

# **The cost of British nuclear weapons**

**Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament**

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- **Cost of Trident Replacement Procurement:** **up to £25 billion**

Although the Defence White Paper estimates the cost as £15-20 billion, CND believes that a figure of up to £25 billion is more realistic taking into account inflation and increased costs of military equipment as suggested by a leading Defence Economist<sup>1</sup>.

- **Running costs of replacement system from 2024:** **£49-59 billion**
- **Running costs of existing Trident 2007-2023:** **£26-31 billion**

**Total: 50 more years of UK nuclear weapons:** **up to £115 billion**

## Additional costs

As well as £25 billion procurement costs, and yearly running costs of £1.6-£2 billion (5-6% of the annual Defence Budget as cited in the Defence White Paper) adding up to £49-59 billion over a 30 year lifespan, the White Paper has also stated additional costs of:

- **Joining US Missile life extension programme:** **£250 million**
- **Future replacement of missile:** **£1.5 billion**
- **Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) investment (2005-2008):** **£1.05 billion**

## **Hidden costs**

### **Future Investment in the Atomic Weapons Establishment, Aldermaston**

The White Paper suggests that even more investment in AWE will be necessary; the next Comprehensive Spending Review 2008-2011 will cover some of this. AWE costs (operating and capital) will peak from a current 2.5% of the Defence Budget to 3% early in the next decade. Investment over ten years for a project on such a scale would be realistic. If the operating costs remain the same this suggests as much as **£5 billion** extra investment of which only £1.05 billion (see above) has been accounted for.

### **Conventional Forces**

The White Paper does not refer to any costs relating to the conventional military forces which the Trident system relies upon for its protection, such as the hunter killer subs at Faslane and Devonport. The annual operating cost of forces committed to this role was **£125 million** in 1998 and the operating cost of additional forces with a contingent role was £176 million<sup>2</sup>.

### **Nuclear Capabilities**

The total costs for the MoD's nuclear liabilities have been stated as nearly **£10 billion**<sup>3</sup>. Certainly some of these costs can be attributed to the nuclear weapons programme. According to the White Paper, 'The disposal of the Vanguard class submarines is still some way off, and it is therefore too early to estimate the possible decommissioning costs.' But a breakdown of the MoD's nuclear liabilities has previously been given, although there is no attempt to separate the costs of decommissioning the Trident SSBN submarines from the costs of decommissioning the other nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs).

Just some of the figures given are:

- Decommissioning costs for both SSNs and SSBNs: **£1.75 billion**
- AWE nuclear liability costs including decommissioning of redundant facilities and dismantling of warheads: **over £3.5 billion**

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These costs are spread over the next fifty years and this means millions of pounds spent every year on decommissioning alone. Moreover, a replacement Trident system, plus all of the massive new infrastructural developments at Aldermaston, will incur hundreds of millions of pounds of further decommissioning costs for future generations to bear.

### **Where will the money come from?**

The White Paper claims that the enormous investments required to ‘maintain’ our possession of nuclear weapons ‘will not come at the expense of the conventional capabilities our armed forces need’, and that decisions on the levels of investment needed will be taken in the Comprehensive Spending Review. Armed Forces have already been described as ‘overstretched’. According to a recent Defence Select Committee report<sup>4</sup>, ‘What is certain is that they are operating in challenging conditions in insufficient numbers and without all the equipment they need. With problems of undermanning continuing, there is a clear danger that the Armed Forces will not be capable of maintaining current commitments over the medium-term.’ If possessing nuclear weapons over another 50 years is not to come at the expense of the Armed Forces, is the investment to be at the expense of public services such as the NHS or education?

### **Instead of Trident Replacement**

The large sums to be spent on a replacement could be better spent on the alleviation of poverty at home and abroad and the improvement of employment, education and health provision. The UK could also divert the money into funding measures to address the problem of climate change. This would be a popular option as a recent Populus poll<sup>5</sup> shows that 36% of the British public believes climate change is the greatest threat to the security of the UK now, second only to terrorism. Indeed, the same poll shows that 58% believe climate change will be the greatest threat to our security in 20 years time. The Stern report suggests that an annual expenditure of 1% of GDP (around £12 billion every year for the UK) would technically and economically mitigate the effects of climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 75%.

