

Strategic Defence and Security Review

19 October 2010

Read the UK Statement in the First Committee

Speaker: **John Duncan, UK Ambassador for Multilateral Arms Control and Disarmament**

Event: **First Committee Debate**

Location: **General Assembly**

“ Mr Chairman,

Yesterday the UK government published a new National Security Strategy which is a reappraisal of Britain's role in the world and describes how – in an age of uncertainty – we need the structures in place to allow us to react quickly and effectively to new and evolving threats to our security.



Earlier today the Prime Minister announced the results of the Strategic Defence and Security Review which describes the means by which the UK will address those risks to its security and prosperity.

Today's SDSR reaffirms the UK's commitment to a submarine-launched minimum continuous nuclear deterrent based on the Trident missile delivery system, whilst taking tangible steps towards the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

In parallel with the SDSR we have conducted a review of our nuclear declaratory policy, and scrutinised the Trident replacement system to ensure value for money, including the scope for further reductions in the scale of our nuclear weapons capability. The outcomes of both reviews are announced in today's SDSR. The SDSR concludes that:

No state currently has both the intent and the capability to threaten the independence or integrity of the UK. But we cannot dismiss the possibility that a major nuclear threat to the UK might re-emerge – a state's intent in relation to the

use or threat of its capabilities could change relatively quickly, and while we will continue to work internationally to enhance mutual trust and security, we cannot rule out a major shift in the international security situation which would put us under grave threat.

Despite the success of the NPT over the last 40 years in limiting the number of states with nuclear capabilities, large arsenals remain and the risk of nuclear proliferation continues. We cannot discount the possibility that the number of states armed with nuclear weapons might increase. Equally there is a risk that some countries might in future seek to sponsor nuclear terrorism. We must not allow such states to threaten our national security or to deter us and the international community from taking the action required to maintain regional and global security.

It is also important to recognise that the UK's nuclear deterrent supports collective security through NATO for the Euro-Atlantic area; nuclear deterrence plays an important part in NATO's overall strategy and the UK's nuclear forces make a substantial contribution.

Nuclear Weapons Policy

In May 2010, during the NPT Review Conference, the Foreign Secretary announced a review of our nuclear declaratory policy to ensure that it is appropriate to the political and security context in 2010 and beyond. The UK has long been clear that we would only consider using our nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances of self defence, including the defence of our NATO allies, and we remain deliberately ambiguous about precisely when, how and at what scale we would contemplate their use.

As a responsible nuclear weapon state and party to the NPT, the UK also remains committed to the long term goal of a world without nuclear weapons. We will continue to work to control proliferation and to make progress on multilateral disarmament, to build trust and confidence between nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states, and to take tangible steps towards a safer and more stable world where countries with nuclear weapons feel able to relinquish them.

We are now able to give an assurance that the UK will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states parties to the NPT. In giving this assurance, we emphasise the need for universal adherence to and compliance with the NPT, and note that this assurance would not apply to any state in material breach of those non-proliferation obligations. We also note that while there is

currently no direct threat to the UK or its vital interests from states developing capabilities in other weapons of mass destruction, for example chemical and biological, we reserve the right to review this assurance if the future threat, development and proliferation of these weapons make it necessary.

Value for Money Review

The Government will maintain a continuous submarine-based deterrent and begin the work of replacing its existing submarines. We will therefore proceed with the renewal of Trident and the submarine replacement programme, incorporating savings of £3.2 billion and the changes set out below. The first investment decision (Initial Gate) will be approved, and the next phase of the project commenced, by the end of this year.

We have reviewed the scope to extend the life of our existing submarines and concluded that, with sufficient investment, we can safely operate them into the late 2020s and early 2030s. This means we can adjust the build programme of the replacement submarines to match, reducing cost in the short-term, with the aim of delivering the first new submarine in 2028.

The Government has concluded that we can meet the minimum requirement of an effective and credible level of deterrence with a smaller nuclear weapons capability. As a result we will:

- Reduce the number of warheads onboard each submarine from 48 to 40

- That will reduce our requirement for operationally available warheads from fewer than 160 to no more than 12.

- Reduce, over the next few years, the number of operational missiles on the Vanguard class submarines to no more than eight, and configure the next generation of submarines accordingly with only eight operational missile tubes.

- These changes will enable us to reduce our overall nuclear weapon stockpile to not more than 180 by the mid 2020s.

These changes do not alter in any way the nature and credibility of the nuclear deterrent, including our ability to maintain Continuous At Sea Deterrence.

Overall, the SDSR emphasises that the UK remains committed to the maintenance of a credible minimum deterrent. By setting out a new security assurance and the reduction in the scale of our deterrent through the value for money study, we are demonstrating our resolve to contribute towards multilateral disarmament. These are significant disarmament measures and indicate our level of commitment to the NPT, including a successful Review Conference in 2015.

Yesterday's National Security Strategy also set out the range of risks faced by the UK from hostile acts by terrorists or states, including using chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons. The SDSR today sets out UK's approach to addressing these threats to UK national security, including through the retention of critical capabilities at the national level, and by seeking proactively to strengthen multilateral initiatives to counter proliferation and secure fissile material and expertise from malicious use. To implement these requirements, the SDSR introduces a number of changes to government policy.

Specifically we will:

Work to strengthen international commitments to non-proliferation treaties such as the NPT, the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention. We will continue to support the international bodies that monitor and verify compliance against these commitments, such as the IAEA, and the OPCW

Refocus critical programmes for building security capacity overseas (such as the G8 Global Partnership-led Global Threat Reduction Programme) on the areas that represent the most serious risks to the UK: prioritising the security of nuclear, biological and chemical materials and expertise

Support international negotiations on an Arms Trade Treaty to ensure that defence trade is undertaken in a responsible manner, and to ensure the UK meets its obligations in its own export activity.

The full text of the UK's new National Security Strategy and the Strategic Defence and Security Review can be found on the UK's Cabinet Office website (www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk).

