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D/DOP/FOIA Requests (045/05)

Maria Francisco
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23 September 2005

Thank you for your letter of 16 August, in which, under the Freedom of Information Act, you requested details of which studies have been carried out to assess potential and/or existing threats which might or might not be deterred by the various options for replacing Trident.

The MOD holds some information that falls within the scope of this request. However, I am withholding details of the nature and content of this information under the following exemptions to the Freedom of Information Act: s.24 (National Security), s.26 (Defence), s.27 (International relations) and s.35 (Formulation of Government Policy).

All these exemptions are qualified exemptions under the Act and as such it was necessary to assess the public interest in releasing or withholding the information and where the balance lay. There is a strong public interest in the UK having a credible nuclear deterrent and it is felt that releasing information about threat assessments and the potential value of a deterrent capability in particular circumstances or scenarios could damage national security, and we do not believe there would be any public interest in doing so.

In addition, releasing information of this nature could also identify plans for Government policy, and prejudice the formulation of policy, particularly in the area of Defence. Threat assessments identifying any particular country could also jeopardise international relations with that country and others. There is a strong public interest in maintaining relations with other countries, especially on defence and security matters.

As the Government has made clear, no decisions on any replacement for Trident have yet been taken and whilst some are likely to be necessary in the current Parliament, they are still some way off. Indeed, as the Secretary of

State for Defence said in the House of Commons on 7 July this year, "I have not even started to consider the position on it."

If you wish to clarify any aspect of this response then please contact me in the first instance. Should you remain dissatisfied, then you may apply for an internal review by contacting the Director of Information Exploitation, 6th Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB.

If you are still unhappy following an internal review, you may take your complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not investigate your case until the MOD internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioner's website, <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk>. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Yours sincerely,

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