

Labour, Trident and the 2015 Election

Labour CND Briefing for Prospective Parliamentary Candidates

What is Labour's current policy on Trident?

Agreed at National Policy Forum July 2014 and endorsed by Annual Conference September 2014.

The policy states a commitment to continuing the Trident replacement programme, whilst also putting it under review in a post-election Strategic Defence & Security Review (SDSR), as well as making greater efforts on international negotiations, which could suggest support for a ban treaty on nuclear weapons.

- *'With other nations possessing nuclear weapons, and nuclear proliferation remaining a deep concern, we can never be absolutely certain as to what the future security landscape will look like. In July 2013, the current Government published its Trident Alternatives Review which examined alternative defence systems and postures for the UK's deterrent. Labour has said that we are committed to a minimum, credible independent nuclear deterrent, delivered through a Continuous At-Sea Deterrent. It would require a clear body of evidence for us to change this belief.'*
- *Labour recognises the importance of Britain leading international efforts for multilateral disarmament and non-proliferation. Following the action we took when in government, Labour would actively work to enhance momentum on global multilateral disarmament efforts and negotiations, looking at further reductions in global stockpiles and the number of weapons. This would be done in line with our assessment on the global security landscape.*
- *Labour would continue to take a leading role internationally to push the agenda of global anti-proliferation with nuclear and non-nuclear states. This is a vision shared by President Barack Obama and Labour would work with the United States and other allies, such as France, to advance 'Global Zero', which seeks to advance an action plan for the elimination of all nuclear weapons. Labour recognises that success of past international bans on weapons of mass destruction such as landmines, cluster munition, chemical and biological weapons.*
- *The NPT Conference 2015 will be a key moment for a Labour Government to show leadership in achieving progress on global disarmament.*
- *Labour has said that the process and debate leading up to the next Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2015 needs to be open, inclusive and transparent, including examining all capabilities, including nuclear. It must also examine the cost implications as well as the strategic necessities, recognising the importance of the defence sector to the UK economy, and the need to protect and develop a highly skilled workforce. To this end, a Labour Government will have a continuing consultation, inviting submissions from all relevant stakeholders, including Labour Party members and affiliates, on the UK's future defence and national security issues'*

How does opposing Trident replacement relate to current Labour policy?

- *Labour has evidently supported Trident replacement - as Tony Blair proposed the process in 2007.*
- *Labour policy also states a post-election Strategic Defence and Security Review will consider all options, including nuclear weapons, after the election. A Labour Government will reach conclusions after that open consultation and discussion.*
- *Labour policy also states how the party recognises the importance of international bans on other WMDs, such as chemical weapons, and should specify support for a similar ban for nuclear weapons.*

How does opposing Trident replacement relate to Ed Miliband's views?

Ed Miliband has not spoken at great length on Trident since his election as leader, but during the leadership election he said he both supported Trident but would have included it in the 2010 SDSR process.

He has since welcomed initiatives to review the Trident decision, including the Cabinet Office Trident Alternatives Review, and has continued to support spending less money on nuclear weapons.

His commitment to keeping the replacement under review shows his open-mindedness on the issue.

- *In January 2015, Ed said he wanted the 'least-cost nuclear deterrent we can have'*
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/ed-miliband/11325940/Ed-Miliband-hints-he-may-back-replacing-Trident-with-cheaper-system.html>
- *In September 2011, Ed said at Annual Conference, 'I think the government has done the right thing by commissioning a study looking at whether there are alternatives to the renewal of Trident. Actually, the big decision on this is 2015, 2016. I think it's right we look at that and see what it comes out with because if there's a different way of doing things which keeps us as secure and costs less then I think that's a case certainly worth looking at.'*
<http://www.labourcnd.org.uk/2011/10/ed-miliband-welcomes-trident-review/>
- *In September 2010 following his election as leader: 'Throughout this leadership election I have been clear that I believe the right approach is to include the decision about the replacement of Trident in the strategic defence review, so that we can make an informed decision about how best to maintain the minimum nuclear deterrent that Britain requires.'*
http://www.politicshome.com/uk/article/14740/ed_miliband_trident_decision_looks_worryingly_like_weak_government.html

What are other Labour figures views on Trident?

A selection of alternative Labour voice on Trident include:

- **Lord John Prescott**, former Deputy Prime Minister, wrote in July 2013, *'Scrap Trident for good, stop being the world's policeman and spend that money protecting the health of the nation.'*
<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/john-prescott-its-time-sink-2096704>
- **Lord Des Browne**, Secretary of State for Defence in 2007, said in January 2013, *'The time is now right, in my view, to change our posture and to step down from continuous at-sea deterrence. This would demonstrate that nuclear weapons are playing less and less of a role in our national security strategy'*
<http://www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?id=2013-01-24a.1238.0>
- **Lord Frank Judd**, Former Navy Minister, said in January 2013, *'I strongly believe that the case and need for, and relevance of, a new Trident have never been established.'*
<http://www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?id=2013-01-24a.1244.0>
- **Nick Brown MP**, the former Chief Whip for Blair and Brown, said in January 2013, *'This is a weapons system that we cannot use. The cost is disproportionate to the hard-to-identify benefits and it makes no sense in terms of our alliance with other friendly nations, of our international obligations or even as a response to the security threats faced by the United Kingdom'*
<http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2013-01-17a.1125.2>
- **Robin Cook**, in his final article in 2005, wrote, *'It is against Britain's national interests to replace Trident.'*
<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/jul/29/labour.politicalcolumnists>

What are other Labour candidates' current views on Trident?

