

A doctrine Of 'minimum deterrence'

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▶ 'Minimum deterrence'

British nuclear posture is described by the Government as 'minimum deterrence' based on much lower levels of nuclear weapons than those of America and the Soviet Union/Russia. It is based on the ability to inflict massive devastation upon an opponent with minimum nuclear force. Since the end of the Cold War Britain has reduced its arsenal from approximately 400 to 160 warheads and has reduced to one nuclear weapon system in Trident.

The Government states that its posture of minimum deterrence requires one of the four *Vanguard* submarines to be at sea on operational duty at any time and fully armed with up to 48 nuclear warheads. Some of these warheads will be of 'sub-strategic' yield. The warheads are not pre-targeted and usually require several days 'notice to fire', although this could be considerably reduced in a crisis. The Government says this posture requires weapons of global range that are invulnerable to a surprise pre-emptive attack.

The Government says that it would only use nuclear weapons in "extreme circumstances of self-defence" but it does not rule out using nuclear weapons first in a crisis.

▶ What are British nuclear weapons for?

The Government assigns a number of roles to British nuclear forces:

- Deter acts of aggression against vital interests.
- Insure against the re-emergence of major strategic military threats.
- Prevent nuclear coercion, particularly by nuclear armed 'rogue' states.
- Preserve peace and stability in Europe and support Euro-Atlantic collective security.
- Deter state-sponsored nuclear terrorism.
- Provide an independent centre of nuclear decision-making in NATO.
- Enable intervention against nuclear-armed states to maintain regional and global security.

▶ Other nuclear weapon states

Britain is one of nine states that are known or thought to possess nuclear weapons:

Country	Total warheads	Country	Total warheads
America	9,600 (5,700 deployed)	Israel	100-200
Russia	15,000 (5,700 deployed)	India	50-60
France	350	Pakistan	60-70
China	200	North Korea (suspected)	2-10