



Ministry  
of Defence

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

Telephone 020 7218 9000 (Switchboard)

PHILIP DUNNE MP  
MINISTER OF STATE FOR DEFENCE PROCUREMENT

MSU 4-2-4-5

14<sup>th</sup> July 2016

*Dear Colleague,*

On 18<sup>th</sup> July the House will debate the principle of Continuous At Sea Deterrence (CASD) and our plans for the Successor programme.

The Prime Minister has made clear that her government will make strong defence a priority in a more dangerous world. It is vital for our national interest that we maintain what is the most significant security and military capability in Europe – backed up by our commitment to spend 2 per cent of GDP on defence – and that we are able to project our power around the world. In particular, it is crucial that we maintain our independent nuclear deterrent.

Deterrence is at the heart of our defence policy. If we possess the capabilities to ensure the consequences of attacking the UK outweigh the benefits, then we can deter a potential adversary from attacking. Conventional forces can deter conventional threats, but only the nuclear deterrent can deter the most extreme threats.

We cannot rule out the future possibility of an extreme threat to the UK or our NATO Allies. The NATO Warsaw Summit recognised the important contribution our independent nuclear deterrent makes to the overall security of the Alliance.

The UK has reduced its nuclear stockpile by over 50% since the height of the Cold War. We remain committed to reduce our overall stockpile of nuclear weapons to no more than 180 warheads by the mid-2020s. Others have not followed our example and there remain about 17,000 nuclear weapons globally. Disarming unilaterally would weaken international security.

### **The need for four submarines**

CASD requires four submarines to ensure at least one is on patrol at all times, taking account of the cycle of deployment, training, and routine and unplanned maintenance. While one is on patrol, the second will be ready to deploy if required, with the third undergoing routine maintenance, and the fourth in full refit. Three submarines could not provide resilience against unplanned refits or breaks in serviceability.

This principle is regularly reviewed and assessments consistently show that four submarines are required. It was studied in the 1970s before the Vanguard submarines were built; an in-depth classified study took place to inform the 2006 White Paper and this was again reassessed for the 2013 Trident Alternatives Review.

Building three submarines would also not deliver the cost savings that some have suggested – far less than a quarter of the cost of the project. There are large fixed costs – such as infrastructure, training and maintenance – which would still have to be borne.

## **The need for a submarine based deterrent**

Repeated studies demonstrate that a submarine based deterrent offers the best resilience and cost effectiveness. The Trident Alternatives Review concluded submarines are the most invulnerable to attack and can maintain a continuous posture in a way that aircraft and land-based alternatives cannot. Cruise missiles would not have the same range as the Trident missile, reducing the reach and capability of our deterrent.

## **The impact of new technologies**

The submarine platform will not, as some have claimed, be made obsolete by technological developments in underwater drones or cyber warfare. If such claims were true, the US, France, Russia and China would not be investing in similar, submarine based systems.

The oceans remain opaque and impervious below the surface to overhead imagery. The Ministry of Defence dedicates considerable resource to assessing such threats and mitigating accordingly.

On underwater drones, the oceans remain a vast, complex and challenging environment in which to conduct large scale anti-submarine warfare. On cyber-attack, submarines operate in isolation, so it is hard to think of a system less susceptible. Even so, the Ministry of Defence implements essential safeguards against cyber-attack, including software and hardware protection, personnel scrutiny, robust supply chains and training.

## **Cost**

While such a complex system requires significant investment, let me reassure you that the programme is affordable. We have estimated a cost of £31 billion, spread over 35 years. We have also set a £10 billion contingency. This represents an annual insurance policy of around 0.2% of total government spending: that is a price worth paying to protect our national security and one we can afford as we are increasing defence equipment spending to £178 billion over the next decade. It will also support tens of thousands of jobs across hundreds of companies in the UK and help sustain our nuclear skills base.

The UK's nuclear deterrent is the ultimate guarantee of our security. Parliament's support for renewing our deterrent will send an important message that, as Britain leaves the European Union, we remain committed to working alongside our NATO allies and playing our full role in the world. The national interest is clear.

I attach a briefing paper that summarises the key elements of the UK's nuclear deterrent. It has also been placed in the House of Commons library. I would encourage you and your constituents to find the latest information on the UK nuclear Deterrent at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-nuclear-deterrence-the-facts>

Yours sincerely,



**PHILIP DUNNE MP**