a spectrum of political affiliations (or none).

The objective was simple: to put a much needed spotlight on the madness of nuclear weapons by linking the pink peace scarf between Aldermaston and Burghfield, the nuclear bomb facilities that design and produce warheads for Britain’s nuclear weapons system, Trident.

We decided that the peace scarf link up should be on August 9th, the anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki in 1945.

This Saturday's family-friendly demonstration, jointly organised by Wool against Weapons, [Action AWE](#) (Atomic Weapons Eradication), and [CND](#) (the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament), will bring thousands of people from all over Britain. We will join up the sections of peace scarf and link eight 'milestones' along the route. From East to West, these are: Rainbow Burghfield (CND South East); Red (faith groups); Orange (Oxford and North-West); Yellow (Wales and borders); Green (Greens and women's peace groups); Blue (Scotland and Angel of the North); Purple (Reading Greenpeace, Berkshire, Hampshire); and Rainbow Aldermaston (Stroud, Bristol and South-West). It will be a fantastic day of guerrilla woollfare, possibly the world's biggest ever woollen scarf. The link-up will be accompanied by music. We will ring bells when the peace scarf is fully joined, and then have some minutes of silence followed by bells, to honour the people killed by nuclear and other inhumane technologies of war.

After the protest the peace scarf will be separated and made into blankets that will be distributed wherever they are needed – to the homeless and hospices in this country and to refugee camps and warzones abroad, ensuring that nothing is wasted.

[Wool against Weapons](#) has already been using the scarf to demonstrate against the obscene prospect of spending £100 billion to replace the UK's Trident nuclear weapons. In Scotland, where over 80 % of people want to get rid of Trident, people stretched their peace scarf down most of the Royal Mile in Edinburgh. Knitters and activists have surrounded the Angel of the North, unrolled coils of peace scarf in town centres in England and Wales, draped bridges and war memorials, and photographed their sections of peace scarf in front of icons like the Clifton Suspension Bridge. And now all these lengths of scarf are being sent to Aldermaston and Burghfield for Nagasaki Day.

It was Jaine Rose's idea to make the peace scarf pink – a colour that seems embarrassingly girly to some, but has a political resonance too. In the 1980s Greenham women marked the cruise missile launchers with pink 'gloop' of sticky porridge when the cruise missile launchers went out on nuclear exercises. Gay people reclaimed the pink triangle that the Nazis used to persecute homosexuals. Women in the United States founded "[Code Pink](#)" to oppose military violence, war and weapons, subverting the system of threat codes used in the 'war on terrorism' after 2001. Pink brilliantly challenges the macho camouflage of militarism, including Trident

submarines.

For the past 18 months, people have been inspired to knit: in public, at meetings, during breaks at work or school, on public transport. In town centres people staged knit-ins, with placards inviting: “Ask me what I’m knitting”. Jaine’s daughters talked about Wool against Weapons in schools. They got friends to knit; and then their mums (and dads)! There have been knit-ins in libraries, churches, Friends Meeting Houses, schools, care homes, bingo halls, ice cream parlours, gardens and sitting rooms. It’s very homespun, its very creative, it has huge power.

As the knitting spread, so have the conversations – about Trident, about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and how other nations are pushing for negotiations to [ban and eliminate all nuclear weapons](#), about what activism means today, and about fears and hopes for the future. Wool against Weapons has also stimulated the growth of [Craftivism](#), an exciting new movement that combines craft and activism. It’s been a lot of hard work, but we promised ourselves that it needed to be fun... which it has been - enormously!

It's not just the UK either: we have had peace scarf sections from all over the world – women (and some men) gathering in groups to knit in places as diverse as Scandinavia, the United States, Latin America, Australia, Kenya, and across Europe. Women in the Netherlands knitted so many pieces - literally hundreds - that they were rolled into pinwheels, loaded into a large vehicle and driven to Wool against Weapons to join into the peace scarf on Saturday. Our oldest knitter is 102, the youngest under ten. The hundreds of letters and emails we’ve received have told so many stories, including from people who have picked up knitting needles for the first time. Peace choirs have written and sung songs about Wool against Weapons, and will be singing on Nagasaki Day. Amidst the horrors of the shelling of Gaza, Palestinian and Israeli women have managed to knit sections for our peace scarf. This is a campaign that reaches beyond borders, cultures and differences.

After Nagasaki Day, we’ll be following up to make the scarf into blankets, while Action AWE goes forward with the next phase of our campaign. Called [Act, Speak, Vote: Disarm](#), we now need to do even more to mobilise the public to talk to the politicians of all parties – candidates for

the 2015 election as well as MPs. The British Ministry of Defence may have set the artificial date of 2016 for signing billions of pounds of contracts with BAE Systems to build new nuclear submarines, but the MPs can halt such a pointless, wasteful plan. Most of the world's governments will be meeting in Vienna in December to talk about preventing the catastrophic humanitarian impacts of nuclear weapons. They will meet again in New York to address nuclear disarmament and the ongoing dangers of proliferation. As Scotland yearns to become a nuclear free country and the vast majority of nations now back negotiations on a global treaty to ban nuclear weapons, how can any UK government be so stupid as to commit taxpayers' money to getting more of these useless weapons of mass destruction.

Crazy as knitting and rolling out a 7 mile peace scarf might sound, it isn't as insane as letting the government spend another £100 billion on building a new nuclear weapons system to replace Trident when we need that to be spent on our NHS, education and support for people who are hungry or homeless. The mad idea dreamed up around a camp fire in October 2012 turned into an inspiring Wool against Weapons campaign, poised to go even further after Saturday, to stop the horrible madness of mutually assured destruction and to ban and abolish all nuclear weapons.