

# THE FUTURE OF BRITISH DEFENCE POLICY

**Andrew DORMAN**

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# Focus stratégique

Resolving today's security problems requires an integrated approach. Analysis must be cross-cutting and consider the regional and global dimensions of problems, their technological and military aspects, as well as their media linkages and broader human consequences. It must also strive to understand the far reaching and complex dynamics of military transformation, international terrorism or post-conflict stabilization. Through the “**Focus stratégique**” series Ifri's Security Studies Center aims to do so, offering new perspectives on the major international security issues in the world today.

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## Abstract

As the prospect of the United Kingdom leaving the European Union raises increasing challenges to its international position, as well as major divisions at home, the future of British defence policy seems more uncertain than ever. As an established great power, the United Kingdom bears the legacy of a solid and reliable defence and security apparatus. However, political and budgetary hesitations have casted doubts on its strategic outlook. To comprehend the renewed context, one has to take a closer look at the state of Britain's armed forces, their capability and organisational agenda as well as the defence transformation process they are engaged in. Given the precarious posture of the current government, a renewed political horizon remains to be found so that strategic goals can finally be met with consistent military means.

## Résumé

Alors que le processus de sortie du Royaume-Uni de l'Union européenne soulève des divisions internes majeures, ainsi que des défis croissants sur sa position internationale, l'avenir de la politique de défense britannique semble plus incertain que jamais. Grande puissance établie, le Royaume-Uni bénéficie de l'héritage d'un appareil de défense et de sécurité solide et fiable. Cependant, les hésitations politiques et budgétaires remettent en question l'aspect stratégique de cet appareil. Afin de mieux appréhender ce nouveau contexte, il est nécessaire d'examiner de plus près l'état des forces armées britanniques, leurs échéances capacitaires et organisationnelles, ainsi que le processus de transformation dans lequel elles sont engagées. Au vu de la position précaire du gouvernement actuel, seule une vision politique renouvelée permettra de mettre en cohérence les objectifs stratégiques avec des moyens militaires.





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# Introduction

The United Kingdom finds itself in a difficult and unusual position. Like many states, it faces the problems of increasing challenges and threats to its current position and major divisions at home. What makes the United Kingdom's situation unusual is that the new government will also need to negotiate the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union (EU). In the background to these negotiations remains the long-term integrity of the country with the Scottish National Party (SNP) calling for a further referendum on Scottish independence three years after the previous referendum.<sup>1</sup>

With the above as a backdrop, the new British government will need to decide whether it needs to develop a new National Security Strategy (NSS) and an accompanying Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) in order to map out the way forward for British defence and security policy.<sup>2</sup> The arguments in favour of a review centre on the changed circumstances which will confront the United Kingdom. The arguments against are twofold. First, these changing circumstances are too difficult to predict and plan for at present and therefore a review should wait. Second, the government will be entirely focused on Brexit and there simply will not be the capacity for ministers and officials to undertake a review at the same time.

This situation is in stark contrast to the two previous iterations of the NSS and SDSR. In formulating the 2010 NSS and SDSR the then coalition government led by David Cameron was able to assume that the United Kingdom would not engage in any major conflicts for the next decade.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the government made significant defence reductions and designed a force structure for the 2020s.<sup>4</sup> Five years later, the new Conservative government led by David Cameron was confronted by a very different world. The effects of the Arab Spring, the failed intervention in Libya, the Syrian

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1. A. Cramb, 'Nicola Sturgeon Says Independence at Heart of Election', *The Daily Telegraph online*, May 2017, available at: [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk).

2. A. Dorman, 'Sitting on Defence', *The House Magazine*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 580, 5 May 2017, p. 23-24.

3. 'Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review', *Cm.7,948*, London: TSO, 2010; 'A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy', *Cm.7,953*, London: TSO, 2010; HM Treasury, 'Spending Review', *Cm.7,942*, London: TSO, 2010; D. Cameron, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, 'Strategic Defence and Security Review', 19 October 2010, Col.797.

4. A. Dorman, 'Making 2 + 2 = 5: The 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review', *Defence and Security Analysis*, Vol. 27, No.1, March 2011, p. 77-87.

civil war with its wider impact on the region, the various terrorist attacks across Europe and the re-emergence of Russia as a potential threat all resulted in a 2015 NSS/SDSR that said that the potential threats to the United Kingdom and her allies and partners were far greater, more immediate and far more complex.<sup>5</sup>

Since 2015 the world has moved on. Donald Trump has become the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States and Emmanuel Macron has been elected as the new French President. The failed coup in Turkey has led to far greater authoritarian control of that country, the civil war in Syria continues and Russia remains a source of considerable concern for NATO.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps even more significantly for the United Kingdom's defence and security policy, the British population surprised many and voted to leave the European Union in 2016. As a result, in March 2017 Prime Minister Theresa May enacted Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty setting the process in motion for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union in March 2019.

Less than a year into her premiership Theresa May called a snap general election. The results surprised many, and left her as head of a minority Conservative government propped up by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).<sup>7</sup> This leaves her, at best, with a tiny majority in the House of Commons vulnerable to any form of rebellion from small groups within her own and dependent on the DUP for the continuation of her government. Commenting on Twitter, *The Observer* writer Andrew Rawnsley noted: 'There's a member of the living dead walking Downing Street. With the Conservatives having lost all faith in her leadership, Mrs May is still in office but she has no power'.<sup>8</sup>

Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the Labour Party, surprised many. His advocacy of an anti-austerity socialist agenda proved popular and far from losing votes the Labour Party gained 30 seats giving it a total of 262 out of

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5. 'National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom', *Cm.9,161*, London, TSO, 2015; P. Cornish & A. Dorman, 'Complex Security and Strategic Latency: The UK Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015', *International Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 2, March 2015, p. 351-370.

6. R. Allison, 'Russia and the Post-2014 International Legal Order: Revisionism and *Realpolitik*', *International Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 3, May 2017, p. 519-544; S. Auer, 'Carl Schmitt in the Kremlin: The Ukraine Crisis and the Return of Geopolitics', *International Affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 5, September 2015, p. 953-968; J. Haine, 'A New Gaullist Moment? European Bandwagoning and International Polarity', *International Affairs*, Vol. 91, No.5, September 2015, p. 991-1008; J. Kinninmont, 'Unrest in the Arab World: Why the 2011 Uprisings still Matter', *International Affairs*, Vol. 91, No.5, September 2015, p. 1141-1150.

7. G. Parker, 'British Election Results: May's Gamble Backfires', *Financial Times online*, 9 June 2017, available at: [www.ft.com](http://www.ft.com); G. Eaton, 'How Long Will Theresa May Survive as Prime Minister?', *New Statesman*, 14 June 2017, available at: [www.newstatesman.com](http://www.newstatesman.com).

8. A. Rawnsley, 'The Zombie Prime Minister', 11 June 2017, available at: [twitter.com](https://twitter.com).

650 seats. Yet, for all the hype about Labour, they were still in second place, short of an overall majority by 64 seats.<sup>9</sup> Labour are now only the third party in Scotland with the Conservatives as the main opposition to the Scottish National Party. The SNP also lost heavily from their 2015 peak of 56 out of 59 Scottish seats reduced to 35 and the share of vote picked up by the Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats indicating that the Scottish people do not want a further independence referendum. Finally, there was no large swing back to the Liberal Democrats who saw their overall share of the vote fall slightly and a net gain of 4 seats to 12.

It is always dangerous to suggest that we are at some form of turning point in time without the benefit of hindsight. What is evident is that the future of the United Kingdom's defence and security policy is far less certain than it was even in 2015. In examining the future of British defence policy this paper has been sub-divided into three parts. The first part provides a background to British defence policy, identifying the long-term themes that have underpinned a fairly consistent overall policy. It then considers how the defence and security apparatus of government has evolved and outlines the current policy with all its attendant compromises. Part two then analyses the current state of Britain's armed forces, their outlook and planned developments. It then examines the current process of defence transformation and the implications this has for defence and security policy more generally. Part three then looks ahead and considers how the new government is likely to approach defence and security, reflect on what the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union will mean for British defence and security policy and the impact this will also have on Britain's partners. It then draws some conclusions about the future direction of British defence and security.

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9. S. Bush, 'Basking in a Surprise Success, Corbyn's Team Is Planning for Victory Next Time', *New Statesman*, 15 June 2017, available at: [www.newstatesman.com](http://www.newstatesman.com).



# An Island, between Europe and the Open Sea

## The central tenets of British defence

In many respects, the central tenets of British defence (and now defence and security) policy have been largely consistent since at least the end of the Second World War, and in many respects for several centuries. Geography and an island mentality have played a major part in this. As a relatively small but densely populated island nation on the north-west edge of the European mainland, the defence of the United Kingdom has long been dominated by control of the waters around its shores and the ability to maintain the free movement of trade to and from the UK.

For hundreds of years, successive British governments have sought to prevent war by maintaining a balance of power on the European continent so that the United Kingdom could focus on its interests both in and beyond Europe.<sup>10</sup> As part of this strategy the United Kingdom has generally sought to align itself in a web of alliances and partnerships with various other states to help share the defence burden, although at times this balance has been maintained by carefully avoiding such diplomatic entanglements. The natural tendency of any British government is to avoid being isolated and to seek to work closely with others with the most recent SDSR emphasising the centrality of NATO to the United Kingdom. As a consequence, since 1945 successive governments have consistently emphasized the United Kingdom's close relationship with the United States which at times has been problematic domestically. For example, Tony Blair was referred to as George Bush's poodle whilst Theresa May has been criticized for offering Donald Trump a state visit.<sup>11</sup>

The pursuit of this approach over the last couple of centuries was facilitated by the United Kingdom's early industrialization and the successful development of the Royal Navy so that the United Kingdom

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10. M. Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of Two World Wars*, London: Temple Smith, 1972; B. L. Hart, *The British Way in Warfare*, London: Penguin, 1942; C. J. Bartlett, *Defence and Diplomacy: Britain and the Great Powers, 1815-1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993.

