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The Secretary of State for Defence (Dr Liam Fox): With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement on our nuclear deterrent programme.

The House will be aware that we have been considering the next stage of investment—called initial gate—in the programme to deliver a successor to our current nuclear deterrent. This is the point in the Ministry of Defence's procurement cycle at which we decide on broad design parameters, set out our plans for detailed system assessment and order any long lead items that might be required. Taking this action enables us to be sure that we will make the right decisions at the key investment stage, at the main gate, which for this submarine programme will be in 2016. I am announcing today that we have approved the initial gate investment and selected a submarine design that will be powered by a new generation of nuclear propulsion system—the pressurised water reactor 3—that will allow our submarines to deliver our nuclear deterrent capability well into the 2060s if required.

At this milestone in the project, I think it is useful for me to remind the House of this Government's policy on the nuclear deterrent. The first duty of any Government is to ensure the security of their people. The nuclear deterrent provides the ultimate guarantee of our national security, and for the past 42 years the Royal Navy has successfully operated continuous deterrent patrols to ensure just that. I pay tribute to the crews and support staff who ensure the continued success of deterrent operations, and I extend that tribute to the families of all those personnel, many of whom are regularly away from home for long periods.

We assess that no state currently has both the intent and the capability to threaten the independence or integrity of the United Kingdom, but we cannot dismiss the possibility that a major direct nuclear threat to the UK might re-emerge. We simply do not know how the international environment will change in the next few years, let alone the next 50 years; and as this House concluded in 2007 when it voted on whether the UK should start a programme to renew the deterrent, the time is simply not right to do away with it unilaterally. That is not to say that if the time is right we will not move away from nuclear weapons at some time in the future. Our long-term goal remains a world without them, and we are doing all we can to counter proliferation, to make progress on multilateral disarmament, and to build trust and confidence with nations across the globe.

In this spirit, as part of the value-for-money study we reviewed carefully how we manage our deterrent programme, and concluded that we could take significant steps to demonstrate our commitment to disarmament: by reducing the number of warheads carried on each deterrent submarine from no more than 48 to no more than 40; by consequently reducing our overall stockpile of nuclear weapons from no more than 225 to no more than 180 in due course; and by giving a stronger assurance to non-nuclear weapon states in compliance with the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. The value-for-money study delivered £3 billion of savings and deferrals over the next 10 years.

The coalition agreement reflected both coalition parties' commitment to a minimum credible nuclear deterrent, but also the desire of the Liberal Democrats to make

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the case for alternatives. As Secretary of State for Defence, I am absolutely clear that a minimum nuclear deterrent based on the Trident missile delivery system and continuous at-sea deterrence is right for the United Kingdom and that it should be maintained, and that remains Government policy;

but to assist the Liberal Democrats in making the case for alternatives, I am also announcing today the initiation of a study to review the costs, feasibility and credibility of alternative systems and postures. The study will be led by Cabinet Office officials overseen by the Minister for the Armed Forces. A copy of the terms of reference of the study will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

As I have said, the Government have approved the initial gate for the nuclear deterrent successor programme. We have now agreed the broad outline design of the submarine, made some of the design choices—including the propulsion system and the common US-UK missile compartment—and the programme of work we need to start building the first submarine after 2016. We have also agreed the amount of material and parts we will need to buy in advance of the main investment decision.

We expect the next phase of work to cost in the region of £3 billion. That is a significant sum, but I am confident that it represents value for money for the taxpayer, as every aspect of the programme has been carefully reviewed by MOD, Treasury and Cabinet Office officials. It will fund the programme that we need to conduct to make sure that we can bring the submarines into service on time. Overall, we assess that the submarine element of the programme will still cost within the £11 billion to £14 billion estimate set out in the 2006 White Paper, but these costs were estimated at 2006 prices, of course, and did not account for inflation. The equivalent sum today is £20 billion to £25 billion at out-turn, but it is important to recognise that there has been no cost growth in the programme since the House first considered the findings of the White Paper. 720-20

Between now and main gate we expect to spend about 15% of the total value of the programme. That is entirely consistent with defence procurement guidance. The cost of long lead items is expected to amount to about £500 million, but it is not true to say that large parts of the build programme will have been completed by main gate. Although we are ordering some of the specialist components, that does not mean that we are locked into any particular strategy before main gate in 2016. 1

I would like to focus for a moment on the matter of nuclear safety. There has been some ill-informed comment suggesting that our nuclear propulsion systems are not safe. That is simply not true. All our nuclear propulsion plants meet the stringent safety standards set out by the defence nuclear safety regulator and the Health and Safety Executive. However, we are developing a new design of submarine, and it is right that we take advantage of the opportunity that that affords to advance our policy of seeking continual improvement of nuclear safety. A new propulsion plant allows us to do that while also giving us the opportunity to improve the availability of propulsion systems and lower through-life support costs.

