



Trident: The Facts

What is the Liberal Democrat policy on Trident?

We oppose the like-for-like replacement of Trident. We believe there is a 'nuclear ladder' of capabilities. Alternative systems or postures could bring Britain down that 'nuclear ladder'.

Why do you oppose the like-for-like replacement of Trident?

It is out of date. There is no excuse for Labour and the Conservatives to continue with a Cold War-era system that doesn't suit Britain's needs anymore. The 24/7 Trident patrol is not an appropriate response to the primary threats facing Britain today. Second, it is expensive. The costs of Trident renewal will come from the Defence budget at an opportunity cost to our Armed Forces. Those who support like-for-like Trident replacement have to explain how they would pay for it on top of what our Armed Forces need.

If it's so expensive, why not scrap nuclear weapons altogether?

It's not quite as simple as that. Complete unilateral disarmament is not our policy. We cannot predict the future and, in an uncertain world, now is not the time for that decision. Second, scrapping Trident completely would actually be more expensive in the short term. The costs of decommissioning submarines and missiles, as well as paying redundancy packages for workers, would be extremely high. We believe in stepping down the nuclear ladder in the short-term, with the long-term aim of stepping off the ladder altogether.

Other than full replacement or unilateral disarmament, what options are there?

An alternative solution could be a middle way, stepping down the nuclear ladder, but not completely abandoning Britain's capabilities. For example, Britain could stop having 24/7 patrols.

What are the benefits of the other options?

They could be more flexible, allowing Britain to respond to international threats without being hampered by an expensive and out of date system.

They could be cheaper. Ending 24/7 patrols and having fewer submarines could save around £4 billion over the life of the system.

Finally, it could send a positive signal to other countries that Britain is willing to step down the nuclear ladder, while not unilaterally disarming. Others would come under pressure to follow us.

Would this leave Britain vulnerable?

No. Stepping down the nuclear ladder would not leave us vulnerable as we could have a more flexible system that would allow us to respond to threats if needed.

Isn't it better to have a like-for-like replacement as we can't predict the future?

Of course we can't predict the future, but the like-for-like replacement of Trident isn't the only way, or even the best way, to protect us. A more flexible posture could protect us and be more suitable for our needs.

Surely we're never going to use nuclear weapons anyway?

Although it is extremely unlikely, we can't predict the future. Full unilateral disarmament is a permanent decision - we can't just turn it on again if we need. In an uncertain world, it would be a big decision to leave our children without a nuclear deterrent capability. We believe Britain is ready to step down the ladder, but not off it.