

# Beyond Trident

## Introductory remarks at RUSI Conference

### Current Lib Dem Policy

The policy is contained in Defending Democracy page 17. Essential points: We have reduced our nuclear forces to minimum deterrent level. Annual running costs of Trident are affordable, although decommissioning is a longer term problem. Given the uncertainties of the future, we advocate running on Trident until "real progress can be made for multilateral disarmament". Passed by Conference with a short debate over how many warheads were enough. Overwhelming support for current number about right. Confirmed policy in latest election manifesto.

What about beyond Trident? The policy addresses that question as well (5.1.3). Decisions must take account of the 30 year life of Trident. Decision needs to be taken in light of non proliferation and disarmament objectives, cost/benefit analysis, and prevailing global security climate. " Any decision to commit any research or other funding for the preparation of any successor to Trident should be first approved by Parliament."

### Key points

**Timing of decision – Trident** . Last boat went into the water two years after Labour elected. A 30 year life span. How long did Trident programme take? Decision on 15 July 1980 – first boat operational 1994. A very complex and over-capable programme but just 14 years. On this basis decision would be needed in 2010 for the 2024 replacement. Possible life extension and a question of how many boats are needed? What is the time critical element the platform, the missile or the warhead? The later the decision is made, the more likelihood of having useful idea of strategic context.

**Point One: Need to know why a decision is needed during this parliament.**

**Global Security Climate – What is it for?** This is the most difficult question. Cold War – it contributed to deterrence. Now state based threats are much reduced, and it is difficult to see the scenario in which the UK deterrent plays a part. However by the mid 2020s we may be in a very different world. Remember 20 years ago the height of Soviet/US arms race competition. Enormous uncertainty is one of the justifications for maintaining Trident now.

However we are being asked to make a judgment about the world from 2025 to 2055. We can all hope that we will then be in a peaceful non threatening world. We might be in one where all the threats are from undeterrable non state actors, or we may have seen a return to nationalism and find ourselves facing again a nuclear armed potential enemy. We cannot know at this distance.

**Point Two: Look for safe ways to make the final decision as late as possible, so that we end up making it on a best assessment of strategic context.**

**Cost Benefit Analysis – Can we afford it?** When the time does come to consider what to do, the question of costs must be a major consideration. Acquisition of Trident cost £12.52 bn at 1998 prices, with running costs of around £700 mil per year. A major programme, but not like the days of the V-force, which was a significant part of the GDP. In the March 1982 Government Paper, Trident costs were: "planned expenditure on the strategic deterrent can in no way be described as excessive in relationship to other capabilities". There was a graphical comparison with Tornado, to show costs were somewhat less.

In the same way a new programme is likely to be of the order of other major equipment procurements. I can see now the figure will be compared with Typhoon costs or aircraft carrier costs. Some have talked about cheap and cheerful solutions – often based on cruise missiles either submarine or air launched. I think those in the business will know that there will be nothing cheap about the procurement of any nuclear certified system.

The question will be whether the need for a particular system merits that share of the defence budget. The current situation "There is no major conventional threat to Europe" (latest defence white paper), means that the argument revolves around uncertainty in the future. We all assume that the defence budget will have to bear the cost burden, at a time when the strains are well known to us all. The reduction to capabilities – the opportunity costs – are likely to be considerable – unless separate funding was provided. Again it is difficult to forecast so far ahead, but again the cost benefit analysis argument makes the later the decision, the better as it can be more informed.

**Point Three: The cost benefit analysis will be more difficult and unreliable, the earlier a decision is taken.**

**Non proliferation/disarmament objectives – How to we meet NPT obligations?** One reason, perverse as it is, for staying nuclear is to have a card to play in the disarmament game. There are still some options about reducing readiness – and perhaps reduction in time to 3 boats. Could replacement system be fewer in quantity and at lower availability – perhaps but will still have considerable cost and little effect on global disarmament.

Need to maintain Negative Security Assurance Posture, and be prepared to disarm when it can improve global security. NPT constrains co-operation with US on warheads.

**Point Four – Arms Control limits our room for manoeuvre and we gain security through taking our NPT responsibilities seriously.**

### **Political Dimension**

Topic has more political baggage than most. Problems of Old Labour and CND policy. Now strange bedfellows – Portillo in Sunday Times; Lewis with CND in Guardian. Labour may have quite an internal fight, so strange that it is being brought to a crisis point. Difficult to know what the public take will be. Nuclear has not been a big issue for a long time, and we should welcome an informed debate. It will only become a row if decisions are foreclosed. It would be good to see a cross-party solution emerging.