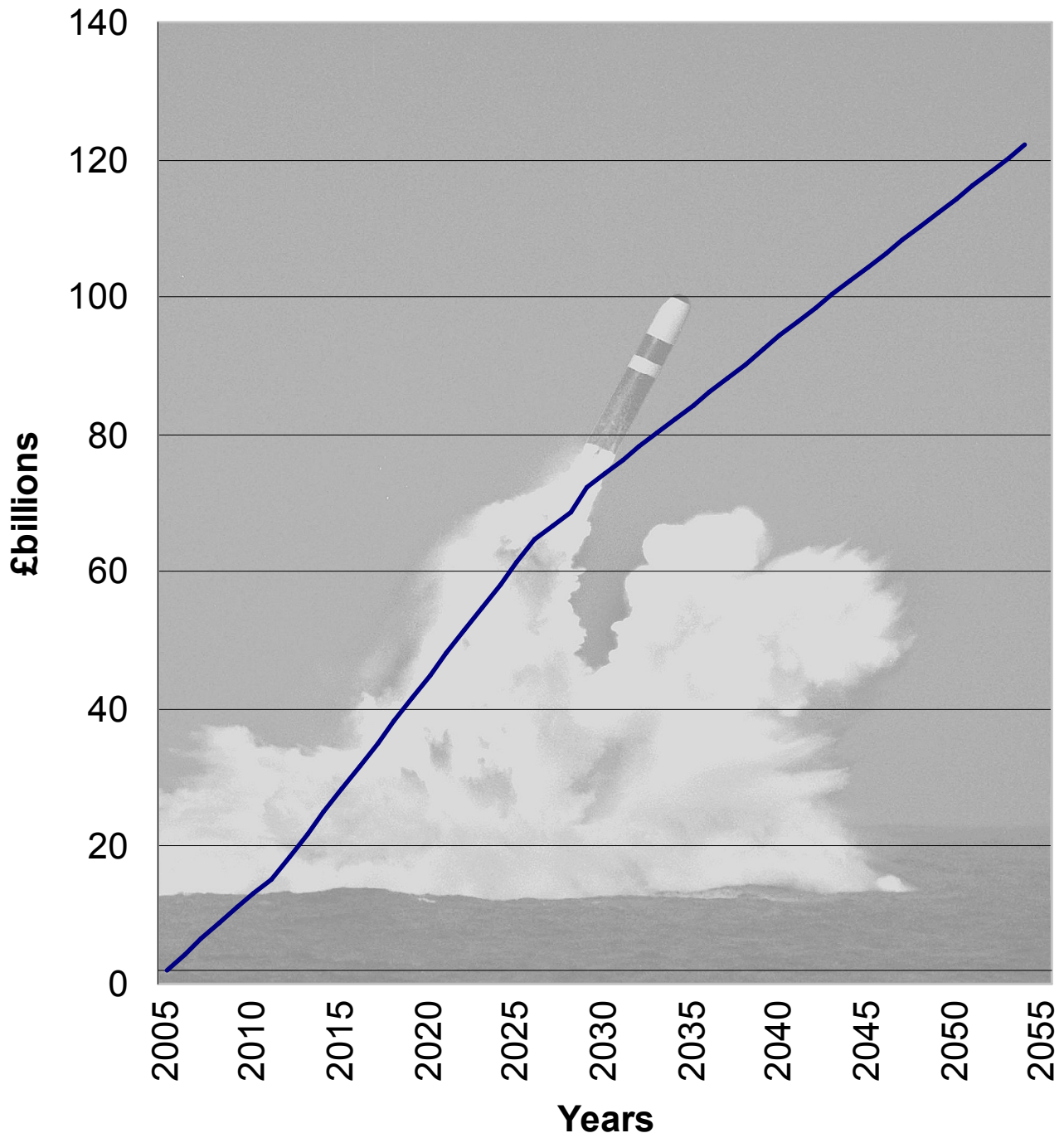
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### **The legal situation**

