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Rt.Hon. Malcolm Rifkind MP  
Secretary of State  
Ministry of Defence  
Main Building  
Whitehall  
London, SW1A 2HB

Dear Secretary of State,

**Trident Strategic Weapons System**

In 1987 a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General identified problems in the development of software for the Trident Strategic Weapons Systems (SWS). This was repeated in the Defence Committee 3rd Report, "The Progress of the Trident Programme", May 1988, page xvi para 37 which states:  
"..proving the effectiveness of the system for UK purposes is dependent on the production in the UK of software for targetting, modelling and effectiveness assessment. DGSWS currently has a shortage of scientific staff to carry out these tasks, and has had difficulty in recruiting such specialists since 1982. The position is not yet critical, but could become so, with a potential risk to assurance of the effectiveness of the UK system."

The 1988 report indicates that software development accounted for part of the UK element of the SWS costs, estimated at £147 million in the figures presented to the Defence Committee in February this year (Defence Committee 2nd Report, "The Progress of the Trident Programme", May 1994, p 23).

Now that the first missile tests have been conducted, presumably the reliability of this and other SWS software has now been proved and so I would be grateful if you could answer a number of questions:

1. Are there any outstanding problems with the targetting, modelling and effectiveness assessment software of the SWS?
2. Did the two missile tests carried out from HMS Vanguard in May and June 1994 achieve the expected results and are they regarded as completely successful?
3. Did the missile tests carried out from HMS Vanguard reveal any significant problems in the fire control and targetting software of the SWS?
4. What action has been taken to remedy any software problems in the SWS and what is the anticipated cost and timescale of such work?
5. Have any changes been made to the number or timing of missile tests as a result of the initial tests and have any changes been made to the in-service dates of submarines as a result?

Yours sincerely,