I have announced a major step forward in this programme. We have some of the finest submarine builders in the world, and the approval of the next phase of work in the programme will secure the jobs of

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the highly skilled and professional work force already involved in it, as well as providing further opportunities for the engineers and apprentices of the future. However, both my Department and industry will have much to do to deliver this programme and to ensure both that we continue to maintain the sustainability of the submarine industry and that we improve performance and drive costs down through more efficient and inclusive working. I am confident that all sides will respond to this challenge.

This is a programme of great national importance, so today I am placing in the Library of the House a report that sets out in detail the work that has been completed so far, the key decisions that I have presented to the House today, and the work that is required over the coming months and years. I believe that the decisions we have taken on our nuclear deterrent programme at initial gate are the right decisions for the country and that, as a result, future generations will continue to benefit from the security we have been so fortunate to enjoy.

Mr Jim Murphy (East Renfrewshire) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State both for his statement and for providing advance sight of it. I join him in paying tribute to all our forces operating our deterrent and their families, and to our skilled civilian work force who help to build and maintain our defence capabilities. Let me also stress once again that where the Government do the right thing on defence policy, we will, in the national interest, support them.

Britain's independent deterrent has been the cornerstone of our peace and security for over half a century, and our view is that, in today's world, as long as there are other countries with such capability it is right that the UK retains an independent nuclear deterrent. In what will be a detailed debate on the military, technical and financial aspects of today's announcement, there is a careful judgment to be made: whether we believe the threats posed to our nation and our interests to be such that we are more secure with the UK having our own independent deterrent. Most of us believe in a world free of nuclear weapons and a multilateral process to achieve that, whereas others take a different and unilateralist view, born of a myriad of traditions such as faith, passivism, political commitment or concerns about costs. I respect all those views but take a different approach.

The previous Government met their commitment in the December 2006 White Paper to reduce the number of operationally available warheads to fewer than 160, meaning that the UK has reduced its nuclear arsenal by 75% since the end of the cold war. We welcome this Government's announcements in the strategic defence and security review to reduce the number of operationally available warheads and the overall weapons stockpile. We will continue strongly to advocate the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Its three pillars—non-proliferation, disarmament and the right to use civil nuclear power peacefully—provide the framework around which we should base our policy.

The greatest nuclear threats we face today come from proliferation and unilateral armament, specifically from North Korea, which we know has a nuclear capability, and Iran, which we know has nuclear ambitions. The most robust response to those threats is for the UK to

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remain committed to the NPT and to be an active disarmer, alongside our allies and other nuclear weapons states. Maintaining our independent deterrent as part of international non-proliferation efforts is therefore vital in enabling us to combat the threats we face at home, and to sustain regional and global security.

I now wish to deal with some specific questions about the review announced today. In 2007, Parliament took the view that it would support the position set out by the previous Government in the 2006 White Paper of replacing the current Vanguard class submarines and maintaining an independent, continuous at-sea submarine-based nuclear deterrent. The decision then was based on evidence and military advice. The Government have announced today that as we move towards main gate there is logic in looking again at some of the defence capability and financial issues relating to how best to maintain a credible, minimum, independent nuclear deterrent. It is important that this is an open process. What is crucial is that the process is evidence-based and in the interests

of national security, and that it is not, on occasion, driven by the dynamic within the coalition parties.

I wish to ask the Secretary of State some specific questions. Will the review look at the Government's procurement policy in this Parliament for materials for successor submarines? Will the review look at international co-operation over nuclear policy, including deeper co-operation with France above and beyond the agreements made in the UK-France defence co-operation treaty, which we welcomed? Finally, on the review, can he confirm that the Minister for the Armed Forces is a one-man ministerial review team?

