

Trident in question

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On 28 May 2015, the House of Commons debated AB McNeilly's revelations about Trident, on the initiative of the Scottish National Party. We reprint excerpts. The new Parliament is much more alert to the dangers and impositions posed by Trident nuclear weapons, as indicated by subsequent written questions to ministers, which we also reprint together with the Government's sometimes repetitious replies.

Alex Salmond (Gordon) (SNP): ... I want to do three things in the debate this evening. First, I want to get some detailed answers from the Ministry of Defence. We had today in a written statement from the Secretary of State for Defence 500 words of the suffocating bland complacency that typifies so much of the MOD's reaction to serious concerns (see below). I knew the Secretary of State for Defence at university and, although I might have accused him of many things, he was neither bland nor complacent. He seems to have picked up some bad habits in his tenure as Secretary of State for Defence. We want detailed answers to detailed questions this evening.

Secondly, I want to examine the lessons from the working, or indeed malfunctioning, of the reactor prototype HMS *Vulcan* at Dounreay and what that tells us about the safety concerns at the Faslane base. The difficulties that that reactor has experienced and the MOD's reaction to them give us serious cause for concern.

Thirdly, I want to examine the inherent safety concerns about nuclear reactors, made double of course by the fact that the nuclear reactors in this case are associated with nuclear weapons and tripled by the fact that the nuclear weapons are on a submarine. That tells us that there is an inherent unsafe aspect to Trident submarines. How can that be reconciled with the new political reality in Scotland, where by my count 57 Members of Parliament out of 59 oppose the renewal of the Trident deterrent in Scotland?

I say 57 not because I am expecting an imminent by-election in Scotland, but because the hon. Member for Edinburgh

South (Ian Murray) is on the record as opposing the renewal of Trident. I congratulate him on his recent promotion to the Labour Front Bench—I should say that we have been the cause of that promotion. I hope that that promotion to the Front Bench does not mean that he has undergone some mind-melding process over the last week. I hope that he will stay faithful to the commitments made to his constituents publicly on his opposition to the renewal of Trident as a nuclear device.

I want to start with the claims made by Able Seaman McNeilly—claims that are published via WikiLeaks and also through the excellent journalism of the *Sunday Herald*. Briefly, those claims—I know that the Minister will treat them seriously and give us the detailed answers that we seek—are, first, that at the final security checkpoint in Faslane naval base, no security checks of ID cards were made, that the PIN code system was broken, and that both Navy personnel and contractors were allowed access with no verification of identity. Secondly, aboard a vessel, on the missile compartment deck, no one asked for identification or checked to see whether personnel were on the list providing them with access to that part of the submarine. Thirdly, bags coming on board the submarine were going unchecked. It would be extraordinary, Mr Speaker, if we had a greater level of security in the House of Commons than might exist at that nuclear naval base.

Fourthly, the vast majority of equipment onboard may be defective. It was alleged that HMS *Vanguard* was in the worst condition and had to be recalled to port several times, forcing other vessels to do extended patrols. Fifthly, it is alleged that a problem with one of the nuclear reactors aboard one of the SSBNs [ship submersible ballistic nuclear] had been found and an instructor had suggested that all the boats might need to get their reactors replaced. We know that the process of refuelling is already under way.

It is claimed, sixthly, that firefighting equipment has been removed from the submarine while in port; seventhly, that complaints about defective equipment and safety concerns are being ignored; eighthly, that rules on constant manning of crucial positions such as the nuclear reactor's main control desk and the nuclear missiles' control and monitoring position are being ignored; ninthly, that the correct procedures to avoid a fire in the weapons storage compartment were not being followed, but no disciplinary action followed or was pursued; tenthly, that HMS *Vanguard* was nearly lost on two separate occasions, first in a deep depth incident, where the SSBN exceeded the recommended depth, and secondly when it crashed into a French SSBN. The report alleges that the extent of the latter incident has not been fully revealed.

It is claimed, eleventhly, that there have been numerous floods and fires aboard the SSBN, fire alarms are frequently ignored and concerns over fire hazards were dismissed; twelfthly, that personal electronics equipment is frequently used in the vicinity of the missile compartments, despite being explicitly banned; and thirteenthly, that standard operating procedures and safety procedures are routinely ignored across the board. The last of the main allegations in the report is that the tests carried out at the end of a patrol had to be conducted three times because they kept failing, largely due to defective equipment.

