

The Westminster consensus on Trident is dead

The forthcoming Scottish referendum on independence has thrown up a new angle on the debate over Trident replacement.

Should Scotland choose independence in a referendum, an SNP administration would force the Ministry of Defence to seek a new naval base for Trident south of the border in England or Wales. This would take years to develop at an unknown cost. That is if a site can be found at all. A new report argues it would be more difficult to switch now to one of the alternative sites that were discounted back in 1963, when the government chose Faslane. If the Ministry of Defence has done more research in recent years, it hasn't said so. Could a Labour Government afford to build a new submarine base and armaments depot in England?

Anyway, aside from the referendum result, Labour has some real thinking to do.

The independence issue is only one of a number of reasons to question Trident, as the former Labour Chief Whip Nick Brown raised in a defence debate last week, when he said *"The arguments, which were never that strong, are now moving away from Trident renewal."*

Nick Brown is right, raising the obvious economic question: do we continue to support other defence and public spending cuts – and of course the tuition fee hikes he specifically noted – when billions are spent on Trident? With the main decision on building the new submarines due in 2016, could a new Strategic Defence and Security Review following an election in 2015 be the opportunity to change course?

Before Christmas there was growing



disquiet from MPs when the MoD announced it had no plans to publish the Trident Alternatives Review – the Cabinet Office review ordered to fulfil the agreement in the coalition agreement that Lib Dems could continue to argue for alternatives. But Lib Dem unease within the coalition over Trident is now coupled with consideration of the implications of Scottish independence.

Meanwhile any discussion about public spending always raises the question why spend billions on Trident rather than our public services? Opposition to Trident is going to have a loud airing in the next few months and years, and Labour needs a policy for the manifesto.

Jim Murphy has himself stated that Labour's defence policy review covering Trident is *"parked until we see what the government's evidence"* in the Trident Alternatives Review and that he is *"really not wedded"* to a particular weapon system.

Whilst he is clearly committed to maintaining some sort of nuclear weapon system, this is something of a change of emphasis, and is a more flexible approach to the policy area than the traditional position of the Labour right which has been to close down debate by simply assiduously confirming that Labour is as committed as the Tories to nuclear weapons.

Cheerleaders for nuclear weapons need to demonstrate the public want to keep Trident.

Ed Miliband clearly has an open mind: during the leadership election he said a defence review *"should look at the totality of our conventional and nuclear capabilities, considering both our defence needs and what our priorities are in the changing economic climate. Defence should not be exempted from the tough spending choices we need to face."*

Since being elected, although his public comments have only been occasional they have confirmed that open minded approach to the policy area – notably welcoming the Trident Review at last year's Labour Party Conference.

Whilst they are saying different things – Nick Brown's backbench intervention, Ed Miliband welcoming the Trident Review or Jim Murphy waiting for Nick Harvey to report, Labour is adopting a more open-minded approach to Trident. The previous Westminster consensus on Trident – that it is a non-negotiable facet of the politics of the centre ground – is dead.

By Daniel Blaney

Nick Brown MP: 'arguments now moving away from Trident renewal'

The former Chief Whip of the Parliamentary Labour Party has hit out at the replacement of Trident, saying 'The arguments, which were never that strong, are now moving away from Trident renewal.'

In a contribution to a debate on the Strategic Defence and Security Review, he said 'The large financial outlay that the Government are committed to in planning to replace our independent deterrent could be better spent in a number of ways.

During the economic boom, I argued that we ought to better equip our troops, invest in the specialist field of anti-terrorism capability in line with the real threats that we face, and supplement our existing overseas aid budget. We now face new threats.

To take one example, the money that we spend on Trident could be used to bring down substantially the tuition fees of every student. I think that cutting a generation adrift from higher education poses a bigger threat to our

nation than the idea that a foreign power with nuclear weaponry would uniquely threaten to use it against us, and not the rest of NATO, and would somehow be able to disapply NATO's founding terms.

The real nuclear dangers of the future come from rogue states and terrorism. The possession of an independent nuclear deterrent does not make us safer. A better investment would be in anti-terrorism capabilities.'

Labour CND makes submission to Refounding Labour consultation

Labour CND has made a submission to the Labour Party's 'Refounding Labour - Partnership into Power consultation'.

In the submission, we wrote: 'That the consultation is taking place is welcome,' but expressed our concern that the current policy review led by Liam Byrne has 'failed to make use of the existing policy making structures of the Labour Party'.

We also highlighted previous abuses of democracy at conference, particularly in 2006 when members wished to debate Trident replacement.

We suggested four concrete changes to policy making processes which were:

1. Remove the 'contemporary' straitjacket

The ruling requiring resolutions to be 'contemporary', referring to events occurring after the final pre-conference National Policy Forum meeting should be removed.

2. Debate eight prioritised resolutions

A solution would be to take four from the constituencies and four from the affiliates, or allow the sections to vote as a college and take the top eight agenda items.

3. Allow amendments to NPF documents

As the sovereign body of the party, the annual conference should be provided with a mechanism to amend the National Policy Forum's policy commission documents.

4. End the 'take it or leave it' vote on whole NPF documents

A mechanism that would allow delegates to identify a body of text in the document and hold a separate vote on that contentious item would ensure the policy documents more closely represent Labour members views.

Rhona Badham: in memory of our comrade

Rhona spent her life campaigning against injustice and war.

She cared deeply about the poor and the dispossessed and campaigned fiercely on their behalf. She fought against racism in all its forms consistently. She opposed war and violence as a solution to the world's problems and demonstrated against them.

She was a member of the Labour Party and a committed socialist. It wasn't always easy to be both but she remained loyal to the end. She was an active trade unionist.

She was a committed anti-racist and supported all the demonstrations involved. I remember being with her outside South Africa House in the days of apartheid. I also remember her



work with the Newham Monitoring Project in her own area.

She served as a hard-working treasurer for some years for Labour CND. Her health finally forced her to give up the job but she continued as long as she was able. I last campaigned with Rhona at Aldermaston in the pouring rain a few years ago. She stood soaked to the skin though she wasn't well - at that time she was in her eighties!

By Mary Ogbogoh

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