11. A petition to parliament against Donald Trump being given a state visit received over 1.8 million signatures. Available at: <https://petition.parliament.uk>.

became the dominant maritime power by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The expansion of the British Empire continued so that by 1920 it covered almost a quarter of the world's land mass. The legacies of this can be seen in the 13 Dependent Territories scattered across the globe that remain part of the United Kingdom, its membership of the Commonwealth, the multiplicity of alliances and partnerships that remain extant and its position as one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Along with France, it also means that the United Kingdom has retained global responsibilities evident, for example, in its military operations in support of the government in Sierra Leone in 2000 to fight the Revolutionary United Front and the assistance it also gave in combating the Ebola outbreak in 2014.<sup>12</sup>

However, the 20<sup>th</sup> century also witnessed quite profound changes to the United Kingdom, its relative situation and its conduct of its defence and now national security policies. A century ago, Great Britain, as it was then, was in the process of seeing its position of global dominance starting to come to an end, a demise brought forward by the two world wars. After the First World War, it willingly accepted its loss of naval primacy through the Washington Conference.<sup>13</sup> By the end of the Second World War the United Kingdom had surrendered naval dominance to the United States and left in a financial position which was at best precarious.<sup>14</sup> Since then the conventional narrative has been one of the United Kingdom's relative decline.<sup>15</sup> The United Kingdom has become a stasis power – a country that has consistently sought to maintain the existing power structures and balance in the international system whilst recognising that these will inevitably change over time to the detriment of the United Kingdom.

Yet, as the only large European power to have survived the Second World War relatively intact, it was the United Kingdom that had to confront a Central and Eastern Europe dominated by the Soviet military and political presence.<sup>16</sup> Fear of the Soviet Union developed even before the

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12. A. Dorman, *Blair's Successful War: British Military Intervention in Sierra Leone*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2009; E. Ross, G. H. Welch & P. Angelides, 'Sierra Leone's Response to the Ebola Outbreak: Management Strategies and Key Responder Experiences', *Chatham House Paper*, March 2017.

13. E. Goldstein, *The Washington Conference, 1921-1922: Naval Rivalry, East Asian Stability and the Road to Pearl Harbor*, London: Routledge, 1994.

14. In fact, the United Kingdom only finally completed its payments to the US under the Lend-Lease programme in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. 'UK Settles WWII Debts to Allies', *BBC Online*, 29 December 2006, available at: [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk).

15. G. L. Bernstein, *The Myth of Decline: The Rise of Britain since 1945*, London: Pimlico, 2004; R. English & M. Kenny (eds), *Rethinking British Decline*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000.

16. P. Cornish, *British Military Planning for the Defence of Germany, 1945-1950*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1996; C. Bluth, *Britain, Germany and Western Nuclear Strategy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 10-30.



end of the Second World War as the allies sought to plan the peace.<sup>17</sup> With the Soviet Union as the most likely enemy, the Royal Navy was of limited use against a power which would ultimately have to be confronted on land. This situation was complicated by the technological changes that developed in warfare in the twentieth century. In the First World War, German airship and bomber raids had demonstrated that the United Kingdom was no longer immune from direct attack from the air, whilst the U-Boat war had threatened to starve and isolate the country.<sup>18</sup> The Second World War reinforced the government's understanding of the UK's vulnerability still further. The development of the atomic bomb and its use against Japan demonstrated the potential for a single bomber to destroy an entire city and fulfil the claims of the early air power theorists.<sup>19</sup>

As a consequence, three tenets of British defence policy emerged after 1945 and have remained almost entirely unchanged. The first was already in operation – the policy of preventing a single state or group of states from dominating Europe was retained. In the Cold War setting the Soviet Union was identified as the main threat to this. The difference was the United Kingdom's response. Successive British Governments concluded that the only way to deter the Soviet Union was to use the United States as a counterweight. Thus, for the first time the United Kingdom has sought to use a non-European power rather than itself as the means to help offset the stronger power bloc. To solidify this, the United Kingdom helped establish the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) a mechanism to formally commit the United States to the defence of Europe and it has consistently identified NATO as its principal military alliance.<sup>20</sup>

Second, successive British governments have recognised that ultimately one state might not be prepared to sustain massive losses for another. This goes back to the British experience in the Battle for France in May 1940 when, despite French requests for additional fighter squadrons, the British government refused to send the aircraft in order to preserve a sufficiently large fighter force for the anticipated defence of Britain. The lesson drawn was that ultimately no state will commit suicide for another.

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17. W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War Volume VI: Triumph and Tragedy*, London: Penguin Book Ltd 1974, p. 495-507.

18. S. J. Ball, *The Bomber in British Strategy: Doctrine, Strategy and Britain's World Role, 1945-1960*, Boulder (CO, USA): Westview Press Inc, 1995.

19. H. Wynn, *RAF Nuclear Deterrent Forces*, London: The Stationery Office, 1994; J. Baylis & K. Stoddart, *The British Nuclear Experience: The Role of Beliefs, Culture and Identity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015; G. C. Peden, *Arms, Economics, and British Strategy: From Dreadnought to Hydrogen Bombs*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

20. R. Self, *British Foreign and Defence Policy since 1945: Challenge and Dilemma in a Changing World*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

This led successive British governments to develop and then maintain an independent nuclear deterrent.<sup>21</sup>

Third, successive British governments have also seen the United Kingdom playing a wider role in the rest of the world. In 1945 Britain thought of itself as one of the three leading world powers and expected to be treated as such – even if by then others had doubts. This was made clear in the 1948 Defence Estimates: “the United Kingdom, as a member of the British Commonwealth and a Great Power, must be prepared at all times to fulfil her responsibility not only to the United Nations but also to herself.”<sup>22</sup> Whilst by then not a superpower in its own right, Britain’s military and civilian presence throughout the world, particularly through its continuing Empire, led many to assume that the world role would continue, particularly given the relative inexperience of the United States in many regions.<sup>23</sup> This view was reinforced by Britain’s status as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council with veto rights. Today, this policy is associated with the ‘Global Britain’ brand currently being advocated by the Prime Minister.<sup>24</sup>

## The Defence and Security Apparatus

As part of the evolution of the machinery of government, the organizations and foci for defence policy have been the subject of almost continual change since the end of the Second World War. Prior to the war the three Services each had their own department of state with coordination provided by a Chiefs of Staff Committee and overseen by the Committee of Imperial Defence, a sub-cabinet committee first set up in 1902 to provide the mechanism for coordinating the defence requirements of the empire.<sup>25</sup> In 1940 the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, created the post of Minister of Defence for himself to coordinate the defence effort. In 1946,

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21. H. Wynn, *The RAF Strategic Nuclear Deterrent: their Origins, Roles and Deployment, 1946-69: A Documentary History*, London: HMSO, 1964; J. Baylis and K. Stoddart, *The British Nuclear Experience: The Role of Beliefs, Culture and Identity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015; K. Stoddart, *Facing Down the Soviet Union: Britain, the USA, NATO and Nuclear Weapons, 1976-1983*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; A. Futter (ed), *The United Kingdom and the Future of Nuclear Weapons*, London: Roman & Littlefield, 2016.

22. ‘Statement Relating to Defence, 1948’, *Cmnd 7,327*, London: HMSO, 1948, reprinted in *Brassey’s Naval Annual*, edited by Rear Admiral H.G. Thursfield, London: William Clowes and Sons Ltd., 1948, p. 528.

23. C. Ponting, *Breach of Power: Labour in Power, 1964-1970*, London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1989, p. 41-42.

24. B. Wright, ‘Theresa May Declares Brexit Will Make a ‘Truly Global Britain’ at Davos’, *Telegraph online*, 19 January 2017, available at: [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk).

25. J. Devanny & J. Harris, ‘The National Security Council: National Security at the Centre of Government’, *Institute for Government*, 2014.

the Labour Government created a Ministry of Defence to coordinate the three Service departments. Over time the role of the Ministry of Defence (MoD) increased with the three Service departments eventually becoming subsumed within the MoD.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, successive governments maintained a cabinet sub-committee tasked with overseeing and coordinating defence and security as a direct replacement for the Committee of Imperial Defence.

Defence policy was articulated until 1999 by a series of annual 'Statements on the Defence Estimates' that were presented to parliament and periodic defence reviews culminating in the 1998 'Strategic Defence Review' (SDR) which provided the basis for British defence policy for more than a decade with some tweaks.<sup>27</sup> After 1999 the annual 'Statement on the Defence Estimates' ceased to be published and defence policy was updated via two defence reviews – the 2002 'SDR: A New Chapter' and the two-part 'Delivering Security in a Changing world'.<sup>28</sup> Although these latter two reviews were designed in part to update and replace the 1998 Strategic Defence Review, most commentators and even parts of government continued to refer back to the 1998 review as extant policy.

In 2008, the then Labour government, under the leadership of Gordon Brown, released the United Kingdom's first National Security Strategy.<sup>29</sup> This document was produced by the Cabinet Office with little consultation with the other departments of state. It outlined a series of threats and challenges to the United Kingdom and little else. It was quickly replaced by a second version in 2009 which did involve cross-governmental consultation.<sup>30</sup> Yet again, the document identified threats and challenges but once again it failed to articulate any real measures to meet these issues other than to emphasise the importance of the 'special relationship' with the United States.

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26. M. Edmonds, 'The Higher Organisation of Defence in Britain, 1945-1985: the Federal-Unification Debate', in *The Defence Equation*, edited by M. Edmonds, London: Brassey's Defence Publishers, 1986; M. McIntosh, *Managing Britain's Defence*, London: Macmillan Academic & Professional Ltd, 1990.

27. 'The Strategic Defence Review', *Cm.3,999*, London: TSO, 1998; P. Cornish & A. Dorman, 'Blair's Wars and Brown's Budgets: From Strategic Defence Review to Strategic Decay in Less than a Decade', *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No.2, March 2009, p. 247-261.

28. 'The Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter', *Cm.5,566*, London: TSO, 2002; 'Delivering Security in a Changing World: Defence White Paper', *Cm.6,041*, London: TSO, 2003; 'Delivering Security in a Changing World: Future Capabilities', *Cm.6,269*, London: TSO, 2004.

29. 'The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Security in an Interdependent World', *Cm.7,291*, London: TSO, 2008.

30. 'Security for the Next Generation: The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Update 2009', *Cm.7,590*, London: TSO, 2009.

As a direct result of this confusion and the failure of the British armed forces in Iraq and Afghanistan the idea that a ‘strategic vacuum’ existed in government policy making emerged in 2009.<sup>31</sup> In opposition the Conservatives had debated whether to change the British national security making process. As part of its agreement to form a government, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition formed in May 2010 announced the creation of a National Security Council, a new post of National Security Advisor and the development of a classified national risk register.<sup>32</sup> The government also sought to ensure that future governments would regularly review defence and security policy by committing the government to undertake a defence and security review in every parliament.<sup>33</sup> At the time, it was unclear whether this would be accompanied by a regular review of the UK’s national security strategy. In practice, the coalition government published the third national security strategy and an accompanying SDSR within a day of each other in 2010, and in 2015 the Conservative government produced a single publication combining the two.<sup>34</sup>

Theresa May’s decision to call for an early general election in 2017 has unpicked the fixed term parliament act and the question has now emerged as to when the next defence and security review will be. Should it be in 2020 and thus follow the rolling five year programme of its immediate predecessors or should the new government produce a new NSS and SDSR in recognition of the United Kingdom’s changed circumstances brought about by Brexit? In their election manifesto the Conservatives gave no indication when the next review would be undertaken.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, the Labour Party called for a defence and a defence review but omitted to say whether there would also be a new NSS.