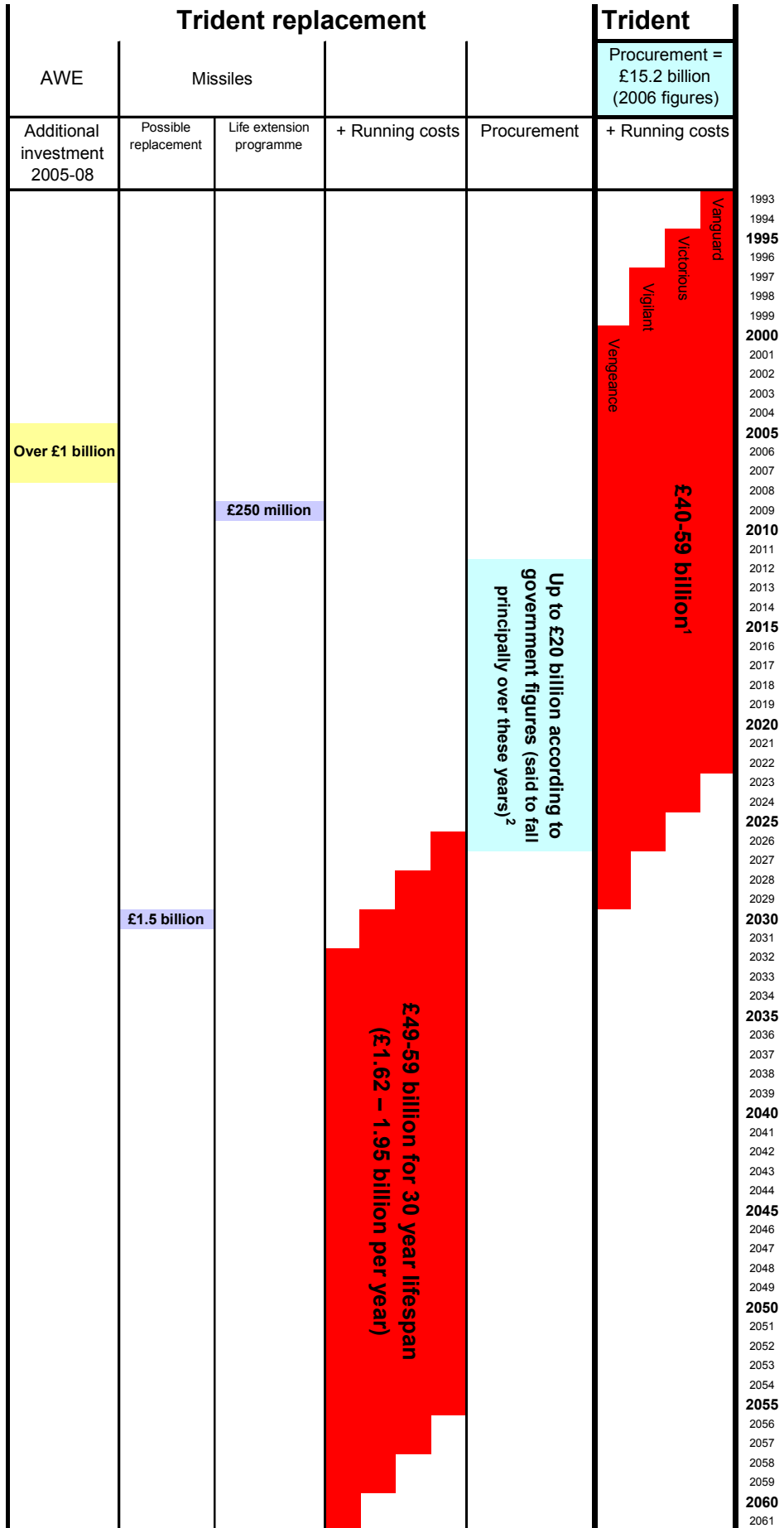
The nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty does not 'recognise' the right of Britain, or any other country, to possess nuclear weapons. On the contrary, nuclear weapon states are legally obliged under the Treaty to begin the process towards nuclear disarmament. A replacement of Trident can only be described as re-armament.

**CND calls on the government to decommission the Trident programme and rule out any plans for future nuclear weapon systems.**

## Cumulative Costs of British Nuclear Weapons



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**Cost over time of British nuclear weapons**

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### **Diagram Notes: Cost over time of British nuclear weapons**

1. Government sources have always previously quoted between 2-4% of the annual Defence Budget (around £1 billion per year) for Trident's running costs. The White Paper revised this figure to 5-6%. Defence Secretary, Des Browne, giving evidence to the Defence Select Committee explained that 'we went through an exercise recently to make sure that we were identifying as accurately as we could the costs that are associated with our nuclear weapon systems and that caused us to revise information that previous governments may have put into the public domain'. He said this even though, on more than one occasion, his own government has also quoted the lower 2-4% figures.

For the purpose of this diagram, and with no further information forthcoming on whether, and for how long, previous costs have been underestimated, annual Trident running costs will be estimated for a 30 year lifespan as £1-2 billion for every year up to 2007 and thereafter from £1.6-2 billion per year.

2. According to the White Paper, this figure will include £11-14 billion for the submarines, £2-3 billion for infrastructure (at Faslane, Coulport and Devonport but not at Aldermaston), and £2-3 billion for refurbishment or replacement of the warheads. CND believes a cost of up to £25 billion is more realistic with 10% inflation adjusted figures suggested by Hartley to take into account the general trend of increasing costs for military equipment.

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<sup>1</sup>Keith Hartley, 'The Economics of UK Nuclear Weapons Policy', *International Affairs*, Vol. 82, No.4, pp. 675-684, for military equipment a 10% rise in real terms each year is suggested, p. 684

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons, Written Questions, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1998

<sup>3</sup> House of Commons, Written Questions, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2006

<sup>4</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2005-06, Second Report of Session 2006-07

<sup>5</sup> Populus poll published by More 4 News February 21st - February 22nd 2007:  
<http://www.populuslimited.com/>

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