



# Summary: Maintaining the UK's Nuclear Deterrent

## Why do we need to take a decision now?

- The life of the Vanguard-class submarines can only be extended by about five years. Even with that life extension, they will start leaving service in the early 2020s and it will take around 17 years to develop a replacement.
- Unless we start work on a replacement now, we will be unable to maintain a continuous nuclear deterrent capability from the mid-2020s.
- Currently, we know of no state that has both a nuclear capability and the ability and intent to use it against our vital interests. But there are risks that capability and intent will become dangerously aligned over the period 2020 to 2050.
- We need to maintain a minimum nuclear deterrent to ensure future generations are properly insured against these risks. Now is not the time to abandon the protection which our nuclear deterrent provides.

## Why do we want to retain a nuclear deterrent?

- It is a fundamental responsibility of Government to provide for the security of the UK and its citizens now and for the future.
- The UK has maintained a nuclear deterrent since 1956, which has made a substantial contribution to peace and stability in Europe and beyond.
- The future is uncertain: accurately predicting events over the period 2020 to 2050 is extremely hard.
- There are worrying trends: nuclear proliferation continues; large nuclear arsenals remain, and some are being enlarged and modernised; and there is a potential risk from state-sponsored terrorists armed with nuclear weapons.
- Our nuclear forces must be credible if they are to be an effective deterrent. They must be invulnerable to attack, fully operationally independent, and have the range to cover all potential threats.
- A submarine is the most cost effective solution. Other options are much less effective and are at least as expensive.
- Ballistic missiles are more capable than cruise missiles in terms of range, payload and invulnerability. Retaining the Trident D5 missile is far cheaper than developing any new delivery system.
- We will maintain continuous at sea deterrent patrolling to ensure our deterrent remains fully credible. We currently need four submarines to maintain one continuously on patrol. We will investigate fully whether there is scope to make sufficiently radical changes to the design of the new submarines, and their operating, manning, training and support arrangements, to enable us to maintain continuous deterrent patrols with

a fleet of only three. A final decision on submarine numbers will be taken when we know more about their detailed design.

## What will this cost?

- Our initial estimate is that the procurement cost will be in the region of £15-20 billion (at today's prices) for four submarines and the associated equipment and infrastructure. The costs will become clearer as we engage in further detailed discussions with industry.
- It is not possible to be sure what the size of the defence budget will be over the timescales involved but the procurement costs are likely on average to be the equivalent of around 3% of the current defence budget over the main period of expenditure.
- The investment required to maintain our deterrent will not come at the expense of the conventional capabilities our armed forces need.

## International obligations

- Retaining our current nuclear deterrent capability is fully consistent with our international obligations.
- We will continue to work towards a safer world in which there is no requirement for nuclear weapons.
- We have an excellent record of meeting our commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). We are the only nuclear weapon State recognised under the NPT to have a deterrent based on a single platform, delivery system and warhead design, and have already significantly reduced the scale and readiness of our Trident system.
- We have now decided to reduce the number of operationally available nuclear warheads to less than 160, a cut of 20% compared to the previously declared maximum.
- We have reduced the upper limit on our operationally available nuclear warheads by nearly half since 1997.

## What decisions have been taken?

- We have decided to:
  - maintain our current Trident-based nuclear deterrent by procuring a new class of submarines;
  - participate in the US life extension programme for the Trident D5 missile;
  - make a further 20% reduction in our warhead stockpile.
- Decisions on whether and how we may need to refurbish or replace the current warhead are likely to be necessary in the next Parliament. A final decision on submarine numbers will be taken when we know more about their detailed design.

## Conclusion

We are committed to retaining our nuclear deterrent capability to provide effective deterrence, while setting an example, where possible, by reducing our nuclear capability and working multilaterally for nuclear disarmament and to counter nuclear proliferation. We believe this is the right balance between our commitment to a world in which there is no place for nuclear weapons and our responsibilities to protect the current and future citizens of the UK.