Those are just some of the allegations—or revelations—made by Able Seaman McNeilly. Of course, we have no way of knowing whether any or all of them have substance, but I would submit to the House that in the crucial matter of safety, which is clearly what is at stake, the House and the public deserve better information and a more comprehensive explanation than the 500-word written statement issued by the Defence Secretary today. That is not just an insult to this House; it is an insult to the intelligence of the general public.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab) ... The right hon. Gentleman may be aware that, in the previous Parliament, the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), the former Member for Lewisham, Deptford and I attended the conference on the humanitarian effects of nuclear weapons in Vienna. Most countries that took part in that conference have put on record a detailed assessment of the effects of a nuclear explosion, brought about by an accident or an act of war and the detonation of a nuclear weapon. Is he aware of any assessment made of what the effects would be on Scotland, on Glasgow, on the north of England or on Northern Ireland of a nuclear explosion, either by accident or design, in the Clyde, and what the effect would be on the wider population? Would he support such a report being sought from the UK Government?

Alex Salmond: I am aware of reports estimating the extraordinary damage that could result from such an occurrence. What I am not aware of is whether Her Majesty's Government have ever conducted such an assessment, and whether they would be prepared to do that now and to release the findings to the general public and to this House.

The second question I want to raise is what the failings in the prototype reactor at Dounreay tell us about the functioning of the reactors on board the submarines at Faslane ... On 25 March this year, the Secretary of State for Defence, in a written statement, explained the decisions that had been

taken on precautions following the discovery of the breaches in the cladding around one of the fuel cells at the shore test facility at Dounreay. For Members of the House who are unfamiliar with this, let me say that that has been a matter of concern for some considerable time. The breaches in the fuel cell cladding have led to the refuelling already of one of the Trident submarines and to the potential refuelling of a second one in the near future.

The prototype reactor is designed and operated at extensive level to test whether in future there might be breaches in the reactor on board the submarines. There are two aspects that should give the House considerable cause for concern. First, we have been assured by the current Secretary of State for Defence and his predecessor that when this has happened, all appropriate authorities have been informed and kept up to date with the consequences of these microscopic breaches, but I submit that the process of consultation and information is severely inadequate.

The responsible democratic body is the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, but despite the fact that SEPA was informed by the MOD within a reasonable timescale, but not immediately, it was years before the general public and this House were informed. Hon. Members may well ask why SEPA, a democratic agency reporting to Scottish Ministers, did not immediately and timeously release information, as it would in a civil nuclear incident affecting the environment. The reason is that the MOD invoked Crown immunity regarding the control and flow of information from the test reactor. I submit—I hope the Minister will reply specifically on this point—that we are past the stage where it is acceptable that the invocation of Crown immunity can conceal from the general public, for months and perhaps even years, nuclear incidents that may have a bearing on the safe operation of nuclear reactors in the Faslane base.

Secondly, the microscopic breaches in the reactor in Dounreay have resulted in that reactor being closed down. It is to be decommissioned in the next few years. That seems to me to be sensible when radiation leaks have been identified.

The difficulty in the matter which concerns this House is that that position has led to an examination of whether there should be a prototype reactor on the new generation of nuclear submarines. The conclusion that was reached, and that was in the statement of the Secretary of State for Defence this year, was that his expert panel concluded that it was a valid decision not to prototype PWR3 because there was no practical course of action that would enable a prototype facility to be built ahead of the first successor submarine.

It is bad enough that a prototype reactor is giving a signal of potential problems in a nuclear fleet, and that the Secretary of State for Defence did not timeously inform the general public of what was going on or allow the Scottish Environment Protection Agency to do its duty. That is bad enough, but to come to the conclusion that we might move to a main gate decision on renewing this nuclear deterrent without having a functioning prototype reactor which would tell us of potential problems in the new reactor is an extraordinary situation which must be inherently unsafe, unless the Minister has some information that the new reactor will be built in such a way that it does not have the failings of just about every other nuclear reactor built in recent history.

