

RENEWING THE UK NUCLEAR DETERRENT

Let me lay out the defence case for Labour keeping our current policy of nuclear deterrence, followed by the political argument.

Labour is undertaking a Defence Review, which will include a policy on the replacement of the Trident nuclear submarine system.

Irrespective of that review, later this year, at a time of the Government's choosing, parliament will vote to proceed with Trident renewal.

That vote will pass.

Changing Labour's policy will not stop that; so our policy will have to consider that the submarines may already be under construction at the 2020 general election.

I believe keeping to our present policy is the right course.

Let's remember:

The 1945 Labour Government introduced the nuclear deterrent.

Labour Prime Minister, Clement Attlee, made the decision for the UK to have its own nuclear deterrent.

This policy has been supported by every UK Government since.

It was the Blair government that signed up to the goal of "Global zero" – a world free of nuclear weapons.

The UK, with a Labour Government, was the first nuclear weapons state to sign up to that goal.

That example was followed by President Obama.

It was that Labour Government that reduced our warhead stockpile to a bare minimum; including scrapping all tactical and battlefield nuclear weapons; scrapping the free fall nuclear bombs; and reducing the warheads on trident by a third.

We cannot wish them away.

Nuclear weapons are appalling. I am sure we all wish they had never been invented.

But we cannot dis-invent them. We cannot wish them away.

We have to shape a defence policy in a world with nuclear weapons.

Why Trident rather than other systems?

The UK's first nuclear deterrent was carried on Vulcan bombers (Doncaster had the last flying Vulcan).

These were replaced by the Polaris system, beginning in 1968. These were Resolution Class submarines, carrying Polaris A3 ballistic missiles.

In 1980, The Government announced the Trident programme, four Vanguard Class submarines, carrying 16 Trident II (D5) missiles. **Labour fought the 1983 election on a promise to scrap Trident - and was heavily beaten.** The submarine Patrols began in 1994.

Since the 1960s the UK has a policy of "continuous at sea deterrence" - i.e. at least one submarine on continual patrol, submersed and hidden.

Labour Governments' nuclear policy

The UK Government (and all Labour Governments) have always been clear about our threat of the deterrent.

First, Labour committed to its being a weapon of extreme self-defence. It is the last resort defence.

Second, we would only direct our deterrent at other nuclear powers. It is not used in conventional conflicts (e.g. Iraq, Bosnia, etc.)

Deterrence

The deterrent has made war on mainland Europe unthinkable since the Second World war. This has been cemented by our role as nuclear power within NATO.

- 60 million people, 3% of the world's population, died in WW2 in just six years.
- The UK lost 380,000 men in World War 2.

In the subsequent 60 years, we have lost less than 8,000 soldiers in different conflicts around the world.

Stopping another world war or pan-European war makes the deterrent an appalling necessity.

Replacing Trident

Parliament has commissioned a new generation of submarines and missiles to replace Trident. Design work has begun. The main vote to build – the “Main Gate” vote is in 2016. This vote is almost certain to be approved. Labour will have to choose – whether to scrap the submarines.

Jeremy Corbyn speculated that Labour might build the subs, but remove the nuclear weapons.

By doing so, Labour would have committed ninety per cent of the cost. Therefore, the argument for big savings disappears.

Likewise, the argument that the cost of the nuclear deterrent undermines funding for conventional armed forces, is also an argument for boosting conventional spending, not for transferring funding to non-military purposes. So, there is no windfall for the NHS or for house building by scrapping trident.

Labour’s disarmament initiatives

The 1997-2010 Labour Government did more to promote disarmament than any other UK Government.

- The Labour Government scrapped all UK battlefield nuclear weapons.
- The 1997 Labour Government halved the number of warheads carried by the Trident submarines (operational warheads) to 48 per submarine, from 96
- Labour also reduced the total UK stockpile of nuclear weapons to 225 (which includes those to be dismantled).

Labour support for the nuclear deterrent

For most of our 116 year history, Labour has been a multilateralist party.

Labour has had six Governments in its 116 year history. Ignoring the 1924 government (in the pre-nuclear age) – every Labour Government: 1945, 1964-70, 1974-79 and 1997-2010 have supported a UK Independent nuclear deterrent.

The Labour Party has never been elected on a non-nuclear platform. The only occasion, 1983, Labour suffered its greatest every post war defeat.

