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## Portillo calls for nuclear weapons to be scrapped

Former Defence Secretary Michael Portillo has called on the Government to scrap nuclear missiles, saying that the collapse of the Soviet Union meant that they were no longer necessary.

Mr Portillo, who stood down from his Kensington and Chelsea seat at the last election, said that the money saved could instead be spent on hardware such as aircraft carriers.

"The case for Britain having an independent nuclear deterrent depended on the existence of the Soviet Union," he wrote in a Sunday newspaper.

"None of those considerations applies today. Whatever residual risk may be posed by Russia's poorly managed nuclear arsenal can be handled by the United States.

"If the UK diverts billions of pounds from its future defence budgets into nuclear weapons that will never be used, it will have less money to spend on useful things such as aircraft carriers and submarines that fire cruise missiles.

"We could be more powerful and a more useful ally for America if we did not waste money on renewing the nuclear deterrent."

A Government decision on any replacement for Trident is expected within the next three or four years.

In an interview on the ITV Jonathan Dimbleby programme today, Defence Secretary John Reid restated that the Government would retain "the minimum nuclear deterrent".

He said: "The major issue for us is what should we do on nuclear weapons and over the past five years under this Government we have reduced the number of war heads, we have de-targeted the Trident boats we've reduced the number of boats at sea on nuclear weapons, we got rid of our free fall nuclear bombs, all when I was Minister for the Armed Forces.

"So isn't true that we haven't made some advance, but while others have nuclear weapons we have said we will retain the minimum nuclear deterrent."

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