In March 2015, around a CND survey of 79 Labour candidates showed 75% oppose Trident replacement; many of these candidates also provided anti-Trident statements for Labour CND's PPC webpage.

In September 2014, a ComRes poll for BBC Daily Politics show revealed 51% of 73 Labour candidates surveyed wanted a commitment to scrapping Trident in the 2015 Manifesto.

- <http://bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-29301225>
- <http://www.cnduk.org/cnd-media/item/2009-over-half-of-labours-parliamentary-candidates-want-to-scrap-trident>

What are Labour members current views on Trident?

In a narrow timeframe of February – June in 2014, around 50 constituency parties submitted policy proposals on Trident and nuclear weapons, almost all of which urged greater action on disarmament internationally and domestically, and with most urging the scrapping rather than the replacement of Trident.

How did Labour MPs vote on Trident replacement in 2007?

In March 2007, Parliament voted to authorise Trident replacement by a vote of 408 - 160.

In that vote, there was significant opposition from Labour MPs.

The motion read:

'This House supports the Government's decisions, as set out in the White Paper The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent (Cm 6994), to take the steps necessary to maintain the UK's minimum strategic nuclear deterrent beyond the life of the existing system and to take further steps towards meeting the UK's disarmament responsibilities under Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty.'

- 232 Labour MPs voted 'aye' on the motion
- 89 Labour MPs voted 'no' on the motion
- 1 Labour MP voted 'aye' and 'no' on the motion
- 29 Labour MPs did not cast a vote
- <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2007-03-14&number=78>

Furthermore, on the same day, a slightly larger number of Labour MPs sought to delay the decision with an amendment tabled by Jon Trickett which read:

'This House notes the Government's decision, as set out in the White Paper The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent (Cm 6994), to take the steps necessary to maintain the UK minimum strategic nuclear deterrent beyond the life of the existing system and to take further steps towards meeting the United Kingdom's disarmament responsibilities under Article VI of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, but believes that the case is not yet proven and remains unconvinced of the need for an early decision.'

- 237 Labour MPs voted 'no' on the motion
- 95 Labour MPs vote 'aye' on the motion
- 19 Labour MPs did not cast a vote
- <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2007-03-14&number=77>

Did Labour MPs vote for Trident replacement in recent weeks?

There was a Commons vote on 20th January 2015, on an Opposition Day motion tabled jointly by SNP, Plaid Cymru and Green MPs.

The majority of Labour MPs did not cast a vote and therefore did not support or oppose the non-replacement aims of the motion.

- *The motion read:*
'That this House believes that Trident should not be renewed'.
- 19 Labour MPs voted 'aye' on the motion
- 102 Labour MPs voted 'no' on the motion
- **136 Labour MPs did not cast a vote**
- <http://www.publicwhip.org.uk/division.php?date=2015-01-20&number=133>

Why is this an issue at this election?

In the March 2007 debate, Tony Blair made a significant concession which stressed that the vote represented approval for a 'concept and design phase' but not construction of new submarines.

The construction decision point is now due in 'early 2016' and MPs are demanding the right to vote on the decision, with precedent established in March 2007.

Prime Minister Tony Blair stated,

'I entirely understand why people might want to put off this decision, but the fact is that we need to take the decision today if we want to get parliamentary approval for the work that has to begin now on the concept and design phase—of course, the actual contracts for the design and construction are to be left for a later time. If we want to get proper parliamentary authorisation, this decision has to be taken now. I entirely understand and respect the views of those who hold a different opinion on this issue, but I have been pretty clear and firm on it from the beginning, and I think that we should continue to be so.'

<http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2007-03-14c.277.3#g279.0>

Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett in the same debate also stated there may be further opportunities to vote though specifically referred to decisions on warhead replacement, rather than submarine replacement, saying,

'No one is less likely to be prepared to commit future Governments and Parliaments to a certain course than a former Leader of the House. I simply draw his attention to the words uttered by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and to the clear facts before the House—the decision in principle must be made today, but the decision on the warheads, for example, will not come in this Parliament. It would be improper for me to bind a future Government or Parliament, but every party in the House will have heard the questions and points raised, and every party will take account of them.'

<http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2007-03-14c.298.0#g308.1>

The Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2010 delayed the construction decision point (known as 'Main Gate' by the Ministry of Defence) to 2016.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62482/strategic-defence-security-review.pdf

A Government report in December 2014 confirmed the 'Main Gate' decision would be made in 'early 2016'.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/390185/20141215-Successor_Update_to_Parliament_final.pdf