

UK Downsizes Its Nuclear Arsenal

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[By Jefferson Morley](#)

The United Kingdom has reduced its nuclear arsenal by 25 percent, Defence Secretary Michael Fallon told the House of Commons on Jan. 20. During a debate over the replacement of UK nuclear forces, Fallon announced that the government had fulfilled a 2010 commitment to reduce the number of deployed warheads on each of the country's four Trident submarines from 48 to 40. "The total number of operationally available warheads has therefore been reduced to 120," Fallon said. Previously, the UK reported having 160 operational warheads.

The government's 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review report stated the reduction would give the country a "minimum deterrent" to potential enemies, while saving money as well as honoring "our commitment vigorously to pursue multilateral global disarmament."

In the Jan. 20 debate, Scottish National Party leader Angus Robertson and other critics said the Trident force was useless as a weapon and should be abandoned.

"I have yet to hear a supporter of Trident convincingly explain in what circumstances they would be prepared to justify the killing of hundreds of thousands of innocent men, women, and children and the causing of massive environmental damage to the world for generations to come," Robertson said.

Fallon defended the government's definition of minimum deterrence.

"Unfortunately, those reductions [in the number of Trident warheads] have not encouraged other states seeking a nuclear weapons capability to forgo their attempts," he said, "nor have they encouraged some other states that already possess nuclear weapons to follow our example. It is our conclusion that it would be rash further to disarm unilaterally while the capability to threaten us remains."

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