## Current defence and security policy

The underlying conclusions of the 2010 NSS, SDSR and accompanying Comprehensive Spending Review was that the UK’s financial situation was precarious and that the country needed to embark on a major programme

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31. The debate began with P. Cornish & A. Dorman, ‘Blair’s Wars and Brown’s Budgets: From Strategic Defence Review to Strategic Decay in Less than a Decade’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 85, No.2, March 2009, p. 247-261.

32. J. Devanny & J. Harris, ‘The National Security Council: National Security at the Centre of Government’, *Institute for Government*, 2014.

33. L. Fox, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, ‘Strategic Defence and Security Review’, 21 June 2010, Cols.52-56.

34. ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom’, *Cm.9,161*, London: TSO, 2015.

35. ‘Forward, Together: Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a Prosperous Britain’, *Conservative Party Election Manifesto*, 2017.

of austerity in order to put the nation's finances on a more secure footing.<sup>36</sup> They also concluded that, with the withdrawal of British forces from Afghanistan planned for 2014,<sup>37</sup> there would be no major defence challenges to the United Kingdom in the immediate short term and that it could make cuts to the defence budget and use the next decade to reconfigure the UK's armed forces to the challenges envisaged for 2020 and beyond.

The review and the various speeches that accompanied it sought to stress that the United Kingdom was not withdrawing from its worldwide commitments and that there would be 'no strategic shrinkage'.<sup>38</sup> The Foreign and Commonwealth Office pledged to rebalance and increase its presence overseas despite cuts to its budget by reducing its presence in Europe and focusing on regions that it had little or no representation in. Few analysts bought into the narrative and the cuts to the armed forces outlined below merely reinforced the perception that the United Kingdom was reducing its capabilities and influence.

The 2010 review placed considerable emphasis not only on the United Kingdom's relationship with the United States but also on the United Kingdom's partnership with France. In part, the latter move was an attempt to placate the right-wing of the Conservative Party with its anti-European Union focus.<sup>39</sup> Thus, emphasising a bilateral relationship in Europe negated opposition to improvements in Europe's defence capabilities. However, the new emphasis on France was also, in part, a recognition that both France and the United Kingdom continue to have significant overlapping defence interests and responsibilities, particularly beyond Europe, and that developing an enhanced bilateral defence relationship was in both nations' interests. This partnership has since progressed under successive French presidents and prime ministers in terms of military cooperation and defence acquisition. However, the impact of the election of a new French president, the weakness of Theresa May and the impact of Brexit may alter this emphasis but at the time of writing this is too soon to tell.<sup>40</sup>

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36. D. Cameron, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, 'Strategic Defence and Security Review', 19 October 2010, Cols.797-825.

37. 'Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review', *Cm.7,948*, London: TSO, 2010, p. 15.

38. 'A Retreat, but not a Rout', *The Economist online*, 21<sup>st</sup> October 2010, available at: [www.economist.com](http://www.economist.com).

39. 'UK-France Summit 2010 Declaration on Defence and Security Co-operation', 2 November 2010.

40. M. R. H. Uttley & B. Wilkinson, 'A Spin of the Wheel? Defence Procurement and Defence Industries in the Brexit Debates', *International Affairs*, Vol. 92, No.3, May 2016, p. 569-586; T. Chopin & C. Lequesne,

The government also decided that defence would need to play a part in the government's deficit reduction measures aimed at addressing the country's current account deficit. As a result, the Ministry of Defence found itself confronted by three fiscal challenges, two of which it had created for itself. First, the Ministry of Defence was confronted with the prospect of paying for the next generation of nuclear ballistic missile submarines. The cost of nuclear replacement has always largely been the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence but for some reason the MoD had thought that on this occasion the Treasury would pay for this separately and had made no provision for the acquisition of new submarines in its budget. Second, MoD was told to balance its own over-extended equipment programme. It was therefore confronted with a series of procurement programmes which it had approved in the preceding decade but which it did not have the funding to support.<sup>41</sup> Third, planned defence spending was to be reduced by 7.5% which, although significant, was far less than that which confronted some other departments of state.<sup>42</sup>

The 2010 SDSR therefore outlined a force structure that would not need to be delivered until 2020 and which represented a reduced capability compared to what it had been. In general, the review was not well received. The first criticism was to allege that the 2010 papers were 'astrategic' or non-strategic.<sup>43</sup> This was frequently coupled with the argument that the review exercise had focused entirely on balancing the Ministry of Defence's budget.<sup>44</sup> Such criticisms generally failed the strategy test by failing to acknowledge that the funding is an element of strategy. The government quite clearly identified the nation's credit rate and the state of the public finances as the key centres of gravity and accepted that with a relatively benign international outlook it could therefore reduce the overall defence burden on the state. Other critics focused on individual decisions and critiqued them demanding that these be reversed again without any consideration given to the financial consequences of such reversals in policy.

Even as the 2010 SDSR was published it was recognised within the government that the speed with which it was delivered meant that a number of areas would have to be considered and decisions implemented at a later date. Whilst the process of defence transformation and reforms to

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'Differentiation as a Double-Edged Sword: Member States' Practices and Brexit', *International Affairs*, Vol. 92, No.3, May 2016, p. 531-546.

41. National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence the Major Projects Report 2009', *HC.85-I*, session 2009-2010, London: TSO, 2009, p. 4.

42. D. Cameron, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, 'Strategic Defence and Security Review', 19 October 2010, Col. 797.

43. J. Walker, 'Quick Cuts Are Fine, but Strategy Takes Time', *The Times*, 25 September 2010.

44. C. Parry, 'Helmand Is the Past: New Risks Lie ahead of Us', *The Times*, 13 October 2010, p. 24.

defence are considered in the next section, the ‘Three Month Exercise’ outlined a series of further defence reductions, most notably to the size of the regular army and the reconfiguration of the two aircraft carriers under construction back to the STOVL version of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.<sup>45</sup>

As mentioned above, between the 2010 NSS and SDSR and the 2015 NSS/SDSR there were major changes in the international environment including the NATO-led operation in Libya, the Arab Awakening, the Syrian civil war and the emergence of Islamic State (IS), Russia’s illegal annexation of the Crimea and conflict in Eastern Ukraine. These changing circumstances were recognised at the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales with calls for all the NATO members to reach a defence spending level of 2% of GDP within a decade.<sup>46</sup>

As a result, when the Conservative government began to formally conduct its 2015 review of the national security strategy and strategic defence and security review, its 2010 assumptions that this would be little more than a minor updating were soon recognised as being wrong and a more fundamental review would be needed. The potential dangers to the United Kingdom were now far more significant and immediate. At the same time, the United Kingdom’s economic position remained weak. Whilst the coalition government had helped to reduce the current account deficit the overall national debt was still increasing.<sup>47</sup>

The 2015 NSS/SDSR outlined three National Security Objectives:<sup>48</sup>

- Protect our people
- Project our global influence
- Promote our prosperity

The first two tied directly into previous reviews. The former focused on hard power and the threats to the United Kingdom from terrorism and also now from a resurgent Russia. The renewed emphasis on the potential threat posed by Russia followed on from the Russian seizure of the Crimea and its actions in the Donbas.<sup>49</sup> At the 2014 NATO summit in Wales the

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45. P. Hammond, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, Defence Budget and Transformation, 14 May 2012, cols. 262-264.

46. ‘Wales Summit Declaration: Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales’, *Press Release 120*, 5 September 2014.

47. Office of National Statistics, *BoP Current Account balance*, available at: [www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk).

48. ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom’, *Cm.9,161*, London: TSO, 2015, p. 11-12.

49. R. Allison, ‘Russia’s ‘Deniable’ Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 90, No.6, November 2014, p. 1255-1298; D. S. Yost, ‘The Budapest Memorandum and Russia’s Intervention in Ukraine’, *International Affairs*, Vol. 91, No.3, May 2015,

United Kingdom led the way in calling for tougher sanctions against Russia and a more robust military response, including the commitment of the European powers to spend 2% of GDP on defence within a decade.<sup>50</sup> At the NATO Warsaw summit in 2016 the United Kingdom agreed to lead one of the four battalions deployed to the Baltic states and Poland<sup>51</sup> and in the aftermath of the 2015 general election the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, formally committed the UK to the 2% commitment for the lifetime of the parliament much to the relief of the United States, the British armed forces and their supporters.<sup>52</sup>

The 'Protect our global influence' strand reflected the government's acknowledgement that, despite its protestations that there would be 'no strategic shrinkage', there was a general feeling within Whitehall and amongst the United Kingdom's closest allies that the UK's voice had been heard less. The disastrous intervention in Libya and the subsequent parliamentary vote against the use of force in Syria suggested that the United Kingdom's ability and willingness to use its military might be in decline. This was reinforced in the crisis over Russia's illegal seizure of the Crimea. Along with Russia and the United States, the United Kingdom was one of the guarantors of Ukraine's borders under the terms of the Budapest Memorandum.<sup>53</sup> Yet, when Russia seized the Crimea it was the United States, France and Germany that led discussions about how the West should respond. The United Kingdom's voice was noticeably silent and only subsequently did the Prime Minister, David Cameron, seek to become involved. The 2015 NSS/SDSR therefore stressed that the United Kingdom's voice would again be heard and that the United Kingdom would continue to play a global role. This tied into the new 'International Defence Engagement Strategy' first outlined in 2013<sup>54</sup> and also the United Kingdom's expansion of its defence activities 'East of Suez' including the opening of a new naval base in Bahrain.<sup>55</sup>

The 'Promote our prosperity' strand was new and marked a change in direction for defence. In 2012 the coalition government published its'

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p. 505-538; A. Lanozka, 'Russian Hybrid Warfare and Extended Deterrence in Eastern Europe', *International Affairs*, Vol. 92, No.1, January 2016, p. 175-196.

50. 'Wales Summit Declaration: Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales', *Press Release 120*, 5 September 2014.

51. 'NATO Summit, Warsaw: PM's Press Conference', 9 July 2016.