It was announced in the SDSR that initial gate was due to take place by the end of 2010. Can the Secretary of State tell us the reason for the delay and how much it will add to the cost of the programme over its lifetime? He said there were £500 million of costs for long lead items. Can he say what these items are? Can he say what the total cost of the replacement programme will be, and over what period? He made some comments about that, but can he also say from which budgets the overall costs will be met? Can he say whether both the running and construction costs will come from the core defence budget, and whether he has any estimate on the impact that may have on other equipment programmes?

The SDSR stated that the Government would reduce the costs of the successor programme by a total of £3.2 billion over the next 10 years. Can the Secretary of State say whether that takes into account the £1.2 billion to £1.4 billion additional costs of extending the life of the Vanguard class submarines in service until 2028? What reassurances has he been given that extending the life of the Vanguard class submarines is indeed safe? Can he make it clear how much is being spent on the new PWR3 reactors, and over what period?

In conclusion, Labour remains committed to a minimum, credible, independent nuclear deterrent, and we welcome the announcements made today by the Government. This decision will have an impact on our nation and beyond for decades to come, and it is crucial that government finds additional ways to involve Parliament in the decision-making process. Labour will always do what is right for the UK's defence and national interests, and the country would expect the Government to continue to do the same.

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Dr Fox: I shall do my best to answer the long list of questions that the right hon. Gentleman asked. I shall check *Hansard*, and if I have missed any I shall write to him with further details.

May I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the Opposition's support for the principle of this policy? Cross-party support adds greatly to the credibility of our deterrence policy, which is an essential part of the protection of our country. He rightly says that the major proliferation risk at the moment comes from North Korea and Iran. We do not know whether other countries will join in that so, as he says, it is entirely prudent to retain a minimum, independent, credible nuclear deterrent for the United Kingdom.

The right hon. Gentleman asked a number of specific questions about costs. The costs of the various items were set out in the 2006 White Paper, when they were broadly split into: £11 billion to £14 billion for the submarine; £2 billion to £3 billion for the warhead; and £2 billion to £3 billion for infrastructure. We believe that those costs are still contained in the programme itself. He asked specifically about long lead items, on which, as I said in my statement, approximately £500 million will be spent. They include: the specialised high-grade steel; the main boat systems, such as the

computer systems, hydraulic systems and atmospheric systems, the generators and the communications systems; and specialist components, including steam generators and test rigs for the propulsion plants.

On our wider international co-operation, we continue to work, as we set out in our treaty with France, on the capabilities required constantly to maintain the safety of our warheads. There are no plans for collaboration on deployment of a deterrent that goes beyond the treaty that has been signed. Agreement with the United States on the major parameters of the jointly developed common missile compartment design, which will be capable of carrying the Trident D5 missiles and any replacement once the D5 reaches the end of its life in the 2040s, has been a major part of our cost containment during the process.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the overall costs of the programme. As I said, £3 billion of those will fall between now and 2016. The costs for the years that fall within the current comprehensive spending review are met by the current defence budget settlement. He asked about the life and costs of the Vanguard class submarines. Our assessment when we undertook the value-for-money study was that we could extend Vanguard's life to 2028 without having huge additional maintenance and upgrade costs, and while preserving our continuous at-sea deterrent—CASD. To go beyond 2028 would almost certainly have huge cost implications and may have implications for CASD that we are not willing to undertake. Those were the reasons we took the overall decision, and I hope that I have answered the right hon. Gentleman's specific questions.

Sir Menzies Campbell (North East Fife) (LD): My right hon. Friend is well known for his independence and openness of mind, as was shown by his recently published correspondence with the Prime Minister. May we take it that the conclusions of the study to which he has referred will be published? Given that independence of mind, may we also take it that if the study produces credible procurement and policy alternatives, he will take proper account of them?

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Dr Fox: I have always thought that our independence of mind was why we were sent to the House of Commons in the first place, but perhaps I was mistaken. Because of the nature of the content of the report, most of it will remain unpublished, but I will consider whether its conclusions might be published without in any way prejudicing the security of the project itself. As I have just outlined, the Government are committed to the replacement of the Trident system, and the spend will go ahead through the rest of this Parliament.

