

## Statement by the Deep Cuts Commission:

### The United Kingdom's damaging decision to build up its nuclear force and how to respond

The United Kingdom announced on March 16 its intention to increase the limit of its overall nuclear stockpile and to make its nuclear posture more opaque. The Deep Cuts Commission believes the United Kingdom's new policy further complicates efforts to advance multilateral nuclear arms control and nonproliferation efforts.

London's new nuclear weapons policies, announced in the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, call for raising the ceiling for its overall nuclear stockpile size to 260 operationally available warheads. Previously, the United Kingdom had been committed to reducing its active nuclear weapons stockpile by the mid-2020s to no more than 180 warheads.

This reversal complicates bilateral arms control efforts by Russia and the United States. Moscow and Washington, which agreed in January to extend the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) by five years until 2026, are planning to resume discussions on additional nuclear reductions. How to involve smaller nuclear powers in future arms control agreements is a key question in that dialogue. Growing nuclear warhead numbers by any nuclear weapon state make it less likely that Moscow and Washington will find a way to reduce their stockpiles. Increasing nuclear arsenals is also at odds with NATO's commitment to create the conditions for a world without nuclear weapons.

The United Kingdom's announcement is inconsistent with its obligations under the nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), which commits States Parties to work towards a world free of nuclear weapons. Increases of the number of warheads by any nuclear weapon state also contradict politically binding NPT pledges to reduce the number and role of nuclear weapons.

London's decision to stop providing public figures for its operational stockpile, deployed warhead or deployed missile numbers contravenes promises by the nuclear weapon states to increase transparency of their nuclear force postures and doctrines. It is particularly worrying that the British government believes that such ambiguity increases strategic stability. This sets a bad precedent for other nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states who may want to be more secretive about their nuclear policies, too.

The British government has not provided a clear or convincing rationale for its decision to increase warhead numbers. British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace has argued that the credibility of the Trident deterrent could be undermined by Russian investments in missile defenses. This is another indication how missile defenses, however imperfect or limited they may be, can fuel nuclear arms buildups.

The Deep Cuts Commission sees several steps that can be taken to reduce and reverse the negative implications of the changes to the United Kingdom's nuclear policies:

- At the upcoming 10<sup>th</sup> Treaty Review Conference, all NPT nuclear weapon states should commit not to increase their overall warhead numbers while New START remains in force and Russia and the United States are actively pursuing additional nuclear cuts through arms control.
- The nuclear weapon states at the NPT Review Conference should live up to their reporting requirements by declaring their overall nuclear stockpile numbers, including operational and non-operational warheads. All nuclear weapon states should be transparent about the conditions under which they are willing to use nuclear weapons and give binding security guarantees to non-nuclear weapon states.
- The P5, at their upcoming meeting hosted by France, should take up the United Kingdom's offer "to create dialogue among states possessing nuclear weapons, and between states possessing nuclear weapons and non-nuclear weapon states, to increase understanding and reduce the risk of misinterpretation and miscalculation" by setting up a permanent P5 strategic risk reduction working group. This group should regularly report back to the NPT non-nuclear weapon states on progress made.
- The P5 should also commit to finding a way to reduce the destabilizing effects of missile defenses on strategic stability.

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The Deep Cuts Commission ([deepcuts.org](http://deepcuts.org)) provides decision-makers as well as the interested public with concrete policy options based on realistic analysis and sound research. Since it was established in 2013, the Commission is coordinated in its deliberations by the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH), the Arms Control Association (ACA), and the Primakov Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO, RAN).