Lastly, I spoke of the new political reality in Scotland and the 57 out of 59 Members who were clearly elected as being against any decision to renew the nuclear deterrent at extraordinary cost at a time of austerity. The attitude of 57 out of 59 Members of Parliament from Scotland to next year's main gate decision will be to oppose it. That should give the Minister substantial cause for thought.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman back to his place in this House. May I appeal to him not to conflate two separate issues? They are indeed separate issues. One is the very real concerns about faulty operating practices leading to potential accidents. The other is the wider issue about whether or not we should have a nuclear deterrent. It might surprise him to know that many of us who believe that we should have a nuclear deterrent are as concerned as he is about the dangers of operating faults and accidents in the systems that we have.

Alex Salmond: These Members will conclude that, unfortunately, one of the consequences of having such a nuclear deterrent is having these systems in a situation which causes inherent danger. The point that I am making is that the working of the system is inherently dangerous because a nuclear reactor and nuclear weapons on a submarine are not an easy fit. The military value of this deterrent as an independent deterrent is non-existent. Its use would break international law. It is not a weapon of security, but a sign of the insecurity of the United Kingdom, believing that fading grandeur can be protected by being one of the big five in having possession of nuclear weapons ... perhaps the Minister will allow me to paraphrase one of the great parliamentarians of the past. Given the political realities in Scotland, she and the Government will be making a fatal mistake if they believe that this costly trumpery, this useless, expensive,

unlawful and inherently dangerous military plaything will be tolerated any longer by those on the SNP Benches, by this party or by our country.

Brendan O’Hara (Argyll and Bute) (SNP): ... The dossier compiled by Mr McNeilly makes for very worrying reading indeed. I, too, am extremely disappointed that the Minister sought to dismiss in a 500-word statement absolutely everything contained in that extremely detailed 18-page dossier. I regard that written statement as absolutely inadequate. It goes nowhere near reassuring me or my constituents about the level of safety at Faslane or onboard the UK’s nuclear submarine fleet. As my right hon. Friend said, the dossier paints a disturbing picture of a lax attitude to safety and security both onshore and onboard our submarines. There are stories of people gaining access to meetings for which they do not have sufficient security clearance, bags being taken onboard submarines unchecked, and the routine use of untested portable bluetooth electronic devices in missile compartments.

I would like to highlight, in particular, a number of specific allegations concerning both the nuclear missiles and the nuclear reactors on board the Vanguard-class submarines. On page 4 of the dossier, Mr McNeilly states that he was told by one of the instructors that they had found problems with the nuclear reactor onboard HMS *Vanguard*, suggesting that all Vanguard-class submarines might have to have their reactors replaced. Is the Minister aware of problems beyond those already known about the nuclear reactors on HMS *Vanguard*, and are they similar to the ‘trouser-leg’ problems that affected the Resolution-class submarines?

As my right hon. Friend said, remembering the widely reported radioactive leak at the Vulcan reactor at Dounreay, and given the fact that it took two whole years for that to be made public, how can we as MPs hold the Ministry of Defence to account, and how can the public have confidence in the Minister’s investigations, when it appears that bad news is released only when it can no longer be concealed? The Ministry told us that it would cost £120 million to refuel HMS *Vanguard*. Should other submarines in the class require refuelling, can she confirm that that would cost about £500 million?

On page 11 of the dossier, Mr McNeilly alleges that the reader-worker procedure for removing the inverters from the missiles at the end of their patrol was not followed. The line-by-line reader-to-worker instructions were, according to Mr McNeilly, ‘completely ignored’, and the removal of the inverters from the missiles became a race between the starboard-side and port-side teams, to see who could finish the job quickest. If that is an

indication of the general attitude onboard towards nuclear weapons-standard operating procedures, we should all be very concerned.

On page 14 of the dossier, Mr McNeilly alleges that while he was on patrol with HMS *Victorious* the nitrogen drench in the missile compartment fell below the minimum 3625 psi required. When he asked what could be done about it, he was told:

‘There’s nothing we can do while on patrol.’

The nitrogen drench is what is used to put out fires in the missile compartment. Therefore, according to Mr McNeilly’s dossier, if a fire had broken out in the missile compartment and the nitrogen drench was not working, there would have been a real danger of one or all three of the solid-fuel rockets within any or all of the missiles onboard igniting and going off in a sympathetic detonation, with potentially disastrous consequences for everyone onboard. As I have said, those are just three of a catalogue of very serious and deeply troubling allegations, yet none of them was addressed in the Minister’s 500-word statement.

