

SPEECH ON TRIDENT

Lib Dem Spring Conference, Harrogate Saturday 3rd March, 2007.

Imagine the photographs you have seen of the Earth spinning through space. A spaceship, using up its resources, getting hotter, and there are people of different nationalities and colours on board, some of whom we don't quite understand, and don't get on with them. Tough – we share spaceship earth with them, and we have to live together. This is our only planet. Nuclear weapons don't help build peace among peoples, and if used would devastate the life support system of our spaceship. So we have to get rid of them fast, but safely. And this last word is the critical word.

I shall make three points:

1. Getting rid of nuclear weapons
2. Bolstering our reputation with the EU
3. Reforming the UN and Global Governance

1. How do we get rid of nuclear weapons?

Given Israel, Iran, Pakistan, India, and North Korea have nuclear weapons, besides the permanent 5 on the Security Council, it makes sense to reduce our own nuclear weapons prudently. Some countries behave like a gang of bullies, and for a country like the UK which has itself been rather warlike in the past, to abandon its weapons unilaterally may make us more vulnerable to those countries that don't like us. Dropping our own guard down is not sensible, and would leave the French as the only nuclear power in Europe without any other European checks and balances. Unilateral abandonment won't shame the Sunnis or Shias, nor the Moslem/Jew nuclear arms race. And it won't prevent them other countries going nuclear either. If Britain unilaterally goes nuclear-free, we have less influence on them. And some Moslems look upon us as the enemy because we are not Moslem, so not having them makes us more vulnerable.

Only slow and steady multilateral disarmament is the safe bet. A decision to cut our warheads by 50 % from 2014 is correct. We should then aim for another 50% by 2030, with the aim of ridding the whole world of nuclear weapons by 2050. Tall order? Let's work towards it.

2. Boost our reputation with our neighbours (EU)

In 1997, the UK and France agreed in St Malo to further military cooperation. Let us take this accord to a higher level and develop the next generation Anglo-French Vanguard submarines (The UK and France are already cooperating to build aircraft carriers).

Bolstering our military cooperation with France will boost our standing in the EU, and give a fillip to the implementation of the European Union's common security and defence policy covering the area outside of the borders of the EU. At the moment every country in the EU has a different army, and wants to do its own thing, Chaos.

Such deepened cooperation between the UK and France within the EU context will send a signal to the Indians and Pakistanis to draw on our experience, within the context of the embryonic South Asian Common market too.

We can continue to lease missile technology from the US as at present, whilst we build our own warheads, and develop joint anglo-french submarines to launch them. Perhaps those submarines will have civilian benefit too one day, as we adapt to climate change. . What I propose will enable the UK to put some more sea between us and the United States, reducing our dependency on them, which has emasculated our independence, and forced us into rash, counterproductive wars like Iraq.

3. UN Reform and Global Governance

As one of the 5 permanent members of the security council, we have considerable influence and power. Let's go back to what the UK is traditionally known for abroad: excellent diplomats, honest government, and the rule of law (Blair and BAE excepted). As Asia, and Russia, becomes more dominant in the world, human rights and civil liberties will need to be advocated more effectively and properly defended.

Between now and 2014, as part of the Permanent 5 of the UN we can push for further reform of the UN to make it more representative of other peoples and stakeholders, boosting global governance (to tackle climate change, pollution, and over exploitation of resources) . If we abandoned our own nuclear arsenal the other 4 nuclear powers would club together, and the UK would be the odd one out, and have less power. Instead keeping a modified Trident, bargain it down with the other nuclear powers, and using the opportunity it gives us to make the world a better place!

In Conclusion: - I urge you all to accept the motion

1. Call for further concerted cuts in stockpile in concert with others, boosting cooperation with French and EU.
2. Start planning for a world FREE of all nuclear weapons by 2050s, to make our own Earth Spaceship a safe place for mankind to live in peace and harmony with each other.