



Ministry
of Defence

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
FLOOR 5, ZONE B MAIN BUILDING
WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

Telephone: 020 7216 9000 (Switchboard)

THE RT HON ANDREW ROBATHAN MP
MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE ARMED FORCES

MSU/4/2/4/5/fs

27 September 2013

Thank you for your recent correspondence regarding the UK's nuclear deterrent. As my department is responsible for the nuclear deterrent, I will set out the Government's policy.

The Government believes that we need to take action to safeguard our national security at home and abroad. Clearly, the renewal of a nuclear deterrent based on the Trident missile system is not a decision to be taken lightly; however, the Government's view is that this is not the right time for the UK to give it up. There are substantial risks to our security from emerging nuclear weapons states, and so, while committed to the long-term goal of nuclear disarmament, we believe that we can best protect ourselves against these threats by the continued operation of a submarine-based nuclear deterrent. Accordingly, this Government has committed to maintain the deterrent and to continue with the programme to renew it as debated and approved by a significant majority in Parliament in 2007.

You suggest that money would be better spent in other areas. The Government has been clear that the safety and security of the UK is its first priority and must be seen as a long term issue: immediate economic pressures are not sufficient rationale for taking long term risks with the security of the nation and British public far into the future. The costs of replacing the deterrent are substantial and it is understandable that, given the current economic problems, people wish to be reassured that this will be money well spent. Consequently within the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), which reported in October 2010, the Government scrutinised in detail the replacement of our nuclear deterrent to assess value for money. As a result we identified £3.2 billion of savings and deferrals over ten years.

Women in Black
c/o The Maypole Fund
PO Box 14072
London
N16 5WB

The Government is committed to playing a leading role in making the world safe from the dangers of nuclear weapons and nuclear proliferation and is fully engaged in the international process to achieve this; through enforcing and supporting the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). The renewal of our nuclear deterrent is fully consistent with our obligations under this treaty. The Foreign Secretary has made public for the first time the maximum number of nuclear warheads we hold in our stockpile, which goes further and is more transparent than any previous Government. His review of our nuclear declaratory policy also ensures it is appropriate for the circumstances of today. We can now give a new and stronger assurance that we will not use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states that are in compliance with their obligations under the NPT.

The achievement of the UK's long term goal of a world without nuclear weapons could, as the NPT Article VI notes, be underpinned by 'a treaty on general and complete disarmament'. However, it is the position of the Government that focusing effort now on a measure such as this would be premature. To reach that point will require the correct conditions to be in place, such as further measures on multilateral disarmament and strengthened non-proliferation. Our priority must be to reach consensus on the entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and start negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty.

There is no evidence or likelihood that others would follow the UK down a unilateralist route or make it any more likely those countries of concern would abandon their current nuclear ambitions. The Government's position is that we will only achieve sustainable global nuclear disarmament through multilateral negotiations and the NPT remains the best vehicle available to the international community for achieving this. Therefore, the Government will continue to work within the NPT and with international partners to advance progress towards our long-term shared goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

I hope that this response has helped to explain the Government's position on this issue, and should be grateful if you would arrange for it to be posted on your Website. Please accept it as a reply to you and your members to all correspondence on the matter. I will also ensure this letter is promulgated on the government's website.

Yours sincerely,
Andrew Robathan

THE RT HON ANDREW ROBATHAN MP