

£33 billion price tag pinned on Trident

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THE cost of Britain's Trident nuclear missile submarine programme could be as high as £33 billion — more than three times as much as official Government estimates, a Greenpeace report claims today.

The report, *The Rising Cost of Trident*, says the Government figures of £10.5 billion for the construction of four submarines and the necessary missiles and warheads to equip them for service "bury" hidden costs of more than £22 billion.

Among these are the extrapolated running cost of the fleet over a 30-year lifespan, "guesstimate" costs of decommissioning and disposal of the boats, and "items essential to the continuation of the programme excluded on the grounds that they may be used for other purposes at a future date".

The report also claims that immediate cancellation of the programme could save the taxpayer up to £17 billion over the next 25 to 30 years.

The Greenpeace study is published on the same day as a Commons Defence Select Committee report is likely to criticise cost overruns and delays in the Trident programme.

These are understood to include a substantial increase in the cost of the giant shiplift crane at the Clyde submarine base caused by corrosion in the pilings, and an overrun in the cost of the explosives handling jetty. It is further understood that the Defence Ministry is carrying out a safety study on both facilities.

A spokesman for the Defence Ministry said last night: "The Trident programme is on schedule and within cost. There have been some overruns, but we have actually saved money due to fluctuations in the exchange rate and other factors. The prediction is that the entire project will finish within budget.

"Anyone speculating on the

future running costs of the boats is dealing in guesswork. Who knows what the running cost of his car will be in 30 years' time? But based on our experience of the Polaris fleet, we envisage them being well below 2% of the total defence budget. That is a figure reached over more than 20 years' experience with Polaris."

Greenpeace identifies the major "hidden costs" not included in official figures as £11.4 billion for 30-year lifetime running costs of four boats, £1.8 billion for 12 refits for the vessels, £1.4 billion for work at the Atomic Weapons Establishment at Aldermaston directly related to Trident, £6.4 billion for running costs at the same establishment from 1980 until 2030, £535m for development of nuclear reactors to power the submarines, £397m for facilities at Faslane, and £285m for facilities at Rosyth.

There is also a further £116m in associated costs elsewhere, including £33m for very low frequency communications system improvements to enable orders to be passed to the boats while submerged on patrol, and an estimated £77m for decommissioning costs at the end of the submarines' lifespan.

Greenpeace's claims include the assertion that Aldermaston "will have been involved in Trident-related work for a total of 49 years, from 1980 until 2030, and during the 12 years of actual warhead production, will have been doing little work (other than research and development) apart from Trident."

Three Trident boats have already been built or are under construction, and a fourth is expected to be ordered soon. If that submarine was to be cancelled now, the savings could be an immediate £250m in building costs, and a possible £150m in equipment.

Greenpeace claims that cancellation of the fourth boat could "save the country over £3.6 billion during the lifetime of the current Government alone".

A Royal Navy spokesman said: "The figures are based on guesswork and assumption. They have no basis in fact."

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← FRONT PAGE

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