



Ministry of Defence

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Dear Mr Ingram

Thank you for your email dated 20 March 2015 to the Prime Minister, Foreign and Defence Secretaries and the Cabinet Secretary with an attached submission (dated 8 May 2015) to the Prime Minister regarding the UK's nuclear deterrent. It has been passed to me in the Ministry of Defence as the points you raise fall under my area of responsibility.

In your submission to the Prime Minister entitled; "Options Surrounding the Replacement of Trident", you make four recommendations which I will address in turn. Firstly, you recommend that the government "include Trident fully in the DSR [Defence and Security Review]". The government was elected on a mandate to renew Trident and provide continuous at sea deterrence. We will maintain a minimum, effective deterrent to provide the ultimate guarantee of our security against the most extreme threats. The Defence Secretary also confirmed in Parliament on 8 June 2015, "we are committed to replacing all four Vanguard submarines with new submarines that will serve this country until at least 2060". There are no plans to revisit this commitment during the forthcoming Strategic Defence and Security Review.

Your second recommendation is to "commission an analysis of the practicalities and implications of a further delay in the Main Gate decision with or without a change in operational posture." The Main Gate decision is scheduled for 2016 to allow an in-service date for the first Successor submarine in 2028. The 2028 in-service date for Successor means that the Vanguard-class will be around 35 years old when they leave service. We can sensibly manage and maintain the Vanguard boats out to this date but any longer would require a disproportionate level of spend on the platform to keep them in service and would jeopardise British industry's ability to design and construct nuclear submarines – a critical sovereign capability. The government is committed to the posture of continuous at-sea deterrence and therefore there are no plans to conduct an analysis on a change in operational posture.

There are no plans to update the 2013 Trident Alternatives Review, which is your third recommendation. The Review demonstrated that no alternative system is as capable or cost-effective as a Trident-based deterrent operating continuously at-sea. Parliament last debated Trident Renewal on 20 January 2015 and agreed to retain a minimum credible independent, nuclear deterrent, delivered through a Continuous At-Sea Deterrent by a majority of 329 votes.

Turning to your final recommendation, let me reassure you that the government takes all of its international obligations very seriously indeed. Despite our constructive engagement, we are disappointed that it was not possible to achieve a consensus outcome to the NPT Review Conference last month. We remain absolutely committed to the NPT, including the creation of a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone. The NPT will continue to be at the heart of global disarmament and non-proliferation efforts. Over the coming months we will continue to work with international partners to move the process forward.

The UK is committed to the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons and to zero tolerance of proliferation. We have reduced the size of our nuclear forces by well over 50% since our Cold War peak. The UK considers the NPT to be the cornerstone of global efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, promote the safe and secure use of civil nuclear energy and pursue the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. However, while the capability to threaten us with nuclear weapons remains, our nuclear deterrent plays an important part in ensuring our national security.

Yours sincerely

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

David Morgan