Mr Bob Ainsworth (Coventry North East) (Lab): On costs, does the Secretary of State accept that since the election two things, effectively, have gone on? Savings have been made as a result of the joint missile compartment and the reduction in the number of war heads, but those savings have been completely wiped out by the political decision demanded by the Liberal Democrats to extend the procurement period beyond the next election. I would have thought that those political decisions have led to costs approaching £2.5 billion, if one takes into account the necessity to build an additional Astute class submarine just to keep Barrow going. One might think that in the circumstances faced by the Secretary of State this might not have been his priority, what with all the other cuts he was making and the additional maintenance round that will now be needed for the existing fleet. How much more additional cost will there be as a result of the separate review? In a Department in which we are bearing down on manpower and reducing the skills available, we are now applying the skill base to an ongoing, second round assessment and review.

Dr Fox: The costs of the alternatives review are met from existing departmental budgets and no additional costs will be associated with it. As I have said, when we take into account the different developments, including the fact that we have taken costs out of the missile compartment, as the right hon. Gentleman correctly says, and have reassessed the infrastructure required, we believe that there has been no additional net cost to the programme on the 2006 prices.

Mr James Arbuthnot (North East Hampshire) (Con): Whatever my right hon. Friend's openness of mind, does he personally agree that the real choice is between a ballistic system and no nuclear deterrent at all? Although there are perfectly respectable arguments for both propositions, the idea of having a vulnerable cruise-based system misses the point of nuclear deterrence altogether.

Dr Fox: I have made it clear on a number of occasions why I believe that having a ballistic, submarine-based system providing continuous at-sea deterrence is the only way to guarantee the level of deterrence that this country has come to regard as the minimum credible level. A number of disadvantages relate to any cruise system, including the fact that the missiles are more vulnerable to anti-missile defences, that they are slower and that there are cost implications because we would require more of them and more platforms from which to launch them. I am very relaxed about any consideration of the alternatives because I believe that anyone who has looked at the criteria and the information behind the 2006 White Paper will rapidly come to the conclusion that if we want a minimum credible nuclear deterrent for the United Kingdom, this system, which will be provided by the replacement Trident system, is the best and in fact the only credible one.

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Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): This is a very depressing statement today. First, the Secretary of State gave us no indication of the long-term total costs of the system—he said only that £5 billion would be committed now. Will it cost £70 billion in total, or more? We should be told. Secondly, 184 countries manage without their own nuclear weapons, and most countries see no need whatsoever even to think about getting them. We are spending a vast amount of money on a status symbol that will make the world not a safer place but a more dangerous one. The Secretary of State's arguments about deterrence are nonsense because those arguments could be used for any country in the world. Most choose to take active steps to bring about a nuclear-free world; this country should do the same.

Dr Fox: I appreciate the sincerity of the hon. Gentleman's views; I just profoundly disagree with them. As I have said, we assess that the costs have not changed from the 2006 basic programme. I also said that, taking inflation into account, we expect them to be some £20 billion to £25 billion at out-turn. The hon. Gentleman is quite wrong: there is a growing nuclear threat in the world from such countries as North Korea and Iran. Who knows what other countries might be trying to develop nuclear technology and weaponisation? Those countries pose a wider risk and our nuclear deterrence is not just the UK's independent deterrent but part of the wider NATO nuclear umbrella. It is important that the reductions that have been announced as regards warheads and stockpiles are not only within the letter but within the spirit of the NPT and set a clear direction for future Government policy.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I am really rather worried that my right hon. Friend is in danger of inflicting cruel and unusual punishment on the Minister for the Armed Forces, who is really quite a decent chap. If the Secretary of State, like me, had had the experience of watching the hon. Gentleman address the Liberal Democrat conference on this subject, he would have seen that it was indistinguishable from a CND revivalist meeting. How is it fair to the Minister for the Armed Forces to confront him on the one hand with serious arguments about why Trident is the only option

while on the other hand requiring him to go back to the Liberal Democrats and tell them that unavoidable conclusion?

Dr Fox: I rather fear that my hon. Friend is a little too late. Having made my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces sit through some 57 hours of the strategic defence and security review, I feel I have already inflicted a cruel and unusual punishment on him. I refer my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) back to the advice he gave me when we were in opposition, which was that we should never be afraid to have the most rigorous look at alternative systems. When one considers the evidence, the costings and the threats, one inevitably comes to the conclusion that a submarine-based continuous at-sea deterrent based on the Trident system will be the best protection for the United Kingdom. I take him at his word and I am not at all afraid to consider the alternatives.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): Given the phenomenal cost of this weapons system and given that we will commit future generations to it by these

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actions, I believe that people have the right to understand whether this weapons system can be used. What are the circumstances in which Trident would be used? Will the Secretary of State tell the House?

