

Cost of Trident

The White Paper on the Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent says that the current annual in-service costs of Trident are 5-6 % of the Defence Budget. Earlier estimates were substantially lower. For example on 13 March 2005 Geoff Hoon said that the combined capital and running costs of the Trident submarine and nuclear warhead programmes in 2003-04 was around 3 % of the Defence Budget.

On 6 February 2007 James Arbuthnot, Chair of the Defence Committee, asked Des Browne why the new figures were higher than previous estimates. Mr Browne said "we went through an exercise recently to make sure that we were identifying as accurately as we could the costs that were associated with our nuclear weapons system and that caused us to revise information that previous governments may have put into the public domain."¹

This would suggest that earlier figures substantially underestimated the true in-service costs of Trident and failed to correctly assign items to the nuclear programme.

The White Paper says that the in-service costs of the new system will also be 5-6 % of the Defence Budget and that procurement costs will be £15-20 billion. Des Browne told the Defence Committee – "what people do .. is they aggregate these running costs with the 15-20 billion. That is a perfectly legitimate thing to do."²

The table below indicates the totals which are produced from this legitimate aggregation exercise:

Proposed system	
Procurement costs	£15 - 20 billion
In-service costs 2024 - 2054 (30 years @ £1.62 – 1.95 billion) ³	£49 – 59 billion
Total cost of proposed system	£64 – 79 billion
Existing system	
In-service costs 2007 – 2023 (16 years @ £1.62 – 1.95 billion)	£26 – 31 billion
Total costs 2007 - 2054	£90 – 110 billion

It is not clear to what extent each of the following major expenditure items are included within the figures listed above:

(1) Atomic Weapons Establishment Site Development Plan

Ministers have refused to disclose the costs of their plan to rebuild many of the key facilities at Aldermaston and Burghfield. The total cost will be several billion pounds.

¹ Defence Committee 6 February 2007

² Defence Committee 6 February 2007

³ 5-6% of 2006-07 Resource Department Expenditure Limit of £32,643 million; The Government's Expenditure Plans 2006-07 to 2007-08, Ministry of Defence.

(2) Protection of nuclear forces

The Strategic Defence Review in 1998 listed a substantial number of military units, part of whose role was to protect the Trident force. In 1998 the annual operating cost of forces committed to this role was £125 million and the operating cost of additional forces with a contingent role was £176 million.

(3) Nuclear Liabilities

On 24 July 2006 Des Browne listed the major items which were included in the £9.8 bn of nuclear liabilities. A large proportion of the decommissioning work listed is likely to be carried out between 2007 and 2055.