52. G. Osborne, *House of Common Parliament Debates*, 'Financial Statement', 8 July 2015, col.337.

53. D. S. Yost, 'The Budapest Memorandum and Russia's Intervention in Ukraine', *op. cit.*, p. 505-538.

54. Foreign and Commonwealth Office & Ministry of Defence, *International Defence Engagement Strategy*, London: FCO/MoD, 2013, available at: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

55. G. Stansfield & S. Kelly, 'A Return to East of Suez? UK Military Deployment to the Gulf', *RUSI Briefing Paper*, London: RUI, 2013, available at: [rusi.org](http://rusi.org).



‘National Security Technology’ white paper.<sup>56</sup> This represented a significant revamp in the United Kingdom’s approach to its domestic defence industries. Under the previous Labour government, the value and importance of the United Kingdom retaining a significant onshore defence industrial capability was recognised and at least officially supported.<sup>57</sup> In the 2012 revision, the coalition government reflected its frustration with domestic industry by its emphasis on the importance of international competition and a far greater willingness to acquire the majority of equipment from abroad if it was cheaper. For the coalition government, there were only a few areas, including cryptography and nuclear submarines, that needed to remain in house.

However, the paper ‘A Benefit not a Burden’, published in April 2015, highlighted the value of the defence industrial base for defence and for the country more broadly in terms of the security of supply and the contribution this capacity made to the United Kingdom’s economy.<sup>58</sup> In response, the Conservative Party’s 2015 election manifesto embraced the importance of the United Kingdom’s defence industries to the economy and the government’s finances and led to a change in policy<sup>59</sup> and the 2015 NSS/SDSR added the ‘Promote our prosperity’ strand and promised to deliver a new defence industrial strategy.

At the higher end of policy making the 2015 NSS and SDSR contain a basic disconnect between the immediacy of the identified threats and the timeframe set for the reconfiguration of the armed forces. In the 2010 review the government could afford to have a 10-year gap between the review and the reconfiguration of the UK’s armed forces because it identified that a window of time existed. The 2015 review identified that this window had closed but the reconfiguration of the armed forces was delayed by a further five years to 2025 for many capabilities. In other words, the 2015 NSS/SDSR has in *de facto* terms preserved a new variant of the interwar ‘Ten Year Rule’ first developed in the 2010 NSS and SDSR, leaving the United Kingdom with its own ‘window of vulnerability’.

The reason for this is largely financial. Much of the new cash pledged for defence equipment and support over the next decade is not actually new investment, but the reallocation of funding from within the wider defence budget and the removal of provisions for programme overruns that

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56. ‘National Security Through Technology: Technology, Equipment, and Support for UK Defence and Security’, *Cm.8,278*, London: TSO, 2012.

57. ‘Defence Industrial Strategy Defence White Paper’, *Cm.6,697*, London: TSO, 2005.

58. A. Dorman, M. R. H. Uttley & B. Wilkinson, ‘A Benefit, not a Burden: The Security, Economic and Strategic Value of Britain’s Defence Industry’, *King’s Policy Institute Paper*, April 2015.

59. ‘The Conservative Party Manifesto 2015’, p. 77.

were inserted into the ten-year equipment programme as an insurance measure.<sup>60</sup> In addition, the Ministry of Defence clearly hoped to make some of the required savings by reducing some of its other capabilities, such as the Sentinel fleet, and delaying upgrades to other capabilities, such as the RAF's Boeing E-3D, leaving it out of alignment with its' US, French and NATO counterparts.<sup>61</sup>

In their 2017 election manifesto Theresa May's Conservative Party has pledged to maintain defence spending at 2% of GDP, with the annual budget increasing by at least 0.5% above inflation.<sup>62</sup> Even so, the armed forces are currently trying to resolve an annual shortfall of approximately £1-2bn.<sup>63</sup> As a result, a number of savings measures are currently under consideration.

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60. National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence: The Equipment Plan 2016 to 2026', *HC.914*, session 2016-17, London: TSO, 2017, p. 6.

61. T. Ripley, 'UK Sentinel Force Capability Gap Emerges in New RAF ISTAR Plan', *HIS Jane's 360*, 13 June 2016, available at: [www.janes.com](http://www.janes.com).

62. 'Forward, Together: Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a prosperous Britain', *Conservative Party Election Manifesto*, 2017.

63. D. Haynes, 'Forces Face Shortfall of £10bn After Costs Soar', *The Times*, 31 March 2017, p. 1 & 7; D. Haynes, 'Military Is Fighting '£20bn Cash Crisis'', *The Times*, 29 April 2017, p. 12; D. Haynes, 'MoD Targets £20bn Savings', *The Times*, 27 June 2017, p. 2; D. Haynes, 'Army Fights for Future as Pledge on Troop Numbers Is Abandoned', *The Times*, 3 June 2017, p. 4; D. Haynes, 'RAF Set to Scale Back on Supersonic Jets', *The Times*, 2 June 2017, p. 4.

# Britain's Military under Strain

## The Current State of the armed forces

The British Armed Forces are in a position of significant flux. They have been engaged in virtually continuous operations overseas since the 1990s and for the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century they were operating at a level that exceeded the defence planning assumption on which they were configured (for current deployments see table in Appendix). The current level of deployment however, is significantly lower than it was a few years ago when the UK maintained thousands of troops in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

The result of this sustained support to operations has been fourfold. First, the deployment of forces to Afghanistan and Iraq resulted in a sustained short-term bias towards the land forces. As a result, both the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force found that many of their programmes were delayed and cut as resources were diverted to the army.<sup>64</sup> Second, it has left the army assuming that it should retain a higher proportion of the defence budget despite the fact that the United Kingdom is an island nation which would suggest a maritime-air bias. Third, operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted in the acquisition of significant amounts of equipment that are only really suited to those environments whilst other programmes have been deferred. In other words, it is trying to accommodate a defence equipment programme that has been distorted by more than a decade of war. Fourth, the focus on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan has left a generation of service personnel lacking some of the wider skills normally associated with their specialty, with the result that there is a considerable requirement for retraining of individuals and units.

## Royal Navy

Since the end of the Cold War the Royal Navy has continued to see its overall size decline in terms of personnel and ship numbers as the table below shows. The cutbacks to the navy's surface fleet, particularly in terms of the reduction from 49 to 19 destroyers and frigates and attack submarines from 29 to 7 (see table below) has raised the question of

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64. See, for example, National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence – The Major Projects Report 2009', HC.85, session 2009-2010, London: TSO, 2009, p. 5.

whether the navy has fallen below a critical mass.<sup>65</sup> The navy has certainly struggled to meet its existing commitments and these are less than it has had in the past.

**Table 2.1: Royal Navy units**

	1990	1998	2010	2016	Comment
<b>Submarines</b>					
<b>Ballistic Missile</b>	4	3	4	4	The reduction in number in 1998 was part of the replacement of the first generation of boats (Polaris) with a second generation (Vanguard). The order for the first of a third generation has recently been made.
<b>Attack</b>	29	12	7	7	In 1990 the attack submarines comprised both nuclear and diesel electric powered boats. By 1998 all the boats were nuclear powered.
<b>Ships</b>					
<b>Aircraft Carriers</b>	3	3	2	0	The aircraft carrier comprised the Invincible-class. Two new much larger aircraft carriers are currently under construction
<b>LPD/LPH</b>	2	2	3	3	Between 1998 and 2010 the amphibious force was completely replaced and an LPH added.
<b>Destroyers</b>	14	12	6	6	Originally it had been envisaged that 12 Type 45 destroyers (now 6) would enter service.
<b>Frigates</b>	35	23	17	13	Currently it is planned that the 13 Type 23 frigates will be replaced by 8 Type 26 frigates with an enhanced anti-submarine warfare capability and at least five Type 31 frigates which will be designed with a view to exports.
<b>Mine Countermeasures</b>	41	19	16	15	
<b>Patrol Ships and Craft</b>	34	28	22	22	
<b>Survey Ships</b>	8	6	4	4	
<b>Ice Patrol Ships</b>	1	1	1	1	

65. House of Commons Defence Committee, 'Restoring the Fleet: Naval Procurement and the National Shipbuilding Strategy', Third Report of 2016-2017, *HC.221*, London: TSO, 2016.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary					
<b>Tankers</b>	13	9	6	4	There are currently 4 new tankers under construction whilst 2 of the existing fleet are compliant with current maritime standards and may be retained in service.
<b>Fleet Replenishment - Stores Ships</b>	4	4	4	3	The 3 remaining ships are awaiting replacement with new ships scheduled to support the new aircraft carriers
<b>Landing Ships</b>	5	5	4	3	The 5 old ships were initially replaced by 4 newer and much larger vessels, one of which was subsequently sold to Australia.

Source: Ministry of Defence, *UK Defence Statistics 2000*, (London: MoD, 2000); Ministry of Defence, *United Kingdom Defence Statistics 2010*, (London: MoD, 2010); Ministry of Defence, *Statistical Series 4 – Equipment Bulletin 4.01: Formations, Vessels and Aircraft Annual: 2014 Edition*, Ministry of Defence, *UK Armed Forces Equipment and Formations 2016*, (London: MoD, 2016).

The Royal Navy's submarine programme currently consists of two classes of boats. The navy currently plans to replace its current force of four *Vanguard*-class nuclear powered ballistic missile carrying submarines with a similar number of the new *Dreadnought*-class. Initially these will be equipped with the same Trident missiles that are currently carried by the *Vanguard*-class boats and eventually it is envisaged that the United Kingdom will buy a new missile from the United States. These new submarines will be equipped with 12 rather than 16 missile tubes and the plan remains to maintain the continuous at-sea deterrent.<sup>66</sup>

The navy's attack submarine force comprises a mixture of four *Trafalgar*-class and three new *Astute*-class boats with a further four of the latter class currently under construction.<sup>67</sup> The ageing *Trafalgar*-class boats are becoming unreliable at a time when Russian submarines are increasingly operating in and around the UK waters. Part of the reason for the delay in replacing the *Trafalgar*-class has been because of problems with their successors caused by a hiatus in nuclear design and construction in the late 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>68</sup> A number of studies have been undertaken into the future sustainability of the nuclear programme and the conclusion is that, to maintain the present design and manufacturing base,

66. Ministry of Defence, 'Dreadnought submarine programme: factsheet', *Policy Paper*, Updated 20 January 2016.

67. National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence: Major Projects Report 2015 and the Equipment Plan 2015 to 2025', *HC.488*, session 2015-2016, London: TSO, 2017, appendix 4, p. 47.

68. National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence – The Major Projects Report 2011', *HC.1,520*, session 2010-2012, London: TSO, 2011, p. 29-30.

the navy needs to order a new nuclear submarine every 2 years.<sup>69</sup> With a life span of 30 years this would suggest that the navy's overall submarine force should consist of 15 rather than 11 boats but this has yet to be addressed.