Dr Fox: This has always been at the heart of the deterrent argument. The whole point is that there is uncertainty about the circumstances in which the United Kingdom would respond, and the system therefore acts as a proper deterrent. We would hope that such weapons would never have to be used because they would deter any threat against us. That is the principle and the core of the issue and it is something that the unilateralists never understood.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Without, obviously, asking the Secretary of State to go into any sort of detail, will he make absolutely certain that the phasing out of Nimrod will not make our submarines more vulnerable to counter-attack?

Dr Fox: We have a number of ways of ensuring the protection of our deterrent and, as my hon. Friend says, he would not expect me to go into it. As for the Nimrod MRA4 programme, to which he might be referring, I must remind him that that capability was not available to us because the programme was already nine years late and the aircraft had not flown other than in one test that was abandoned for safety reasons. I am afraid that the failure of procurement over a number of years made that capability unavailable today.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): I thank the Secretary of State for advance notice of his statement. He is well aware that majority opinion in Scotland is opposed to Trident, yet the UK Government are planning to spend billions of pounds of Scottish taxpayers' money on it. Scotland's Churches, the Scottish Trades Union Congress and Scottish civic society are also opposed to Trident, but the MOD wants to base these weapons of mass destruction in Scotland while cutting conventional defence. Scotland's parliamentarians have not voted for this. What kind of respect agenda is this from the London Government, who totally ignore Scottish opinion and go ahead anyway? The Secretary of State is making the most eloquent case for Scottish independence.

Dr Fox: It would be hard to make a less eloquent case for Scottish independence! It is important that we recognise that defence was retained in the UK Parliament in the devolution settlement and that

decisions about national security are taken by this House of Commons. Given the attitudes of the Scottish National party, the whole of the United Kingdom should be grateful.

Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): It is of course always open for any political party or any part of any political party to take a different view from Her Majesty's Government. Can the Secretary of State think of any precedent whatsoever for public money, ministerial time and resources being used to bolster and examine the manifesto commitment of one particular party that might or might not be part of the coalition?

Dr Fox: There are realities of coalition government that simply have to be faced. As part of the coalition agreement, we made it very clear that we would continue

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and move to the decisions I have announced today, but we also made it clear that the Liberal Democrats, as one of the coalition partners, would be free to make the case for alternatives. We have lived up to that commitment today.

John Woodcock (Barrow and Furness) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State knows that approval of initial gate is overdue and it is good that more work can finally go ahead, but let me be clear: he has placed yet another review on the future of the deterrent in the hands of a Minister from the Liberal Democrats—a party that is predisposed to rejecting the only option that makes any sense. How can the Secretary of State give us confidence that he will prevent his colleagues, from the Prime Minister down, from playing politics on this issue and that he will back Barrow so that it can deliver for the nation?

Dr Fox: What I am making clear today is that for the rest of this Parliament we will be going ahead with the replacement programme. We are setting out the budget, the areas of policy and the industrial implications for doing so. As I have said, it is part of the coalition agreement that the Liberal Democrats are able to look at these alternatives. Having looked, as Secretary of State since we came to office, at all the alternatives in great detail, including the costs and the implications for defence, I remain absolutely confident that the study is very likely to come to exactly the same conclusion as the 2006 White Paper, but we have given a commitment and we are carrying that out, through Cabinet Office officials, for our Liberal Democrat partners in the coalition. We made an agreement and we are going to honour it.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the independent nuclear deterrent is being used all the time because it is, by definition, a deterrent to potential enemies? The firing of the weapon would be a disaster of course, but the point of its possession is to prevent that.

Dr Fox: I cannot fault my hon. Friend's logic. He understands the whole basis of the concept of deterrence. Of course, the deterrent is designed to protect the United Kingdom from the threat of nuclear blackmail, but we still have to work hard to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons in other parts of the world as a complementary, not an alternative, policy.

Mike Gapes (Ilford South) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State said in a small phrase in his statement that "if the time is right", we could move away from nuclear weapons. Given the strategic arms agreement between the United States and Russia and the successful outcome of the non-proliferation review conference last year, neither of which he has mentioned, when does he think the time will be right to put British nuclear weapons into international disarmament multilateral negotiations?

