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Statement at the Press Conference

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Our Manifesto includes the following words:

"This Government's approach is straightforward and resolute.
We mean what we say.
We face the truth even when it is painful.
And we stick to our purpose."

That is the essence of our defence policy.
We are prepared to face the truth of the Warsaw Pact threat
and we are resolute in defence of peace and freedom.

Michael Foot can afford to ignore the facts about the threat
but, as Defence Secretary, I can't.

The fact that NATO conventional forces on the Central Front -
tanks, aircraft and artillery - are outnumbered by factors of
two or three to one.

The fact that Soviet strategic nuclear systems are being rapidly
modernised. Since 1975, they have introduced 6 new land and
submarine-based systems. In the same period, the United States
has introduced only one new submarine-based system.

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*Defence
priority -*

The fact that there is a large and growing imbalance between the intermediate range nuclear systems of East and West.

The Conservative Party is prepared to face the reality of the threat and to take measures to meet it.

We have supported the NATO strategy of strong conventional forces, backed by a nuclear capability, including the British independent nuclear deterrent, which has kept the peace in Europe for nearly 40 years.

Defence

X We have strengthened our defences.

Defence spending is now nearly 20% higher in real terms than it was in the last year of the Labour Government.

In 1979 the regular forces were overstretched, under-manned, under-paid and poorly equipped.

Today their pay is fully comparable, manning levels are satisfactory and morale - following their brilliant triumph in the Falklands - is high.

Their equipment is being massively modernised.

We shall spend nearly £8 billion on defence equipment procurement this year and major equipment projects such as the Challenger main battle tank, the Tornado and advanced Harrier aircraft are well under way.

Over the lifetime of this Government we have placed orders for 33 warships worth nearly £2 billion.

Important enhancements - such as additional Phantom aircraft and a new fleet of Tristar strategic tankers - will be made to our capability following the Falklands campaign.

We have met the commitment we made in 1979 to enhance our reserve forces.

The expansion of the TA is proceeding and the new Home Service Force is being formed.

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Finally, we will proceed with our decision to replace the existing Polaris force with the Trident system which will ensure the maintenance of our strategic nuclear deterrent well into the next century.

For the future we shall continue to support NATO's policy of keeping the peace through deterrence.

At the same time we shall strive for disarmament.

Real and verifiable disarmament which can only be negotiated - with the calculating realists in the Kremlin - from a position of strength.

What is the Labour alternative?

A non-nuclear defence policy of giving up our independent nuclear deterrent and kicking the Americans out of their bases here which would shake NATO to its foundations. All this to be achieved within the life time of a Parliament.

A pledge to reduce defence spending to the level of our major European allies which would slash our conventional defences by about a third or £4,500M a year and would destroy the jobs of hundreds of thousands of people from the Services and the defence industries.

These are the policies to which the Labour manifesto commits a future Labour government. No amount of electioneering rewrites by Dennis Healey and John Silkin can disguise the new left power structure within the Labour Party.

Their policy would tip the balance of power towards the Soviet Union, encourage the Americans in the view that Europe will not defend itself and raise the risk of Soviet adventurism in Europe which NATO has stopped since the 1940s.

They are a naive, reckless and one-sided gamble with the peace and freedom of this nation.

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