Mr McNeilly’s dossier points to concerns about staff training and high levels of staff turnover leading to a worrying lack of suitably qualified and experienced personnel available to the service. The Royal Navy has a proud tradition, and we recognise that people make great personal sacrifices in order to serve, for which we are very grateful, but the rate at which people are being pushed through the training pipeline due to manpower shortages leading to massive staff turnover is of grave concern. There is more than a suggestion in Mr McNeilly’s dossier that there is indeed a worrying shortage of highly trained and highly skilled professionals to fill those roles.

In any workplace, security and safety are paramount, but when dealing with nuclear weapons and nuclear-powered submarines, safety and security must be absolutely sacrosanct, because, to be frank, we are all just one mistake away from a catastrophe. I look forward to the Minister addressing all these points in detail, far beyond the 500 words on offer to us currently.

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Penny Mordaunt): ... I will start by addressing the concerns raised by Able Seaman McNeilly. Hon. Members will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State tabled a written ministerial statement at the earliest opportunity to update the House on this issue. I will go on to address the concerns that hon. Members have raised about McNeilly himself and his welfare, and then the

wider issues that have been raised in this debate.

Before I do so, I hope that Members will permit me briefly to pay tribute to all those who are involved in the nuclear enterprise and nuclear deterrence. Whatever our different views about the merits of the capability, I hope we can all agree that we owe the men and women in the submarine service a huge debt. Their training is extremely demanding. Their deployments, by their nature, are mentally and physically challenging. What we ask of them, and what they deliver at a personal level, is truly extraordinary. The captain of an SSBN will have spent more than 10 years of their naval career underwater. An engineer is responsible for a machine more complex than the space shuttle. An able seaman will be working on a shift system, six hours on watch, six hours off, for three months at a time. There is a particular dedication in the service among all ranks. My personal belief is that those who work in the service firmly believe that the sacrifices that they are making on our behalf are worth it—fundamental to our national security. I hope I can speak for all Members of this House as I put on record our thanks for their dedication and their service.

I welcome this opportunity to address Members' concerns. It is vital that we reassure the public. That is why I sought to brief Members with a constituency interest at the earliest opportunity last week. We owe it to our servicemen and women as well, and to the civilian staff who support them, to rebut unjustified accusations against the quality of what they do. That is not to say that running such a complex operation, uninterrupted for over 47 years, is without its challenges, but the view being perpetuated of a culture of carelessness and complacency is utterly unjust. I can assure the House that neither the operational effectiveness of our nuclear deterrent nor the safety of our submariners or members of the public has been compromised. The Ministry of Defence has a responsibility to carry out its nuclear activities worldwide in a safe and secure manner. We take this, and our commitment to protect defence personnel, the workforce, the public and the environment very seriously. When managing safety, our aim is to maximise transparency while balancing the need to maintain national security.

In my first week as Minister at the Ministry of Defence, I witnessed the Royal Navy's response to the McNeilly allegations. It did not dismiss them. Each point raised was thoroughly and methodically investigated—not just what occurred and when, but why he drew the conclusions that he did. I want to place on record my thanks to the Navy for its swift action.

I appreciate that there are those who are calling for complete transparency on all that has been found, but that is simply not possible or reasonable—certainly not on the Floor of the House—given that this goes

to the very heart of protecting a national defensive deterrent capability. Other channels that I shall touch on later may allow hon. Members a deeper dive into these issues.

Alex Salmond: May I point out to the Minister that the suffocating complacency of which I spoke was that of MOD Ministers in their response to serious concerns about safety? She is a new Minister, so perhaps she can blow a breath of fresh air through the Ministry of Defence and agree to withdraw the Crown immunity certificate that stops the Scottish Environment Protection Agency reporting on nuclear incidents. Will she at least allow that Government organisation, responsible to Scottish Ministers, to do its job as far as military matters are concerned?