Dr Fox: In making reductions that go further than necessary we are, as I have already said, not only within the letter of the NPT but well within the spirit of it. The reductions that we have made in going ahead with this programme show that we are committed to seeing lower levels of nuclear weapons worldwide. As long as the threat to the United Kingdom remains, it is prudent for us to maintain a minimum credible nuclear deterrent.

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How big that credible deterrent is will obviously be reviewed as a matter of policy, but as long as it is required and as long as this Government are in office we will retain it.

James Morris (Halesowen and Rowley Regis) (Con): The Secretary of State said that it is difficult for us to predict events that will happen in the future, but what we do know is that we have instability in Pakistan and a nuclear-ambitious Iran and that North Korea is developing further nuclear capability. Does he agree that it would be strategically naive for the UK Government to make any decisions that would prevent us from being able to deter threats and emerging threats in the world in future?

Dr Fox: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. I wonder how many in the House predicted the Arab spring or what was going to happen in Libya. We have little ability to predict what is happening in the strategic security environment and as long as the threat remains there and, in particular, as long as nuclear proliferation continues in states such as North Korea and Iran, the Government simply will not gamble with the future security of generations of British people.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): May I press the Secretary of State on his decision to introduce a study to assist the Liberal Democrats in making the case for alternatives? What will really be the extra cost of this new study?

Dr Fox: I repeat the answer I have already given to this question. I have already said that the costs are contained within departmental budgets. The study will be led by Cabinet Office officials, there is more than sufficient expertise on this subject, believe me, inside the Ministry of Defence, and ministerial oversight will be provided by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): May I first welcome the statement by the Secretary of State? Does he agree that the United Kingdom's capability as a nuclear-armed state helps it to have a seat on the international top table and helps with global policy?

Dr Fox: I do not think that having a nuclear deterrent does anything to diminish the status of the United Kingdom but our ability to influence world events is a combination of a range of things including military power, economic power and diplomatic power, all of which we exercise in the furtherance of our national interests.

Thomas Docherty (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): The Secretary of State has demonstrated that he is a principled and honourable man. Does he therefore understand the concern on both sides of the House, and indeed in the country, that given the decision not to have carrier capability for more than a decade, as the First Sea Lord confirmed last week to the Select Committee on Defence, we could, for financial reasons, have no continuous deterrent at sea because the decision will be postponed for so long that it becomes financially unviable?

Dr Fox: I am not entirely sure that I grasped the essence of the hon. Gentleman's question. We will have continuous at-sea deterrence because this programme

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will seamlessly move into the replacement programme in 2028. The whole point is that we have continuous at-sea deterrence to give us a credible deterrent for the country.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the main plank of deterrence is mutually assured destruction but that for MAD to work one has to be sane and the countries that want to acquire nuclear weapons today are very different from the countries that have them and had them in the cold war? Does he agree that the Government, NATO and other western nations should revisit the strategic defence initiative so that we have the ability to destroy nuclear weapons if they are unleashed from such regimes?

Dr Fox: The point of our nuclear deterrent is to deter a nuclear threat to the United Kingdom from wherever that threat occurs. I make the point again that it is not a choice between having a nuclear deterrent and having a stronger non-proliferation policy—we need both if we are to have a safer Britain and a safer global environment.

Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The Secretary of State rightly says that the “first duty of any Government is to ensure the security of their people”. If it really is the case, as he also says, that the “nuclear deterrent provides the ultimate guarantee of our national security”, does he accept the logic of his own argument, which means that all nations should seek to acquire nuclear weapons to ensure the security of their people and does he look forward to a world in which every nation is nuclear-armed?

Dr Fox: I look forward to a world in which the nuclear threat is being reduced, and we are reducing our nuclear stockpile as part of taking that process forward. I hope that we will see a time when fewer countries will want to enter into nuclear proliferation. We have an international non-proliferation treaty for exactly that purpose and the status of the United Kingdom and other countries was recognised in that treaty when it was drawn up. In putting forward the proposals we believe not only that we are providing a safe future for the United Kingdom by maintaining our deterrent but that in reducing the number of warheads we have, we are setting our direction very clearly towards a world in which we hope to see the elimination, over time, of this wider threat from weapons of mass destruction.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): I welcome the study of alternatives. It would be a shame to waste that initial investment should a subsequent Government decide to cancel Trident, having read the report, at the main decision point in 2016—I suspect that during the 2015 election campaign that is what the Liberal Democrats will argue should happen—so can the Secretary of State confirm that new propulsion systems and other technology could be used in submarines deployed in other contexts and not just as part of a Trident programme?