As one of its savings measures, the 2010 SDSR scrapped the existing force of two small *Invincible*-class aircraft carriers and their associate Harrier strike aircraft, pending the introduction of two much larger aircraft carriers equipped with the US-designed Joint Strike Fighter (F-35) towards the end of the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>70</sup> After a brief flirtation with modifying the new *Queen Elizabeth*-class aircraft carriers with catapults and arrester gear, the government recommitted itself to building both aircraft carriers but retaining only one in service equipped with the short take-off and vertical landing (STOVL) variant of the Joint Strike Fighter (F-35B).<sup>71</sup> As a result of the SDSR 2015, this decision was again modified. Now both aircraft carriers will be retained in service in order to have one available at all times. In its present form, the aircraft carrier programme will see the introduction into service of two new large aircraft carriers to replace the now retired *Invincible*-class aircraft carriers and the helicopter carrier *HMS Ocean*.

The new aircraft carriers, *HMS Queen Elizabeth* and *HMS Prince of Wales*, will be equipped with the short take-off and vertical landing version of the F-35 Lightning II joint strike fighter – F-35B. The 2015 SDSR also decided to bring forward the acquisition of the F-35B with a planned total buy of 138 aircraft of this single variant, including 42 by 2023, in order to have 24 available in the frontline force for deployment aboard one of the aircraft carriers (both can carry over 36 F-35Bs).<sup>72</sup> The Royal Navy is also in discussion with the US Marine Corps about basing some of its aircraft aboard the new aircraft carriers as a means of giving the ships a full complement of aircraft.<sup>73</sup>

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69. J. F. Schank, J. Riposo, J. Birkler & J. Chiesa, 'Sustaining Design and Production Resources: The United Kingdom's Nuclear Submarine Industrial Base Volume 1', *Rand Paper MG-326/1*, Santa Monica (CA): RAND, 2005.

70. As a comparison, the displacement of the *Invincible*-class is 22,000 tonnes. The displacement of the *Queen Elizabeth*-class is 65,000 tonnes.

71. P. Hammond, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, 'Carrier Strike', 10 May 2012, cols.140-141; National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence – Carrier Strike: the 2012 Reversion Decision', *HC.63*, session 2012-2013, London: TSO, 2013.

72. D. Cameron, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, 'National Security and Defence', 23 November 2015, col.1,050.

73. A. Chuter, 'US Marine F-35B Fighter Jet Deployment Onboard British Warship Made Official', *Defence News online*, 16 December 2016, available at: [www.Defencenews.com](http://www.Defencenews.com).

The aircraft carrier programme has been confronted with numerous delays,<sup>74</sup> and is currently projected to cost in excess of £6bn plus the cost of the air groups. Moreover, the decision to retain both aircraft carriers was not matched by an appropriate uplift in the size of the Royal Navy. As a consequence, the navy has already announced that 200 Royal Marines posts will be replaced by Royal Navy personnel to help find personnel to crew the second aircraft carrier.<sup>75</sup> In addition, a number of other ships have been or are due to leave service without replacement in order to help find the manpower to crew the aircraft carriers. These ships include the navy's helicopter carrier, *HMS Ocean*, and the only fleet repair ship, *HMS Diligence*.<sup>76</sup> In addition, there have also been delays in ordering the three support ships designed to sustain these ships at sea<sup>77</sup> and questions have been raised as to whether the Royal Navy will have sufficient surface ships to protect the aircraft carriers.

Since the end of the Cold War, the navy's surface fleet has been the subject of major cutbacks. It currently consists of 6 Type 45 air defence destroyers and 13 Type 23 anti-submarine frigates. In the case of the former, it was originally envisaged that the navy would acquire 12 ships to replace the Type 42 destroyers on a one-for-one basis. This was reduced to a planned force of 8 ships in 2004 and in 2008 this was reduced to 6 ships as part of ongoing cost savings.<sup>78</sup> All six entered service between 2009 and 2013. The Type 45s had originally been part of the joint Franco-Italian Horizon frigate programme which the UK left in 1999 but they are equipped with the same Principal Anti Air Missile System (PAAMS). In service, the ships have been found to have a problem with their engines and they are scheduled to be the subject of a works programme which will hopefully resolve this problem.<sup>79</sup> Like a number of other naval programmes, the ships are relatively under-armed, having provision for a strike package which has not been fitted. They are also scheduled to lose their Harpoon ship-to-ship missile capability.<sup>80</sup>

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74. For example, the 2009 decision to delay the carrier programme to save £450m in the short term was known to cost £674m in the long term. National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence – The Major Projects Report 2009', *HC.85*, session 2009-2010, London: TSO, 2009, p. 5; National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence – Delivering Carrier Strike', *HC.1,057*, session 2016-2017, London: TSO, 2017.

75. D. Haynes, 'Royal Marines Will Be Sacrificed to Keep Navy's Head above Water', *The Times*, 31 March 2017, p. 1 & 7.

76. *Notice of sale: former RFA Diligence a forward repair ship*, Ministry of Defence, 4 August 2016.

77. H. Baldwin, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, Written Answer A59194, 18 January 2017.

78. National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence: Providing Anti-Air Warfare Capability: the Type 45 Destroyer', *HC.295*, session 2008-2009, London: TSO, 2009, p. 6.

79. H. Baldwin, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, Written Answer A69015, 29 March 2017.

80. H. Baldwin, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, Written Answer A56471, 12 December 2016.

The replacement for the Type 23 frigates has gone through a series of iterations. Prior to the 2015 SDSR it was decided that all 13 ships would be replaced by a similar number of new advanced Type 26 frigates currently under development. In order to help save money, the 2015 SDSR changed this once again. It is now envisaged that 8 of the Type 23s will be replaced by the same number of Type 26 frigates whilst the remaining five would be replaced by at least 5 cheaper Type 31 frigates designed with the export market in mind.<sup>81</sup>

The United Kingdom's amphibious capability had undergone a renaissance in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a result, by the end of the last decade the navy had in service a helicopter carrier, two new Landing Pad Docks (LPDs) and four new Landing Ship Docks (LSDs)<sup>82</sup> capable of delivering 3 Commando Brigade either as part of a national deployment or as part of the larger UK/NL Amphibious Force. However, since then this capability has been reduced. In the 2010 SDSR, it was decided to sell one of the LSDs to Australia, put one of the LPDs into reserve and reduce the landing force to a single amphibious group, although 3 Commando Brigade remained virtually intact.<sup>83</sup> Five years later, the 2015 SDSR announced that the helicopter carrier, *HMS Ocean*, would leave service without replacement.<sup>84</sup> Subsequently, it was also announced that one of 3 Commando Brigade's infantry battalions would also be cut to help provide personnel for the fleet. As a result, there is some ambiguity about the future role of 3 Commando Brigade which is causing concern both in the Netherlands, which contributes to the UK/NL Amphibious Force, and Norway which has traditionally been the focus for the UK/NL to conduct reinforcement exercises on behalf of NATO.

## British Army

As a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and some clever political lobbying, the army has managed to increase its relative influence within the Ministry of Defence and government more generally. This is somewhat surprising considering UK long term preference, and time will tell whether there will be a rebalancing of resources between the three Services. The government's 2015 SDSR appeared to favour the Royal Air Force (see sub-

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81. D. Cameron, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, 'National Security and Defence', 23 November 2015, col.1,050.

82. National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence – The Landing Ship Dock (Auxiliary) Project', *HC.98*, session 2007-2008, London: TSO, 2007.

83. 'Securing Britain in an age of uncertainty: the Strategic Defence and Security Review', *Cm.7,948*, London: TSO, 2010.

84. H. Baldwin, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, Written Answer A59242, 12 January 2017.



section below) whilst the Conservative Party's 2017 election manifesto appeared to give primacy to the Royal Navy.<sup>85</sup> Shifting the balance in resource allocation will inevitably result in a significant backlash amongst the retired generals and opposition from within an army-dominated Ministry of Defence. Whilst the case for rebalancing resources in favour of the other two services is clear the new Conservative coalition with the DUP adds a further complication and may well protect the army. The DUP who are propping up the Conservative government are likely to insist on maintaining army numbers in case there is a return to violence in Northern Ireland.

Part of the questioning about the appropriate size, shape and priorities of the British Army has been caused by the army's constant change of focus and planned reconfiguration as the table below outlines. Up until 2010, the army's composition focused on expeditionary operations with the idea that such operations would be relatively short before the British handed over responsibility for a particular operation to an ally. The reality of Iraq and Afghanistan was the complete opposite, requiring the army to sustain two operations for a number of years. As a result, when the 2010 SDSR was undertaken the army chose to emphasise the importance of maintaining a brigade on stabilisation type operations over the longer term. In addition, such a commitment increased the argument for maintaining a larger army and helped the army initially put off some of the reductions originally envisaged in 2010. However, the internal Ministry of Defence 'Three Month Exercise' which followed forced the army to further reduce its regular component so that the defence budget could be brought into balance.<sup>86</sup>

Changes to the international system identified above led to a more significant SDSR in 2015. Once again, the army shifted its thinking. It used the perceived increase in threat posed by Russia to shift focus back to maintaining a 'warfighting division'.<sup>87</sup> The division is now the principal focus for British command rather than the brigade level. This in part

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85. 'Forward, Together: Our Plan for a Stronger Britain and a prosperous Britain', *Conservative Party Election Manifesto*, 2017.

86. P. Hammond, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, 'Army 2020', 5 July 2012, cols.1,085-1,089; National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence – Army 2020', *HC.263*, session 2014-2015, London: TSO, 2014.

87. 'National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom', *Cm.9,161*, London: TSO, 2015. What comprises a division has been the subject of constant change in the British Army. It is currently envisaged that the war-fighting division will comprise 2 armoured infantry brigades each comprising a single armoured regiment (battalion), a single reconnaissance regiment (battalion) and 2 armoured infantry battalions plus one of the new 'strike' brigades which will probably comprise 2 reconnaissance type regiments (battalions) and two wheeled infantry battalions. However, this is still being worked out.

reflects the experience of operations in Afghanistan but also the army's desire to be seen to be able to insert a unit into any US formation (British battalion into a US brigade, British brigade into a US division and ultimately a British division into a US corps). The army also nominally retains the ability to maintain corps level operations through its leadership of the NATO Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) although it would be unable to provide more than one UK division to this headquarters.

