

The UK would employ nuclear weapons only in extreme circumstances of self-defence and would not use any of our weapons contrary to international law, including those relating to the conduct of armed conflict. You have stated that our nuclear deterrent runs contrary to the UK's obligations under the Geneva Convention to protect 'civilian populations' and 'natural environments'. Please note that the UK Declaration on ratification of the first Additional Protocol (which includes Article 51 (protection of the civilian population) & Article 55 (protection of the natural environment)) to the Geneva Convention (1977) included the following reservation:

*"It continues to be the understanding of the United Kingdom that the rules introduced by the Protocol apply exclusively to conventional weapons without prejudice to any other rules of international law applicable to other types of weapons. In particular, the rules so introduced do not have any effect on and do not regulate or prohibit the use of nuclear weapons"*

Please be assured that the UK is committed to achieving the long-term goal of a world without nuclear weapons and continues to work with our Allies and partners to try to make nuclear weapons less necessary, with the goal of making them unnecessary. The UK considers the Non-proliferation Treaty to be the cornerstone of global efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons, promote safe and secure use of civil nuclear energy and pursue the goal of a world without nuclear weapons, otherwise known as the Grand Bargain. The UK is committed to retaining only the minimum destructive power necessary to achieve our deterrence objectives and have reduced the size of our own nuclear forces by well over 50% since our Cold War peak. Our nuclear arsenal now represents about 1% of the total global stockpile of nuclear weapons.

However, while we have repeatedly reduced the size of our deterrent there remain some 17,000 nuclear weapons globally and it would be irresponsible to disarm unilaterally while the capability to threaten us with nuclear weapons remains.

Therefore, we cannot discount the risk that a nuclear threat will emerge in the future and we therefore judge that a minimum nuclear deterrent is likely to remain an important element of our national and NATO's security.

I hope this explains the position.

Yours sincerely,