



Ministry
of Defence

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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THE RT HON MIKE PENNING MP
MINISTER OF STATE FOR THE ARMED FORCES

MSU/4/2/4/1/is

17 October 2016

Dear Kate

Thank you for your recent petition regarding the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent. As my Department is responsible for the nuclear deterrent, I will set out the Government's position.

The renewal of a nuclear deterrent based on the Trident missile system is not a decision to be taken lightly; but this is not the right time for the UK to give up its deterrent. There are substantial risks to our security from, for example, the re-emergence of a major nuclear threat, emerging nuclear weapons states and state sponsored (nuclear) terrorism. While committed to the long term goal of nuclear disarmament, we believe we can best protect ourselves against these threats by the continued operation of a minimum, credible nuclear deterrent. This Government has committed to maintain the UK's nuclear deterrent and to continue with the programme to renew it as debated and approved in Parliament following a supporting vote of 472 to 117 on 18 July 2016, a significant majority of 355.

The 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) set out how the Ministry of Defence will deliver the vision and strategy, through the National Security Objectives and confirmed the Government's commitment to maintaining the UK's independent nuclear deterrent, to deter the most extreme threats to our national security and way of life. The 2015 SDSR also confirmed the latest estimate of design plus manufacture of four successor submarines is £31 billion (including inflation) on top of which a contingency of £10 billion will be set; a prudent estimate based on past experience of large, complex projects. On average, that amounts to an insurance policy of 20 pence in every £100 of annual government spending. It is also expected that the in-service costs of the new fleet of nuclear submarines will be similar to those of today – around 6% of the defence budget. This is affordable and represents an investment in a capability which plays an important role in ensuring the UK's national security.

It is acknowledged that the deterrent costs are substantial but they have been, and will continue to be, subjected to cross-Government scrutiny. Additionally, the 2013 Trident Alternatives Review demonstrated that no alternative system is as capable or cost effective as the current Trident-based deterrent.

Dr Kate Hudson
CND General Secretary
162 Holloway Road
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Your petition suggests 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.

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.

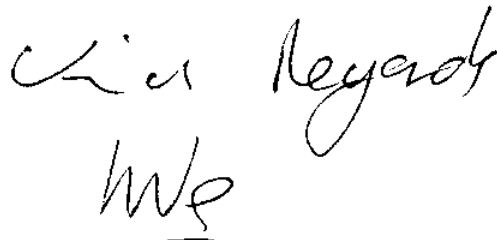
The achievement of the UK's long term goal of a world without nuclear weapons could, as the NPT Article VI notes, be underpinned by '*a treaty on general and complete disarmament*'. However, it is the position of the Government that focusing effort now on a measure such as this would be premature. To reach that point will require the correct conditions to be in place, such as further measures towards 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 negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty.

I would like to assure you and your members that the UK is committed to the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons. The UK considers the NPT to be the cornerstone of global efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, promote safe and secure use of civil nuclear energy and pursue the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. We are working with our Allies and partners to continue to try to make nuclear weapons less necessary, with the goal of making them unnecessary. We have reduced the size of our own nuclear forces by well over 50% since our Cold War peak and our nuclear arsenal represents about 1% of the total global stockpile of nuclear weapons. However, while we have repeatedly reduced the size of our deterrent others have not followed our example and there remain some 17,000 nuclear weapons globally. It would be irresponsible to disarm unilaterally while the capability to threaten us with nuclear weapons remains.

I hope that this response has helped to explain the Government's position on this important issue. Further information about the deterrent can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-nuclear-deterrence-the-facts>.

Please accept this letter as a reply to you and your members to all correspondence on the matter. I should be grateful if you would arrange for it to be posted on your website - I will ensure it is also promulgated on the Government's website.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Penning', written in a cursive style.

THE RT HON MIKE PENNING MP