



Pushing the boat out: Martin O'Neill (right) accused Alex Salmond (left) of telling downright lies over Trident which will be based on the Clyde (above)

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# SNP attacks waste of money on Trident

By Joy Copley  
Parliamentary  
Correspondent

SCRAPPING Trident would save Scotland £1.5 billion which could be spent on houses, hospitals and schools, the Scottish National Party said yesterday.

The figures from Alex Salmond, the SNP leader, were immediately challenged by the shadow defence secretary, Martin O'Neill, who described them as a "downright lie".

Mr Salmond said the Tories, Labour and the Liberal Democrats were all committed to an "obscene waste of £23 million of public money"

for the Trident programme. "The SNP is the only major political party in Scotland which will scrap Trident and spend the money on changing Scotland for the better."

He described Trident as a white elephant and said the issue would emerge as major election issue in Scotland.

"We are not prepared to have Scotland used as a nuclear missile base," he said, claiming that the £1.5 billion could be used to build 12,000 new houses, 16 new hospitals and 177 new schools in place of Trident.

Labour has remained non-committal on whether it would cancel the fourth Trident nuclear submarine

but the Liberal Democrats have echoed the Conservative view of the necessity for the fourth boat to make the minimum deterrent viable and credible.

Both Labour and the Liberal Democrats said there was no need, however, for the planned escalation of nuclear warheads from the 192 on Polaris to 512 on Trident.

Mr O'Neill said Labour would wait until it formed a government before deciding whether or not to cancel, taking into account the possible "crippling cancellation costs".

He said that despite offers to cut the old Soviet arsenal of long-range nuclear weapons from 12,200 to 2,500 it was

still not credible for Britain to get rid of its nuclear weapons. He said: "The SNP's £23 billion figure is a downright lie."

He said about £10 billion had already been spent on the programme and on civil engineering costs and claimed the lifetime running costs had been exaggerated and did include the costs of possible job losses at Rosyth, Faslane and Coulport.

Menzies Campbell, the Liberal Democrat defence spokesman, said there was still a need for nuclear weapons because of the instability of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

"The SNP idea takes no account of the reality of the

existence of nuclear weapons. They would like to have the moral satisfaction of saying they will abandon nuclear weapons but they will just be hiding behind the skirts of the Westminster government which would continue to have them."

Mr Campbell said the Prime Minister had signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union while embarking on the deployment of a level of nuclear deterrent, the only possible justification for which was penetrating the Moscow defence system.

"He is shaking the hand of friendship with Mr Yeltsin at No 10 but at the same time deploying a level of weapons way beyond that needed."