Initially, the 'warfighting division' was to comprise the three armoured infantry brigades with a combined strength of between 170 and 180 main battle tanks. However, in December 2016, this was revised yet again to two armoured infantry brigades and one of 2 new 'strike' brigades with a total strength of just under 120 tanks.<sup>88</sup>

**Table 2.2: Principal Units of the British Army**

Date	Heavy Forces	Medium Forces	Light Forces	Comment
<b>1989 Cold War mode</b>	1 Corps of 3 armoured divisions and 1 Infantry Brigade with an armoured element	1 Infantry Division providing air mobile and rear echelon protection	1 Airborne Brigade plus home defence brigades	The main focus for the British Army was its commitment to the defence of the Central Front in West Germany with four divisions plus a brigade group reinforcement to the Baltic.
<b>1998 – Strategic Defence Review plan</b>	1 Division of 3 Armoured brigades	1 division comprising 3 medium weight brigades	1 Air Assault Brigade plus home defence brigades	The focus was on expeditionary operations with an armoured brigade and a medium weight brigade maintained at high readiness alongside 16 Air Assault Brigade
<b>2010 – SDSR plan</b>	5 composite brigades		1 Air Assault Brigade plus home defence brigades	The focus was on having the ability to maintain a 6,500 personnel brigade on stabilisation type operations deploying each of the 5 specialised brigades and 16 Air Assault Brigade for 6 months over a 3 year cycle

88. M. Fallon, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, 'Strategic Defence and Security Review Army', 15 December 2016.

<b>2012 – Three Months Exercise</b>	3 Armoured infantry brigades		1 Air assault brigade 7 Regional brigades for home defence	The focus remained on the sustained deployment using 3 armoured infantry brigades and the air assault brigade; the 2 remaining brigades were amalgamated with the home defence brigades with the assumption that they could have support a stabilization type operation
<b>2015 - SDSR</b>	3 Armoured infantry brigades		1 Air assault brigade 7 Regional brigades (‘Adaptable Force’)	The focus was now on deploying a heavy division on operations for up to 6 months plus maintaining an air assault brigade for rapid deployment. Six of the 7 Regional brigades are linked to the International Defence Engagement Strategy.
<b>2016</b>	2 Armoured infantry brigades	2 ‘Strike’ brigades	1 Air assault brigade 7 Regional brigades (‘Adaptable Force’)	The focus on putting a division into the field remained, but it will now comprise 2 armoured infantry brigades and 1 of 2 new ‘strike’ brigades. The air assault brigade loses its attack helicopters to the new division but the brigade retains the high readiness role. Six of the 7 Regional brigades are linked to the International Defence Engagement Strategy.

*Source: Ministry of Defence, UK Defence Statistics 2000, (London: MoD, 2000); Ministry of Defence, United Kingdom Defence Statistics 2010, (London: MoD, 2010); Ministry of Defence, Statistical Series 4 – Equipment Bulletin 4.01: Formations, Vessels and Aircraft Annual: 2014 Edition, Ministry of Defence, UK Armed Forces Equipment and Formations 2016, (London: MoD, 2016).*

Details concerning the two new ‘strike’ brigades are still emerging and their exact role and configuration is still subject to debate within the army. In essence, the army is torn between conducting three different types of operations and confusion about where it is likely to have to fight. First, it is focusing on developing a war-fighting division which will be capable of reinforcing NATO’s eastern members against the perceived Russian threat as part of a much wider reinforcement package. In this respect, the mission is not a lot different from its Cold War days, except instead of maintaining and reinforcing a corps in West Germany it is looking to provide a reinforcement division to Poland and/or the Baltic states. It is therefore, maintaining strong links both with the United States and also France via the CJEF concept. Second, it also continues to think that such a division might be deployed outside Europe in a manner similar to 1991 and 2003. In reality in 1991 the division it deployed only had two armoured brigades

whilst in 2003 this had been reduced to a single armoured brigade plus an air assault and a Royal Marine commando brigade. In other words, the army has not deployed more than a division of two brigades since 1945. Third, bearing in mind the British deployment to Sierra Leone in 2000 and using the French operation in Mali as a template, the army considers it might need to deploy a lighter motorised brigade to Africa.<sup>89</sup> For the British Army, the French deployment to and operation in Mali from 2012 is viewed as a model for intervention.<sup>90</sup>

For the first of these missions, the 2 armoured infantry brigades naturally fit in but the ‘strike’ brigade as currently envisaged looks like it would be very vulnerable to Russian forces. In the case of the second mission, the mix of heavy and slightly lighter ‘strike’ brigades might work for stabilisation type operation but the ‘strike’ brigade would prove to be too lightly protected for a more conventional type of conflict. For the third of these missions the ‘strike’ brigades are looking far too heavy and difficult to transport. The new Scout vehicle currently entering service and the potential candidates for the armoured personnel carriers will only be able to be carried by air in the Royal Air Force’s eight C-17 aircraft. In other words, the ‘strike’ brigades look like they will be a perfect bureaucratic comprise, ill-suited to any of the likely missions being both under-protected and too heavy.

The most recent reorganization also gave the regional brigades that form part of the Adaptable Force a role in defence engagement. Each of the brigades has now been given a part of the world to focus its attention alongside providing support to the civilian authorities at home and supporting the reserve force (see table below).

**Table 2.3: Army brigades regional alignment**

4 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade	Northern Africa
7 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade	Western Africa
8 <sup>th</sup> Engineer Brigade	South Asia
11 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade	Southeast Asia
42 <sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade	Eastern Africa
51 <sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade	Gulf Region
102 <sup>nd</sup> Logistic Brigade	Southern Africa
160 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade	Europe and Central Asia

Source: IISS, *The Military Balance 2017*, London: Routledge, 2017, p. 83.

89. A. Dorman, *Blair’s Successful War: British Military Intervention in Sierra Leone*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2009.

90. F. Heisbourg, ‘A Surprising Little War: First Lessons of Mali’, *Survival*, Vol. 55, No. 2, 2013, p. 7-18.

The Regional brigades themselves have no standard configuration and between them comprise 14.25 regular infantry battalions and 3 reconnaissance regiments, with most of these regular units also being paired with a similar reserve unit. The infantry battalions have different roles with some are configured for the light infantry role whilst others are equipped with heavy protected vehicles for the stabilisation and/or counter-insurgency role. Nevertheless, the link to a particular region of the world is seen as a means to better coordinate defence engagement and retain greater regional and local understanding.

The army has recently announced that it is modifying the configuration of 2 infantry battalions with 2 more to follow for the defence engagement role in 2019.<sup>91</sup> What is unclear is whether each of the regional brigades will eventually have a dedicated specialist defence engagement infantry battalion or will these 4 battalions be available for all the brigades to draw upon and thus have no direct links to the regional brigades.

These same regional brigades also have a role at home providing support to the civilian authorities when required in tasks ranging from support for flood relief to counter-terrorism as the recent deployment of army units onto the streets of London demonstrated. The ability of these regional brigades to manage such diverse roles is open to question and if the regular army is reduced further then the Adaptable Force is likely to be the first area for cutbacks.

In sheer numbers, the regular army is a little over half the size that it was at the end of the Cold War whilst the volunteer reserves have fallen by almost two thirds (see table below). Yet, even with this reduction in personnel the army is currently struggling to recruit and retain sufficient regular soldiers.<sup>92</sup> This is despite the decision to open all branches of the armed forces to female recruits. Part of the reason for the failure to maintain the army at its current planned level is put down to the effect of returning the army to a peacetime footing. It is also a reflection of the army's recruitment record. Women and ethnic minorities remain critically under-represented in the army whilst its traditional places for recruitment are providing less and less recruits.

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91. M. Fallon, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, 'Strategic Defence and Security Review: Army', 15 December 2016.

92. House of Commons Defence Committee, 'SDSR 2015 and the Army', *HC.108*, session 2016-2017, London: TSO, 2017.

**Table 2.4: Army Personnel Numbers**

	1990	1998	2010	2017	1990-2017
<b>Regular Army</b>	152,800	109,800	108,870	82,480	- 46%
<b>Volunteer</b>	81,900	57,000	33,100	30,010	- 63%

*Source: Ministry of Defence, UK Defence Statistics 2000, (London: MoD, 2000); Ministry of Defence, United Kingdom Defence Statistics 2010, (London: MoD, 2010); Ministry of Defence, UK Armed Forces Monthly Service Personnel Statistics, 1 May 2017.*

Looking at a level below the formation level we can see from the tables below that the overall size of the army has been steadily reduced since the end of the Cold War. A number of elements stand out. First, whilst the number of regular armoured regiments has fallen by just over half, the actual decrease in the number equipped with main battle tanks, as opposed to reconnaissance vehicles, has fallen even further to a low point of three in 2016, a figure which will fall even further to two with the creation of the 'strike' brigades.

Second, the British Army continues to be an infantry-centric force with the overall reduction in regular infantry battalions far lower than what one would expect given the reduction in the overall size of the regular army. On first appearance, one might assume this was a reflection of the counter-insurgency wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, this has always been the case, with the United Kingdom generally having a higher proportion of infantry compared to most other European nations, and reflects the tribal politics of the British regimental system.<sup>93</sup>

Third, the overall number of Territorial Army units has generally declined to a greater degree compared to their regular counterparts. This reflects the ongoing bias within significant elements of the regular army against their reservist counterparts, together with the problems the Territorial Army has had in recruiting and retaining reservists.<sup>94</sup>

93. A. Dorman, 'Reorganising the Infantry: Drivers of Change and what this Tells us about the State of the Defence Debate Today', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 8, No .4, 2006, p. 489-502.

94. *House of Commons Defence Committee, 'SDSR 2015 and the Army', HC.108, session 2016-2017, London: TSO, 2017.*

Table 2.5: Major Army units

	1990	1998	2010	2016	Comment
<b>Regular Army</b>					
<b>Armour Regiments</b>	19	11	10	9	Currently 3 of the 9 regiments are equipped with Challenger 2 (main battle tank).
<b>Infantry Battalion</b>	55	40	36	31	
<b>Artillery Regiments</b>	22	15	14	13	
<b>Engineer Regiments</b>	13	10	11	13	
<b>Signals Regiments</b>	13	11	12	11	
<b>Territorial Army</b>					
<b>Armour Regiments</b>	5	6	4	4	
<b>Infantry battalion</b>	41	33	14	14	The reduction from 41 to 14 reflects the view that the reserves should be more specialised and ready for deployment from day 1 rather than as a basic pool for reinforcement.
<b>Artillery Regiments</b>	7	6	7	5	
<b>Engineer Regiments</b>	8	9	6	4	
<b>Signals Regiments</b>	11	11	5	4	

Source: Ministry of Defence, *UK Defence Statistics 2000*, (London: MoD, 2000); Ministry of Defence, *United Kingdom Defence Statistics 2010*, (London: MoD, 2010); Ministry of Defence, *Statistical Series 4 – Equipment Bulletin 4.01: Formations, Vessels and Aircraft Annual: 2014 Edition*, Ministry of Defence, *UK Armed Forces Equipment and Formations 2016*, (London: MoD, 2016).

