

House of Commons
Defence Committee

**MISSILE DEFENCE:
GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

First Special Report of Session 2002–2003

Report and Appendix

Ordered by The House of Commons to be printed 5 February 2003

HC 411, Session 2002–03
Published on 11 February 2003 by authority of the House of Commons
London : The Stationery Office Limited
£3.00

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FIRST SPECIAL REPORT

The Defence Committee has agreed to the following Special Report:

MISSILE DEFENCE

The Committee published its First Report of this Session, on Missile Defence (HC 290) on 29 January 2003. The Government's response to this report was received on 5 February 2003 and is published as an Appendix to this Special Report.

APPENDIX

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE MEMORANDUM IN RESPONSE TO HCDC'S FIRST REPORT OF SESSION 2002-03 ON MISSILE DEFENCE

1. The Government welcomes the Committee's Report and its main conclusion that the United Kingdom Government should agree to the US Government's request for the proposed upgrade to the facilities at RAF Fylingdales for missile defence purposes. It is convinced that it is in the best interests of the UK that we retain options for the future development and possible acquisition of missile defences, subject to further examination of the complex issues involved. RAF Fylingdales will be an important element in the US programme for both developmental and operational use, and would be a key building block in any extended missile defence that might give protection to the UK and Europe. By agreeing to this upgrade, the Government believes it will ultimately enhance the security of the UK and the NATO Alliance.

On 17 December 2002, the US Government requested an upgrade of the Ballistic Missile Early Warning System station at RAF Fylingdales, to allow it to be used for missile defence purposes. We deplore the manner in which the public debate on that issue of the upgrade has been handled by the Ministry of Defence. It has shown no respect for either the views of those affected locally by the decision or for the arguments of those opposed to the upgrade in principle.

2. The Government does not accept the suggestion that the Ministry of Defence has shown no respect for the views of opponents of the upgrade or those affected locally. The MOD published a discussion paper on 9 December, to which it has received a large number of responses. The Defence Secretary has attended public meetings in North Yorkshire to hear local views, and officials have maintained close contact with local planning authorities to keep them informed of plans and to listen to their views. The MOD also responds to large numbers of letters on the subject. The Government has encouraged full and effective Parliamentary and public discussion of the issues raised. There have been many opportunities for MPs and members of the public to make their views known, including through a MOD website and e-mail address. The Defence Secretary described work in the United States on missile defence in the House on 17 October 2002 and made an oral Statement on 15 January. There was further opportunity for Parliamentary debate on 22 January. The MOD has assisted the Committee's present inquiry, to which the Defence Secretary gave evidence in March 2002 and again in January 2003.

We believe that it is incumbent on the MOD to publish as much of the detail of the request as it is able to. For example, more information could be published on the timescale for the upgrade and for its incorporation into the US missile defence system and how the system would be able to track missiles. Such additional information should also address radiation emissions and other local concerns.

3. In evidence to the Committee and in other fora, the MOD has indicated that it will provide a report to the local planning authority giving details of the upgrade and its timescale and providing information about radar emissions and other environmental aspects. Although the essential details are already clear to MOD, further site surveys and exchanges of information with the US are necessary before the full details can be presented. On the basis of current information, we expect that this evidence will demonstrate that no formal process of planning consultation is necessary. The MOD report will be in a form that the Authority may make public if it so chooses.

We see no reason to believe that agreeing to this upgrade will lead inevitably to further development or deployment at Fylingdales itself, or indeed elsewhere in the UK. But that agreement to the US request does represent at least a step or two down the path towards active participation in Missile Defence.

4. The Government has been at pains to point out that the upgrade of the radar at RAF Fylingdales does not imply that any further development of this or any other site will be undertaken. In evidence, it has explained, for instance, how US plans for X-Band radars are not settled, and are tending towards a sea-based deployment option - indeed the US is already building such a platform as part of its missile defence test bed. The Government has also made clear that decisions on deployment of missile defences to protect US friends and allies, including ground based interceptors, are some way off. The upgrade is a discrete proposition which does not commit the UK to any deeper involvement in the deployment of missile defences, although it gives the Government options to do so, should it decide on that at a later date. Separately, the MOD intends to agree a new technical Memorandum of Understanding with the United States, which would give it full insight into the development of the US missile defence programme and provide the opportunity for UK industry to benefit from participation. But any UK acquisition of missile defence would be subject to a separate decision, at the relevant time. The Government will approach this issue in stages, considering each step in the light of how both the threat and how the relevant technologies evolve.

We do not believe that the opponents of missile defence strengthen their case by resorting to allegations about hidden US motives. The United States of America is one of the UK's closest allies. We share many of the same values, both political and ethical. We prefer to judge American intentions on the basis of their official statements about the purpose of its missile defence programme. We do not assume that there must be some more or less sinister ulterior motive behind their request to upgrade Fylingdales.

5. The Government agrees. Missile defences are just that: defences. They threaten no-one. This capability would need to be used only if a ballistic missile has actually been fired. Once such a missile is in the air, and threatening a devastating impact, it is unthinkable that anyone could not want to be in a position to shoot it down.

We very much welcome the MOD's approach of putting its case to the planning authorities in a form that could be made public. Those who will need persuading that the local impact of the upgrade will not be significant extend beyond the planning authorities. It would seem that many of the concerns raised by various groups spring from a misplaced apprehension that the UK will inevitably field the full panoply of the Missile Defence system, and an exaggerated view of health hazards that might be caused by the proposed upgrade. But the MOD has not done as much as it could to present the full facts and explain carefully how such misgivings are misplaced. The MOD must now grasp this opportunity to clarify Fylingdales' role and its environmental impact.

6. As indicated in response to Recommendation (ii), the MOD will provide a detailed report on the upgrade in a form that could be made public. This will address the issue of perceived health hazards, on which earlier material has already been provided to the local planning authority and to the Committee. The MOD will also continue to explain publicly the continuing role of RAF Fylingdales and the Government's approach to future decisions on missile defence relating to the UK. The Government's efforts to promote local consultation and explanation were described above [Recommendation (i)]; it considers that the whole process has been conducted with particular openness.

If the UK wishes to keep its options open on a possible missile defence for the UK, it is clearly in our interests to respond positively to the present request. Furthermore, we do not believe that the UK, or the Fylingdales area, would face any material additional risks from the upgrade, in terms either of health risks from radiation or an increased likelihood of potential attackers identifying Fylingdales as a target. Nor do we believe that arguments that missile defence may cause international instability provide compelling grounds for rejecting the US request.

7. The Government welcomes the Committee's conclusion that the UK, including North Yorkshire, would not face any material additional health or security risks arising from the upgrade. The security interests of the United Kingdom are already closely identified with those of the US and other NATO allies, and this will not change regardless of decisions on missile defence. The Government also believes that any increased threat to RAF Fylingdales itself is negligible. For the foreseeable future, states of concern are very unlikely to have the sophisticated capability or size of arsenal to consider targeting specific points or military installations. Long range missiles in their hands will essentially be weapons of terror. On the issue of international stability, missile defence is not intended to defend against responsible states with established strategic forces. Its aim is to tackle limited threats from states of concern with emergent missile capabilities, which seek to acquire and threaten to use ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction in contravention of widely accepted international norms. The proliferation threat is not new; missile defence is a response to, not the cause of, the problem.

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SESSION 2002–03

FIRST REPORT: *Missile Defence*, (HC 290), published on 28 January 2003

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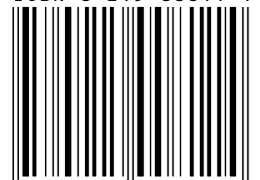
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ISBN 0-215-00811-1



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