

# The Herald

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Home  
**News**  
 Election 2005  
 Sport  
 Business  
 Politics  
 Features  
 Going Out

## LIVE UPDATES

News  
 Sport

## SERVICES

Search the site  
 Free daily email  
 News to your PDA  
 News archive  
 Photo Sales  
 Help & FAQs  
 Contact us

## FAVOURITES

Crosswords  
 The Diary  
 Local news  
 Local weather  
 Fantasy Football  
 Week in photos  
 Today's page 1

## ADVERTISING

Book ads online

Business Online  
 Advert inquiries

## RELATED SITES

Evening Times  
 Sunday Herald  
 Newsquest UK  
 TravelShop

## Trident fleet faces stretched lifespan to help curb defence costs

IAN BRUCE, Defence Correspondent

October 19 2005

BRITAIN is to try to stretch the operational lifespan of its four Trident missile submarines until at least 2035 to maintain its nuclear deterrent at minimal cost and risk, according to naval sources.

Tony Blair and John Reid, defence secretary, have both insisted recently that no decisions have been taken, but sources say they have already scrapped alternative plans for aircraft or submarine-launched cruise missiles tipped with nuclear warheads.

They have also rejected building a new generation of submarines despite the fact that replacing ageing intercontinental missiles, installing new reactor cores, and redesigning the existing British warheads could cost more than the original £12.2bn paid for the Trident system in the 1990s.

Ministers and senior commanders were also swayed by the fact that the US has begun refitting its own 14-strong Trident fleet to extend its life until 2042, effectively stretching the boats' frontline service by 15 years.

Mr Reid is believed to favour a similar approach because strategic submarines are almost impossible to detect while on patrol and that, by opting for the same solution as the Americans, some major costs can be shared and reduced.

The UK has meanwhile committed £2bn to develop state-of-the-art nuclear weapon laboratories at Aldermaston.

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