The current equipment holdings of key land platforms as of 1 April 2016 are outlined in the table below. One of the major problems the army has is that so much of its equipment acquisition over the last decade has been geared towards Iraq and Afghanistan. As a result, there are a large number of Protected Mobility Vehicles currently in the inventory rather than the previously planned Future Rapid Effects System (FRES) of medium weight, high mobility vehicles. It has also meant that the army has largely neglected its other vehicle holdings and is urgently looking to update or replace a number of platforms.

The army's main battle tank, the Challenger 2, was acquired in the 1990s. 227 remain in service although, as mentioned above, it is currently envisaged that less than 120 will form the future frontline strength. The tank has a number of obsolescence issues, particular with regards to its main armament. Unlike its German, US and French counterparts, the

current gun is a rifled variant which means it is incompatible with any of the UK's NATO partners.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, the ammunition provision for it is quite limited. There have been debates in the past about replacing the gun, and last year an offer was made to refurbish and upgrade 400 German Leopard 2 tanks.<sup>96</sup> However, Ministers rejected this option because it was too politically controversial and the army is looking to modernize the Challenger 2. The fleet of Scimitar reconnaissance vehicles is currently being replaced by 589 Scout vehicles. This platform has a significant intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capability and will form a major part of the new 'strike' brigades. Its weight, cost and vulnerability to Russian tanks has meant that its acquisition has been controversial and its potential range is giving the army a significant challenge.<sup>97</sup>

Originally the army had envisaged acquiring a range of wheeled vehicles that would equip the three medium-weight brigades planned under the 1998 Strategic Defence Review.<sup>98</sup> This programme morphed into the Future Rapid Effect System (FRES) which was supposed to deliver a networked, high mobility range of vehicles that were capable of rapid deployment by air and sea.<sup>99</sup> This programme was eventually cancelled after more than £1bn had been spent and the army is currently considering which of the vehicles acquired for Iraq and Afghanistan can be used. The problem with most of them is their lack of off-road mobility and cost of maintenance. Ideally the army would acquire a new wheeled armoured personnel carrier to equip the infantry battalions forming part of the 'strike' brigades.<sup>100</sup> If it is successful then the army will have to choose whether to acquire the same platform as the US Army or a platform that one of its main European partners has acquired such as the Boxer.

The tracked armoured personnel carriers currently comprise three platforms. The small Viking force provides a limited capability for the specialised 3 Commando Brigade. These have been refurbished since their deployment to Afghanistan and will remain in service given their ability to operate in arctic conditions. The Warrior is the army's main infantry fighting vehicle and equips the armoured infantry brigades' infantry battalions. The platform currently suffers from the basic problem that, unlike many of its contemporaries, it cannot fire accurately whilst on the

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95. D. Haynes, 'Russian Tank Leaves West Outgunned Warns Expert', *The Times*, 7 November 2016, p. 6.

96. D. Haynes, 'Fear of Bad Press Halted German Tank Deal', *The Times*, 4 January 2017, p. 13

97. D. Haynes, 'Army's New £3.5bn Mini-Tanks Denounced as Useless Death Traps', *The Times*, 1 November 2016, p. 4.

98. 'Strategic Defence Review', *Cm.3,999*, London: TSO, 1998.

99. National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence – The Cost Effective Delivery of and Armoured Vehicle Capability', *HC.1,029*, session 2010-2012, London: TSO, 2011.

100. D. Haynes, 'Army Set to Buy £3bn Fleet from German Firms', *The Times*, 15 October 2016, p. 8.



move. The platform is currently the subject of a major upgrade programme which it is hoped will rectify this problem by equipping it with a new gun.<sup>101</sup> The Bulldog is a legacy system. The original FV430 series of armoured vehicles were replaced by the Warrior in the role of troop transports but were retained in a number of supporting role such as engineer support, command and control and field ambulance roles. The main problem with them was that they were slower than the Challenger 2 and Warrior vehicles which they were supposed to support on the battlefield. It had been envisaged that they would be replaced by a new vehicle. However, in Iraq a number of them were up-armoured and re-engined to become the Bulldog. Post-Iraq their future remains uncertain.

The army's artillery has been rationalised to three types. There are currently no plans to modify these although there have been calls to replace some of the 105mm light guns with a heavier 155mm towed system.

**Table 2.6: British Army main equipment (in service)**

	Number	Comment
<b>Armoured Fighting Vehicles</b>		
<b>Challenger 2 (Main Battle Tank)</b>	227	To be reduced down to 120 by 2025(?)
<b>CVR(T) Scimitar</b>	201	Currently being replaced by the new Scout vehicle
<b>Protected Mobility Vehicles</b>		
<b>Coyote</b>	71	These are quite specialised vehicles. They are being retained in case of a repeat of an Iraq or Afghanistan counter-insurgency operation.
<b>Foxhound</b>	398	
<b>Husky</b>	317	
<b>Jackal</b>	437	
<b>Mastiff</b>	421	
<b>Ridgeback</b>	168	
<b>Wolfhound</b>	133	
<b>Armoured Personnel Carriers</b>		
<b>Viking</b>	99	3 Commando Brigade
<b>Bulldog</b>	895	
<b>Warrior</b>	770	Main Infantry Fighting vehicle

101. A. Chuter, 'Slow Progress Pays Dividends for Warrior IFV', *Defence News online*, 27 January 2015, available at: [www.Defencenews.com](http://www.Defencenews.com)

Artillery		
<b>AS90 Self-Propelled 155mm gun</b>	89	
<b>L118 105mm light gun</b>	126	
<b>Multiple Launcher Rocket System</b>	35	
Engineering Equipment		
<b>M3 Amphibious Bridging Equipment</b>	37	This area is relatively modern and well equipped.
<b>Terrier Armoured Digger Vehicle</b>	66	
<b>Titan Bridging Vehicle</b>	33	
<b>Trojan Breaching Vehicle</b>	32	
Air Platforms		
<b>AH-64D Apache</b>	50	These will be replaced by 50 AH-64Es
<b>AW159 Lynx/Wildcat</b>	18/24	The Wildcat is replacing the Lynx and there will eventually be 32 in service.
<b>Watchkeeper (UAV)</b>	52	

*Source: Ministry of Defence, UK Armed Forces Equipment and Formations 2016, (London: MoD, 2016).*

There remains an ongoing debate about how small the army can actually become. The key question before it is the balance between personnel numbers and equipment. As its equipment becomes increasingly more complex and expensive it is being forced to reduce personnel numbers. As a consequence, the regular army is the smallest it has been for more than a century and looks set to fall further. A number of retired army generals have already called for the army to be expanded and stated that it has reached an irreducible minimum. The basis for this argument can at best be described as vague and the current financial problems confronting the army and the Ministry of Defence more generally (see below), together with calls to rebalance the armed force in favour of the air force and navy, have led some to suggest that the army could be further reduced by 10,000-20,000.<sup>102</sup>

102. T. Whitehead, R. Prince & B. R. Smith, 'British Army Could Be Cut to Just 50,000 over next Four Years, Report Warns', *Telegraph online*, 9 March 2015, available at: [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk).

## Royal Air Force

As indicated above, whilst the 2010 SDSR saw major reductions to the Royal Air Force, the 2015 SDSR has promised a major uplift in capabilities albeit without the accompanying uplift in personnel numbers.<sup>103</sup> Since its inception in 1918 the RAF has remained fixated with strategic bombing as its principal mission and the main basis for its preservation as a separate service. This is currently articulated through its emphasis on the strike mission and the role of the manned strike aircraft. As a result, its senior leadership continues to be largely dominated by fast-jet aircrew with the occasional exception. The advent of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones is but the latest challenge to this thinking and the RAF is trying to argue that only aircrew can fly drones. It also explains the RAF's ongoing opposition to the navy's aircraft carrier programme and their attempts to alter the acquisition of the F-35 buy from the STOVL or F-35B version to the USAF force version (F-35A) which is incapable of operating from any type of aircraft carrier.<sup>104</sup>

Despite this preference for the strike mission, the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have forced it to devote significant resources to other areas such as ISTAR, close air support and fixed wing and rotary transport. As a result, in these other three areas the United Kingdom is the leading power in Europe with the most significant capabilities. However, as the financial constraints become ever more apparent it is these areas that the RAF leadership will seek to sacrifice first.

The RAF is currently organised into four groups, each of which comprises a series of bases where different squadrons are based:

- 1 Group has responsibility for the combat elements, ISTAR platforms
- 2 Group has responsibility for the combat support elements
- 22 Group has responsibility for training
- 38 Group has responsibility for support and engineering elements

The RAF's current fast-jet fleet has been reduced to only 8 squadrons compared to 28 squadrons in 1990.<sup>105</sup> The current force comprises 5 squadrons of Eurofighter Typhoons and 3 squadrons of Panavia Tornado GR4s. Both aircraft were built in partnership with other NATO allies and

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103. 'National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom', *Cm.9,161*, London: TSO, 2015.

104. D. Haynes, 'RAF Set to Scale Back on Supersonic Jets', *The Times*, 2 June 2017, p. 4.

105. Ministry of Defence, *UK Defence Statistics 2000*, London: MoD, 2000; Ministry of Defence, *United Kingdom Defence Statistics 2010*, London: MoD, 2010.

thus share a significant degree of commonality. Under current plans the Tornado will leave service by 2019 around the time first F-35B squadron is formed. The 2010 SDSR had envisaged this reduction to 6 frontline squadrons (5 Typhoon and 1 F-35B) by 2020 would mark a low point with further F-35 squadrons forming in the 2020s. However, under the 2015 SDSR the paucity of this force was recognised with plans to retain the 53 Eurofighter Tranche 1 aircraft in service and expand the Typhoon force by at least 2 squadrons by 2019.<sup>106</sup> This would mean that the RAF's low point would be 8 squadrons (7 Typhoon and 1 F-35B) with further F-35B squadrons forming earlier.

At present neither of the additional Typhoon squadrons has been formed and the air force is wrestling with the challenge of finding personnel for the new squadrons and also where to base them. In the longer term, there is a question over what will eventually replace the Eurofighter Typhoon from 2030 onwards. Currently as part of the Lancaster House Agreement, there is a joint Anglo-French programme looking at a potential unmanned solution known under the label Future Combat Air System (FCAS) based upon the BAE Systems Taranis and Dassault nEURON demonstrators<sup>107</sup>.