Dr Fox: There is a certain read-across from the Astute to the Trident replacement and the UK should certainly take great pride in our technical capabilities in the submarine arena. However, the hon. Gentleman rather

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jumps the gun in determining what his party's position will be at the next election before the study on alternatives has been carried out.

Cathy Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State understand that many people will find it shocking that we are talking about value for money in the context of weapons of mass destruction, for which no moral case can be made? May I press him further on the point made earlier in relation to deterrence? Surely if something is to act as a deterrent, there must be a reasonable assumption that at some stage it may be used. What are the circumstances in which the Secretary of State would sanction the use of nuclear weapons? If he cannot give a straight answer to that, is it not time for the UK to move towards disarming and not to replace Trident?

Dr Fox: I have never accepted the arrogant attitude that there is no moral case for a deterrent. I can appreciate that there are arguments for and against, but the argument that only one side has any moral legitimacy I have always found rather repugnant. We believe that protecting the 60 million people of the United Kingdom from the threat of nuclear blackmail from wherever that threat may come is not only morally justifiable, but is the duty of the Government.

Stephen Metcalfe (South Basildon and East Thurrock) (Con): I, too, welcome the statement from my right hon. Friend and his full commitment to future investment in our nuclear deterrent. What assurances can he give me that that investment will be spread as widely as possible across the UK to make sure that companies in my constituency, South Basildon and East Thurrock, have an opportunity to benefit from this announcement?

Dr Fox: We will spread the costs wherever we are achieving our objective industrially, which is sustainability, secured by getting the costs down and the performance up. I am sure that if my hon. Friend has any specific examples of companies that would like to bid for the work, the Ministry of Defence will be only too happy to listen.

Mr Andrew Love (Edmonton) (Lab/Co-op): The Secretary of State seems to believe that simply by reducing the number of weapons, he is complying with the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Does he accept that we need to do far more in that regard if we are to have any influence in Iran, North Korea and all the other states that we do not know about, which are developing nuclear weapons?

Dr Fox: I am just a little stumped by the logic of that. We announced some time ago that we are reducing the number of warheads carried per submarine, the number that are operationally available, and our total stockpile. Countries such as Iran and North Korea are continuing with their proliferation policy, so there does not seem to be any correlation between what we are doing—making those gestures—which goes well beyond the letter of what is required of us under non-proliferation, and any ability of the rest of the world to predict what rogue regimes such as North Korea will do. As long as that threat remains, and as long as proliferation remains a threat to the United Kingdom, we must maintain the protection of our people.

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Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): The Secretary of State indicated that the costs between now and 2016 were containable within his budget for the spending review period, but there have been widespread reports in recent days that he is looking for further cuts in his budget to meet his commitments. Can he reassure us that the costs can be met without detriment to the rest of the defence budget?

Dr Fox: The short answer is yes, but what I said was that a proportion of the costs that I outlined today, which go to 2016, fall within the current comprehensive spending review period. I am happy to give the hon. Lady the reassurance that the cost of that element which falls within that CSR period is already met by the departmental budget.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I welcome the Secretary of State's statement. He mentioned that the programme was of great national importance for the whole United Kingdom. A majority of our great nation want our national defences to be strong, and a nuclear deterrent is clearly a core part of that. It is also clear that we need to work alongside our European colleagues to have a strong deterrent. What discussions has the right hon. Gentleman had with them to ensure that the cost of maintaining the deterrent falls on the shoulders not only of the United Kingdom, but of some of our European colleagues?

Dr Fox: Clearly, the costs of the British deterrent fall upon the British taxpayer, the costs of the French deterrent fall upon the French taxpayer and the costs of the US deterrent upon the US taxpayer. There is a great deal of work that we can do together to minimise costs. We have worked with the US on the missile system, we have worked on the common compartment, and we have worked with the French on reducing the costs of ensuring the safety of our warheads. When it comes to the consensus in the House and the country, it is fair to pause and reflect that at the general election, the two largest parties supported the replacement of the Trident programme. The Liberal Democrats supported the concept of minimum credible deterrent, so any idea that the public have not given their assent to this in principle is to fly in the face of the reality of the ballot box.