Arguments put by opponents of the deterrent.

Here is my response to some of the arguments commonly used about the UK deterrent.

“Trident is an out of date cold, war weapon”

The argument that trident is a cold war weapon is bogus.

The nuclear deterrent exists to prevent a major European or world war of the kind we had twice in the 20th century; with wars roughly every 20 years in the previous five hundred years.

“Trident is useless because it cannot be used?”

This argument is simply wrong. The threat of the deterrent prevents any nation from using nuclear weapons against the UK – for fear of the ultimate retaliation. Far from “never being used” – Trident works every day.

“Trident is expensive.”

Yes, there is a cost to the deterrent. During the Labour government it cost approximately £1 billion per year.

The last confirmed cost of replacing the Trident system was £31 billion. Its running costs are about 6% of the defence budget.

The House of Commons library notes that “one quarter of the UK’s military equipment budget” is devoted to the submarine and deterrent systems” over the next ten years.

The cost of the UK nuclear deterrent is 0.13 per cent of the UK Government spending (13p in every £100 spent).

Last year Reuters claimed replacing Trident would cost £168 billion. This was a nonsense figure invented by a Tory MP and used by opponents ever since.

“Trident is no use in modern conflicts e.g. against ISIS/Al Qaeda.”

Trident’s purpose is not to tackle terrorists with Kalashnikov’s (like in Paris) or terrorist strongholds Syria. Just as a Navy Frigate is no use at fighting in jungle or desert warfare; and typhoon aircraft are no use at house to house fighting.

Each component of our armed forces has a different role. There is no substitute weapon that provides the deterrent role in the modern era against nuclear attack.

“Replacing Trident goes against the Non-Proliferation Treaty.”

No. The NPT both recognises nuclear weapons states; and makes no comment on replacement of out of date equipment or systems. What NPT looks at is limiting quantity; availability of nuclear material and technology. It also encourages nuclear states to undertake disarmament initiatives.

The NPT led to several other agreements, including the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) between the USA and USSR/Russia.

The impact of multilateral initiatives is striking.

In 1986 there were over 64,000 nuclear weapons – most held by the two superpowers. By 2010 – there were less than 12,000.

Today, there are 15,900 held worldwide and the number is falling.

Three out of four of the world’s nuclear weapons have been dismantled through arms control and disarmament agreements.

“Under-water Drones make submarines vulnerable”

‘Unmanned’ submersibles – drones by another name – have been around for many years. The new generation of submarines will develop technology to detect drones, just as drones hope to detect the submarines, hidden in deep water in large oceans. This argument is specious.

Admiral Lord Boyce, the former First Sea Lord and submarine commander, rejected the idea that drones could find trident submarines in the deep oceans, commenting that we are more likely to put a man on Mars within six months than make the seas transparent within 30 years.

“There will never be a good time to disarm, because there will always be a new threat around the corner.”

This is an argument for impatience and fails to recognise the complexity of the lengthy disarmament processes that have been initiated:

- 1.A Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty
- 2.190 states are signatories to the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty.

3.The NPT as it is known, had had eight review conferences.

4. There have been bilateral agreements between the USA and Russia. The Strategic Arms reduction Treaty (START) committed both countries to reduce their stockpile to 6,000 warheads each by 2001. Both countries limited their numbers of intercontinental ballistic missiles; sea launched missiles and bombers to 1,600.

5. A successor to START, which expired in 2009, is underway. This cut deployed strategic warheads to 1550 per country within seven years; eliminated nuclear-armed ground launched missiles with a range of 500 to 5,500km;

By 2010, Russia possessed 5,200 operational warheads and 7,300 awaiting dismantlement. In contrast in 1986, they possessed over 40,000.

By 2010, the US had 4,950 warheads, 2,700 of which are operational. In 2010, the US was dismantling 300-350 warheads per year.

By 2008, the French Government had reduced their arsenal to less than 300 warheads.

China is thought to have about 180 warheads. China's leaders have consistently declared a no first use policy, therefore, only requiring a minimum deterrence.

Arms control and international disarmament agreements have already removed 75% of the world's nuclear weapons and the process is ongoing.

"Trident isn't 'Independent'?"

Wrong. The UK has operational independence. Our nuclear deterrent does not require or allow any US interference in its operations. The US cannot affect its command or control. The Trident guidance system does not rely on use of external; systems like the US GPS (which your satnav uses).

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