Penny Mordaunt: I will address all the points made by the right hon. Gentleman, but I must stress that he cannot have his cake and eat it. The allegations he has made are about the safety and security of this capability. I will answer as much as I can on the Floor of the House, but I absolutely stress the dedication of the Royal Navy in addressing those concerns—keeping the deterrent safe and ensuring the security of the capability—and any suggestion that somehow there is complacency is absolutely not correct. I am pleased that the right hon. Gentleman has acknowledged that this evening.

I can assure the House that the Navy's investigation included an analysis of the service history of the boat and of the patrol report; a review of the ongoing programme of work to improve safety and security at Her Majesty's naval bases of Clyde and Devonport; one-to-one interviews with McNeilly's chain of command, his colleagues and McNeilly himself; and consultations with the regulatory and operating authorities. McNeilly's concerns proved to be either factually incorrect or the result of misunderstanding or partial understanding. Some of his concerns drew on historical, previously known events, none of which had compromised our deterrent capability and from which, where appropriate, lessons had been learned to develop our procedures as part of a continuous improvement programme.

Only one of the allegations is yet to be fully examined—that e-cigarettes were used on the submarine. I must stress that no corroboration for that has been found. Nevertheless, the chain of command is considering what further steps should be taken to ensure that it does not happen.

On the specific comments about security at Her Majesty's naval base Clyde, McNeilly's observations focus on one limited aspect of the security jigsaw—access to one internal area. There was no reason why he should have been aware of the extensive security that is layered around the

controls that he experienced. Taken as a whole, I am satisfied that the overall system for security within and around the base at the time was robust and fully effective in meeting its requirements.

We are, however, not complacent. There is an ongoing programme of work constantly to review and improve security at the base. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will send a clear message that he supports such work. He may not see the merits of the capability, but I hope that he would support its security and, where we identify the merits of further improvements to security, agree that they should be implemented.

Perhaps the most concerning aspect of this case is that McNeilly said he raised these matters while deployed, but was ignored. For his concerns, whether justified or not, to be ignored would be wholly incompatible with the leadership, the divisional system, and the safety culture we expect from the Royal Navy. We have investigated this thoroughly, including through interviews with McNeilly's former crew mates. We have not found any evidence, formal or informal, of his raising any safety concerns, even privately with those closest to him.

I will touch on the welfare of the able seamen, which I know is a concern of the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara). I congratulate the hon. Gentleman both on the two speeches he has made in close succession and on his appointment as his party's defence spokesman. I updated him after Able Seaman McNeilly was arrested, and I spoke to the hon. Gentleman at the time about the welfare checks that were being done on him. He was arrested by the police in Scotland on 18 May as he landed at Edinburgh airport, because he was reported as a missing person, having failed to return to duty following a period of leave. He was released the following day and passed into the care of the Royal Navy. On 20 May, he was moved to HMS *Nelson*, a shore establishment in Portsmouth, while concerns that he had raised were investigated. He has at all times been afforded the duty of care we give to all our personnel. He has been in contact with his family, and the Royal Navy has offered additional support to them should they wish to visit him.

Brendan O'Hara: Has Mr McNeilly been charged with anything? What is his current legal status? Has he been given access to legal representation?

Penny Mordaunt: I was coming to that. Mr McNeilly remains on duty as a serving member of the Royal Navy. He is not under arrest or in custody. Any restrictions that were initially placed on him for his own welfare—

namely, his having to seek permission before leaving base—were lifted as of Tuesday. He is not under arrest, in custody or charged. Our prime concern throughout the process has been his welfare.

The right hon. Member for Gordon raised wider issues regarding the fuel element breach at Vulcan. The issue with the reactor at the naval reactor test establishment was classed by the International Atomic Energy Agency as a level zero below scale incident, with no safety significance. Workers remain safe and the local community is not at risk. There was no leak outside the reactor circuit.

The MOD has made the Scottish Environment Protection Agency aware of the issue. The key point is this: had there been any safety issues, the MOD would have been the first to inform the Scottish Government and the local community. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the MOD works closely with SEPA, and continues to do so, given its responsibility for regulating environmental discharges from the site. Vulcan is subject to close monitoring by SEPA, and there is a robust and public formal agreement between the MOD and SEPA to ensure that we are compliant with the Radioactive Substances Act 1993.

Alex Salmond: Will the Minister undertake to revise and review whether Crown immunity should prevent SEPA from releasing information to the public?

