



HMS VANGUARD

[Picture: Lt Stuart Antrobus RN]

The Foreign Secretary, Margaret Beckett, said:

"This decision to retain our deterrent at minimum levels is fully compatible with all our international legal obligations. We remain committed to working for a world free of nuclear weapons. I am pleased that it has been possible to take further practical steps in this direction in this White Paper. The UK now has the smallest arsenal of the five recognised nuclear weapons powers. And the UK now accounts for only one per cent of the global stockpile of nuclear weapons."

Three possible future scenarios are identified in the white paper that could develop over the coming decades: the re-emergence of a strategic nuclear threat; the emergence of new nuclear powers that could threaten British vital interests; and the deliberate equipping of terrorist groups with nuclear weapons by a state sponsor. To be effective the UK's deterrent must be able to operate independently, be immune from pre-emptive action and reach the territory of any potential aggressor. The most credible and cost-effective method of delivering this remains the minimum independent nuclear deterrent provided by a submarine based deterrent system. A full analysis of potential future nuclear threats and deterrent options is set out in the White Paper, and accompanying factsheets. (see **Related Links >>>**) .

Britain has maintained an operational nuclear deterrent since 1956. Today's decision allows for this to continue beyond the 2020s, potentially into the 2050s. Since 1969 there has been a nuclear armed British submarine continuously at sea somewhere in the world's oceans. Uniquely among the nuclear weapons states recognised under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, Britain has reduced its deterrent to a single nuclear weapons system: the Trident D5 missile on board four Vanguard class submarines.

The first of the current Vanguard fleet, HMS Vanguard, was launched in 1992 and the second, HMS Victorious, in 1994. The submarines have a design life of 25 years. A successor to Vanguard is expected to take 17 years to develop from the concept phase through to final operational deployment, so a decision is needed now if we are to maintain continuous deterrence patrolling. The first new submarine needs to be operational by the time HMS Victorious leaves service in 2024.

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