



**THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND**

STATEMENT ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS

By

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to the Conference on Disarmament**

to the

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On 18 July, the UK House of Commons voted on a motion put forward by the Government concerning the UK's nuclear deterrent. Members of the House, all democratically elected, voted 472 to 117 in support of the motion. The motion had various elements but included a request for Parliament's support for:

- the Government's assessment in the 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review that the UK's independent minimum credible nuclear deterrent, based on a Continuous at Sea Deterrence posture, will remain essential to the UK's security today as it has for over 60 years, and for as long as the global security situation demands, to deter the most extreme threats to the UK's national security and way of life and that of the UK's allies;
- the decision to take the necessary steps required to maintain the current posture by replacing the current Vanguard Class submarines with four Successor submarines;
- the Government's commitment to continue work towards a safer and more stable world, pressing for key steps towards multilateral disarmament.

I would like to explain those three elements in more detail because they are relevant to the positions we take on disarmament and arms control issues more generally.

First, then, the need to maintain the UK's nuclear deterrent.

The unpredictable international security environment we face today demands the maintenance of our nuclear deterrent for the foreseeable future. Other states continue to have nuclear arsenals and there is a risk of further proliferation of nuclear weapons. There is a risk that states might use their nuclear capability to threaten us, try to constrain our decision making in a crisis or sponsor nuclear terrorism.

Recent changes in the international security context remind us that we cannot rule out further shifts which would put us, or our NATO allies, under grave threat. In the past two years, there has been a disturbing increase in both Russian rhetoric about the use of nuclear weapons and the frequency of snap nuclear exercises.

There is the threat from countries that are actively seeking to acquire nuclear capabilities illegally. North Korea has stated a clear intent to develop and deploy a nuclear weapon, and it continues to work towards that goal, in flagrant violation of a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions.

And there is the question of further proliferation, leading to nuclear threats in the future that we cannot anticipate today. The decision on whether to maintain our nuclear deterrent hinges not just on the threats we face today, but on an assessment of what the world will be like over the coming decades.

Our nuclear deterrent has helped keep the peace between the major powers for decades. Abandoning it unilaterally would undermine our security and that of our allies. It would not make us safer. As the great deterrence theorist Sir Michael Quinlan once wrote: 'no safer system than deterrence is yet in view, and impatience would be a catastrophic guide in the search. To tear down the present structure, imperfect

but effective, before a better one is firmly within our grasp would be an immensely dangerous and irresponsible act.'

Maintaining our nuclear deterrent is not just essential for our own national security; it is vital for the future security of our NATO allies. As long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance.

Next, I would like to stress that the replacement of the four submarines is necessary to 'maintain the current posture' of our nuclear deterrent. This is not an upgrade of our capabilities.

The vote does not change the salience of nuclear weapons in our security doctrine.

Deterrence draws upon the full spectrum of our capabilities... diplomacy, economic policy, law enforcement, offensive cyber, covert means...and, of course, our Armed Forces. We would employ our nuclear weapons only in extreme circumstances of self-defence, including the defence of our NATO Allies.

And we continue to offer the assurance that the UK will not use, or threaten to use, nuclear weapons against any Non-Nuclear Weapons State party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. This assurance does not apply to any state in material breach of those non-proliferation obligations. While there is currently no direct threat to the UK or its vital interests from states developing weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical and biological capabilities, we reserve the right to review this assurance if the future threat, development or proliferation of these weapons make it necessary.

Let me come to the Government's commitment on disarmament.

As a responsible Nuclear Weapons State the UK is committed to creating the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons, in line with our obligations under the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

We play a leading role on disarmament verification, together with Norway and America. We will continue to press for key steps towards multilateral disarmament, including the entry into force of the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty and for successful negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. And, in our shared effort to strengthen international peace and security and to address further prospects for nuclear disarmament, we welcome the P5 discussion last month of global strategic stability and our respective nuclear doctrines.

Looking to the future, we are committed to retaining only the minimum amount of destructive power needed to deter any aggressor. In 2010, we announced for the first time the total size of our nuclear warhead stockpile. Last year, we delivered on our 2010 commitment to reduce the number of deployed warheads on each submarine from 48 to 40. We will retain no more than 120 operationally available warheads and we remain committed to further reduce our stockpile of nuclear weapons to no more than 180 warheads by the middle of the next decade.

Mr Chairman

Our Negative Security Assurances regarding the use and threat of use of nuclear weapons, our commitment to maintain only the minimal credible deterrent, and our transparency about our arsenal and declaratory policy all contribute to the UK being a responsible NWS. There are other factors, too:

- The UK maintains a minimum credible level of deterrence, with a single Trident submarine on patrol, normally on several days 'notice to fire' and for almost twenty years now, UK nuclear weapons have been de-targeted;
- We have had a voluntary moratorium on the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other explosive nuclear devices since 1995, and have declared the amount of fissile material produced prior to the onset of that moratorium;
- We are a strong supporter of Nuclear Weapon Free Zones, which enhance regional and international security;
- We have strict accountancy and control measures for military nuclear material which are based on UK legislation and industry best practice and take our responsibilities for protecting our military nuclear material very seriously.
- And we have a well-established and on-going programme of activity to protect defence networks and the information they hold from cyber attack.

Mr Chairman

We remain determined to continue to work with partners across the international community to prevent proliferation, to make progress on multilateral nuclear disarmament, to build trust and confidence between states, and to take tangible steps toward a safer and more stable world in which countries with nuclear weapons feel able to relinquish them.