Penny Mordaunt: The incident to which the right hon. Gentleman refers was a non-incident—there were no safety issues. I give him the reassurance on the Floor of the House that, if there were such concerns, the Scottish Government would be informed. I am going to make progress because I am running out of time.

Figures on discharges are not secret. The information is published annually in the ‘Radioactivity in Food and the Environment’ publication, which is available on the SEPA website. The naval reactor test establishment at Vulcan is safe and remains a low-risk site.

On the wider issues that the right hon. Gentleman raises, the protection of the UK is the Government’s first duty. We are committed to the future of defence in Scotland, the capabilities based there, and the industry that supports and generates those capabilities. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has said, we must plan for a major and direct nuclear threat to this country or to our NATO allies that might emerge over the 50 years during which the next generation of submarines will be in service. We know that there are substantial nuclear arsenals, and that the

number of nuclear states has increased. Russia is modernising its forces, actively commissioning a new class of eight SSBN vessels, and preparing to deploy a variety of land-based intercontinental ballistic missile classes. It is planning to reintroduce rail-based intercontinental missiles. North Korea is carrying out nuclear tests and threatening more. It is carrying out ballistic missile tests in defiance of the international community.

The Government are firmly committed to renewing continuous at-sea deterrence. That capability is as relevant today as it has ever been. It is highly regrettable when inaccurate commentary leads to public concern about the deterrent. When such comments are made, we will investigate them thoroughly. When a member of our armed forces has concerns or questions, there are appropriate channels in the chain of command through which they can be raised. That must be encouraged.

I mentioned other channels that are perhaps more appropriate for the deep dive that the right hon. Gentleman seeks. I know from my experience of serving on the House of Commons Defence Committee and our work on the security and safety of the base that that is one such channel. I thank him once again for securing the debate.

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Brendan O'Hara MP followed up his speech with a series of probing questions about the safety and security of nuclear weapons which are deployed from Her Majesty's Naval Base (HMNB) Clyde, commonly known as Faslane, and stored nearby at the Royal Naval Armaments Depot (RNAD) Coulport in Scotland.

Brendan O'Hara MP (*Shadow SNP Westminster Group Leader, Defence*): *To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, whether 43 Commando Fleet Protection Group Royal Marines is responsible for final denial at HMNB Clyde and RNAD Coulport only when nuclear weapons are aboard nuclear submarines in transport? 3 June 2015*

Penny Mordaunt MP, *Minister of State, Ministry of Defence, Minister for the Armed Forces*: *43 Commando Fleet Protection Group Royal Marines' core task is to provide military support to undertake final denial of access to nuclear weapons in addition to supporting the multi-agency force that protects nuclear weapons convoys.*

Brendan O'Hara MP: *To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what*

fires have taken place on UK (a) nuclear-powered and (b) nuclear-armed submarines since 3 December 2014.

Philip Dunne MP, *Minister of State, Ministry of Defence, Defence Procurement*: Due to the nature of submarine operations, meticulous records are kept of all fire safety incidents, irrespective of how minor. Since 3 December 2014 there has been one small-scale fire, that was categorised as minor. It was dealt with quickly and effectively using onboard resources.

Brendan O'Hara MP: *To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what grounding incidents involving UK nuclear-powered submarines have taken place since 2 April 2009.*

Penny Mordaunt MP: Two such incidents have been recorded since 2 April 2009: HMS *Torbay* grounded in the Eastern Mediterranean in April 2009. HMS *Astute* grounded off the Isle of Skye in October 2010.

Brendan O'Hara MP: *To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what collisions involving a nuclear-powered submarine and (a) another submarine, (b) another naval vessel, (c) a private vessel and (d) a merchant vessel have taken place since 2 April 2009.*

Penny Mordaunt MP

Two such incidents have been recorded since 2 April 2009: HMS *Torbay* grounded in the Eastern Mediterranean in April 2009. HMS *Astute* grounded off the Isle of Skye in October 2010. (Sic.)

Brendan O'Hara MP: *To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many vessels transit by RNAD Coulport en route to Finnart Oil Terminal each year; and whether those vessels are boarded by Military Police during the transit.*

Penny Mordaunt MP: Between 1 June 2014 and 31 May 2015 146 tankers transited to and from Finnart Oil Terminal. We do not comment on specific security procedures as this would, or would be likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of the Armed Forces.

