

Key Points

- **The SDR conducted a rigorous re-examination of our deterrence requirements concluding that, while other countries maintain large nuclear arsenals and the risk of proliferation exists, a minimum deterrent remains a necessary element of our security. Deterrence is based on the *minimum* capability necessary to deter any threat to our vital interests, accordingly the UK has made reductions from Cold War weapon numbers.**
- **The UK's independent nuclear deterrent is vested entirely with TRIDENT which is assigned to NATO. As such it constitutes a force for European and global stability. TRIDENT is now the UK's only nuclear weapons system and has assumed a sub-strategic role, which is the credible ability to threaten nuclear action on a carefully limited scale, manifestly short of the ultimate sanction of strategic nuclear action it provides the linkage between strategic and conventional deterrence.**
- **The improved stealth capabilities of the VANGUARD class SSBNs, combined with the range and accuracy of the TRIDENT weapon system, will help to maintain the effectiveness, invulnerability and credibility of the UK's independent Strategic and Sub-Strategic deterrent well into the 21st century.**

Background

- The Government remains committed to a credible and effective minimum nuclear deterrent which provides ultimate guarantee of national security and remains the Department's highest priority.
- All four TRIDENT submarines, HMS VANGUARD, HMS VICTORIOUS, HMS VIGILANT and HMS VENGEANCE are now established in the operational cycle.
- The stealth and sophistication of the VANGUARD Class platform, together with the greater range of the TRIDENT missile system, helps to maintain the invulnerability of patrolling SSBNs against any likely ASW threat. The ability to remain in the deep ocean while accurately targeting at extremely long range increases the chance of a successful strike and minimises the hazard to SSBN.
- The stockpile of operationally available warheads has been reduced to around 200. The number of warheads carried by each SSBN has been reduced to 48 and, while we will maintain continuous-at-sea deterrence patrols, the missiles are de-targeted and will normally be at several days "notice to fire". This will allow greater use of the submarines for secondary tasks
- Since the end of March 1998, TRIDENT has been the UK's only nuclear weapons system. The addition of this sub-strategic capability has not affected strategic effectiveness, neither does it make nuclear use easier to contemplate, more likely, or more applicable to action against smaller countries. The UK would only ever use its nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances in defence of our vital interests.