Brendan O'Hara MP: *To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment the Joint Terrorist Analysis Centre, Royal Navy Fleet*

Intelligence, MI5 and Ministry of Defence Police Special Branch have made of threats to security at HMNB Clyde and RNAD Coulport; what those threats are in order of the likelihood of them occurring; and what steps are being taken to address those threats.

Brendan O'Hara MP: *To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what defences are in place to protect HMNB Clyde and RNAD Coulport from possible terrorist attack from the air.*

Brendan O'Hara MP: *To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what defences exist against a momentum vessel attack on the Explosive Handling Jetty at RNAD Coulport.*

Penny Mordaunt MP: The Ministry of Defence works closely with wider national police, security and intelligence organisations, including the Security Service, to ensure it maintains effective protection for all defence assets against a range of threats. We do not comment on detailed intelligence or security measures to protect defence nuclear assets.

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House of Commons

*Written Statement made by Secretary of State for Defence,
Michael Fallon, on 28 May 2015.*

Safety at HM Naval Base Clyde

I am informing the House at the earliest opportunity on the investigation of each of the claims made by Able Seaman William McNeilly about the operational effectiveness, safety and security of our nuclear deterrent.

Having now completed our investigation, and having consulted with the appropriate regulatory and operating authorities, I can assure the House that neither the operational effectiveness of our Continuous at Sea Deterrent nor the safety of our submariners or members of the public have been compromised.

The Naval Service operates its submarine fleet under the most stringent safety regime, which is subject to independent scrutiny. The Naval Service does not put a submarine to sea unless it is safe to do so, and there are appropriate procedures in place to deal with any issues that may arise during its deployment. There are robust regulatory mechanisms, both

within the Ministry of Defence (MOD) but independent of the Royal Navy and, externally with the Office of Nuclear Regulation, to ensure this. The MOD is also held to wider account by Parliament.

Able Seaman McNeilly published his comments following his first submarine deployment. He was under training, and his access and exposure to activities and material on board were appropriate to his security clearance. We have found no evidence that he raised any concerns with colleagues on board or with the Chain of Command: had he done so, the more senior and experienced submariners would have been able to explain how the boat operated and why McNeilly's concerns were unfounded. A number of the issues he raised did not occur during his patrol.

Most of McNeilly's concerns proved to be either factually incorrect or the result of mis- or partial understanding; some drew on historic, previously known, events none of which had compromised our deterrent capability and, where appropriate, from which lessons had been learned to develop our procedures as part of a continuous improvement programme. Only one of the allegations remains to be fully examined – the allegation that e-cigarettes were being used within the submarine. No independent corroboration of this has been found but even if it were true, there is clear evidence that their use did not put the safety of the boat at risk.

Able Seaman McNeilly was arrested having not reported for duty after a period of leave. He was released the next day, but confined to a specified location in Portsmouth while interviews were conducted. He is being afforded the duty of care that we give all our personnel, is in contact with his family, and is still in the employ of the Royal Navy.



I

When Newton saw an apple fall, he found
 In that slight startle from his contemplation –
 'T is said (for I'll not answer above ground
 For any sage's creed or calculation) –
 A mode of proving that the Earth turned round
 In a most natural whirl, called 'gravitation;'
 And this is the sole mortal who could grapple,
 Since Adam – with a fall – or with an apple.

II

Man fell with apples, and with apples rose,
 If this be true; for we must deem the mode
 In which Sir Isaac Newton could disclose
 Through the then unpaved stars the turnpike road,
 A thing to counterbalance human woes:
 For ever since immortal man hath glowed
 With all kinds of mechanics, and full soon
 Steam-engines will conduct him to the moon.

III

And wherefore this exordium? – Why, just now,
 In taking up this paltry sheet of paper,
 My bosom underwent a glorious glow,
 And my internal spirit cut a caper:
 And though so much inferior, as I know,
 To those who, by the dint of glass and vapour,
 Discover stars, and sail in the wind's eye,
 I wish to do as much by Poesy.

Lord Byron, Don Juan, 10th Canto