The RAF/Royal Navy are in the early stage of acquiring 138 F-35Bs.<sup>108</sup> The exact number of squadrons to be formed and the relative balance of holdings between the RAF and the Fleet Air Arm is still the subject of much speculation. As mentioned above, in the RAF's ideal world, the acquisition of the F-35B would be limited to as few as possible and the rest of the planned 138 acquisition switched to the F-35A – the variant currently being built for the US Air Force. Their rationale for this is that the F-35A variant is a more capable and cheaper aircraft and the navy's new aircraft carriers are vulnerable to missiles fired from above and below the ocean.<sup>109</sup> In other words, the RAF wishes to minimise if not eliminate the navy's carrier strike capability in favour of its aircraft operating from fixed bases.

This argument has been an ongoing theme dating back to at least the 1960s when the RAF successfully argued for the cancellation of a new generation of aircraft carriers for the Royal Navy. The first two squadrons will be a RAF squadron (617) and a naval squadron (809), and both are due

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106. National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence – Impact of the Strategic Defence and Security Review on the Equipment Plan', *HC.319*, London: TSO, 2016.

107. 'Award of £120M Anglo-French Defence Co-Operation Contract', *Defence Aerospace* (blog), 5 November 2014, available at: [www.Defence-aerospace.com](http://www.Defence-aerospace.com).

108. D. Cameron, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates*, 'National Security and Defence', 23 November 2015, col.1,050.

109. D. Haynes, 'RAF Set to Scale Back on Supersonic Jets', *The Times*, 2 June 2017, p. 4.

to be operational by 2023 with 12 aircraft each. Under current plans 48 aircraft in total will have been ordered by Financial Year 2024-25.<sup>110</sup> After that there are few details although the presumption is that both the RAF and Fleet Air Arm will each form a second squadron giving a total of four frontline squadrons. This seems low given the pledge to acquire 138 aircraft. Moreover, with each aircraft carrier capable of carrying over 36 F-35B a frontline strength of 72 aircraft would seem more appropriate.

In addition, despite the RAF's preference for manned strike aircraft, the 2015 SDSR committed the government to the acquisition of at least 20 of a new generation of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).<sup>111</sup> The RAF currently operates a force 10 Reaper UAVs flown by two squadrons – 13 and 39 – with one based in the UK and the other in the US alongside their US counterparts. These also contribute to the wider ISTAR (Intelligence, surveillance, targeting, acquisition and reconnaissance) capability.

The RAF has Europe's leading ISTAR capability. It has accepted two of three Boeing EC-135 Rivet Joint aircraft (called Airseeker) that replaced the older Nimrod R1s.<sup>112</sup> These have a significant SIGINT capability and form part of a shared pool of aircraft with the United States. The RAF also maintains 6 of 7 Boeing E-3D Sentry aircraft in the AWACS role. Unlike their US, French and NATO counterparts, these aircraft are currently not the subject of an upgrade although it is hoped that such an upgrade will eventually occur.<sup>113</sup> The other ISTAR assets include 5 Sentinel R1s and 5 Shadow R1s. The latter work closely with UK Special Forces and the former have been used in a number of operations to provide a ground surveillance capability. The maintenance of the Sentinel force has been the subject of some speculation but its future looks assured only until 2020.<sup>114</sup>

The one obvious capability gap has been in the absence of a maritime patrol capability following the 2010 SDSR decision to scrap the Nimrod MRA4 programme. This weakness has been recognised and the 2015 SDSR included plans to order 9 Boeing P-8A maritime patrol aircraft for delivery from 2020 onwards.<sup>115</sup> In the meantime, the United Kingdom remains reliant on its partners but has maintained a limited capability by deploying crews into various partner nations' equivalent forces – the 'Seedcorn'

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110. National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence – Delivering Carrier Strike', *HC.1,057*, session 2016-2017, London: TSO, 2017, p. 33.

111. 'National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom', *Cm.9,161*, London: TSO, 2015.

112. Available at: [www.raf.mod.uk](http://www.raf.mod.uk).

113. T. Ripley, 'UK Sentinel Force Capability Gap Emerges in New RAF ISTAR Plan', *Janes Defence Weekly*, 13 June 2016, available at: [www.janes.com](http://www.janes.com).

114. *Ibid.*

115. R. Lea, 'Boeing Plans to Double UK Jobs to 4,000', *The Times*, 11 July 2016, p. 36.

personnel exchange programme.<sup>116</sup> The size of this projected force looks small compared to the requirements of the United Kingdom but at present no options have been taken on acquiring additional aircraft.

Within Europe the RAF has an unmatched heavy lift capability in the form of its' 8 Boeing C-17A aircraft. These are capable of lifting significant outsized loads, including main battle tanks, and transporting them between continents. The only comparable capability in Europe is in NATO's shared pool of three aircraft and it was noticeable that it was this capability that the French government requested first when they began their deployment to Mali in 2013.<sup>117</sup> This capability is set to be boosted as the RAF receives its full complement of 22 A400M aircraft. The RAF also plans to retain 14 Lockheed C-130J-30 aircraft in service which will primarily be used to support the UK's Special Forces. These aircraft have accumulated a significant number of flight hours and under the 2010 SDSR they were planned for retirement in the mid-2020s without replacement. The 2015 SDSR reversed this decision and the government has just announced that the aircraft will receive new wing boxes as part of a programme to extend their service lives.

The RAF also maintains Europe's largest air-to-air refuelling capability in the form of 14 KC-30s operated under a private finance initiative (PFI).<sup>118</sup> The aircraft have a passenger and cargo carrying capability. The use of the PFI arrangement has been quite controversial and it is not yet clear whether the adoption of this approach in a frontline capability will prove to be either the operational optimum or the most economical approach.

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116. 'RIAT: UK's Seedcorn MPA Project Renewed for a Further Three Years', *Flight Global*, 20 July 2015, available at: [www.flightglobal.com](http://www.flightglobal.com).

117. 'Mali: RAF C17 Cargo Plane to Help French Operation', *BBC News Online*, 13 January 2013, available at: [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk).

118. National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence – Delivering Multi-Role Tanker Aircraft Capability', *HC.433*, session 2009-2010, London: TSO, 2010.

Unlike many nations who give the task to their armies, the RAF retains responsibility for the main rotary lift capability. Despite its general reticence in supporting this area, the RAF now has quite a significant capability here. Its assets include some 60 CH-47 Chinooks which makes it the largest customer for these aircraft outside the United States. It also has 24 smaller Puma HC2 helicopters that have recently been upgraded whilst the navy's Commando Helicopter Force operate 25 Agusta-Westland Merlin helicopters in the maritime assault role.<sup>119</sup>

**Table 2.7: Royal Air Force Aircraft (in service)**

Select aircraft	Forward fleet	Total	Comment
<b>Combat aircraft</b>			
<b>F-35A/B Lightning</b>	4	4	Planned total buy 138
<b>Panavia Tornado</b>	46	81	Leaves service 2019
<b>Eurofighter Typhoon</b>	92	132	160 in total ordered
<b>MQ-9 Reaper UAV</b>	8	10	20+ Protectors to be bought
<b>ISTAR platforms</b>			
<b>RC-135 Airseeker</b>	2	2	Planned total 3
<b>Raytheon Sentinel</b>	3	5	
<b>E-3 Sentry (AWACS)</b>	4	6	In need of modernization
<b>Shadow R1</b>	4	5	Planned total 8
<b>Transport aircraft</b>			
<b>A400M Atlas</b>	7	7	Planned total 22
<b>C-17 Globemaster</b>	7	8	
<b>C-130 Hercules</b>	16	24	To reduce to 14
<b>A330 MRTT / KC2/3 Voyager</b>	9	9	Planned total of 14
<b>Helicopters</b>			
<b>CH-47 Chinook</b>	53	60	
<b>Puma</b>	16	23	24 being modernized

Source: Ministry of Defence, *UK Armed Forces Equipment and Formations 2016*, (London: MoD, 2016).

## Managing of Defence and Defence Transformation

Over the last decade the Ministry of Defence and successive governments have been subject to significant criticism over their management of British defence and security policy. When it entered government in 2010 the

119. Ministry of Defence, *UK Armed Forces Equipment and Formations 2016*, London: MoD, 2016.

Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition implemented a series of significant changes to defence.<sup>120</sup> As mentioned previously, it sought to address the issue of a strategic vacuum by setting up a National Security Council as a cabinet committee charged with overseeing and managing British defence and security policy. As part of this they set in place a five year cycle for defence and security reviews which led to the 2010 and 2015 policy documents outlined above.

This was not their sole reform. Under the previous Labour defence government Bernard Gray reviewed the way in which the United Kingdom undertook defence procurement.<sup>121</sup> Gray was subsequently put in charge of defence procurement by the new coalition government and tasked with reforming acquisition. His original intention was to detach the MoD's acquisition organisation and make it a trading company that would be answerable to the government in a similar fashion to any other business. This proposal failed in its implementation phase and the government was forced to accept an alternative in which the defence acquisition organisation remained far more closely linked to the Ministry of Defence. Nevertheless, when linked to the other reforms outlined below, it did in theory at least change the relationship between the frontline commands and the defence acquisition organisation. It is still too soon to tell whether this revised arrangement has been a net benefit for the Ministry of Defence. What is clear is that it initially shifted the relationship between government and the United Kingdom's defence industry into a more adversarial relationship with a focus far more on cost than overall performance. However, the subsequent realisation by the government brought about by the publication of the report *A Benefit not a Burden* has resulted in a partial return to the idea of government and industry working together for the optimal solution put forward under the previous Labour government.<sup>122</sup>

The new government also asked Lord Levene, a former Conservative minister for defence procurement in the 1980s, to look at the Ministry of Defence's wider management structures.<sup>123</sup> In the 1980s Lord Levene had helped lead the drive towards greater centralisation within defence that eventually led to the creation of a series of joint initiatives including the creation of the Permanent Joint Headquarters, the Joint Services Command

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120. J. Louth, 'Defence Reform in the United Kingdom: A Twenty-First Century Paradox', *Focus Stratégique*, No.43, Ifri, 2013.

121. *Review of Acquisition for the Secretary of State for Defence an Independent Report by Bernard Gray*, London: MoD, 2009.

122. A. Dorman, M. R. H. Uttley & B. Wilkinson, *A Benefit not a Burden: The Security, Economic and Strategic Benefit of Britain's Defence Industry*, King's Policy Institute, 2015, available at: [www.kcl.ac.uk](http://www.kcl.ac.uk).

123. *Defence Reform an Independent Report into the Structure and Management of the Ministry of Defence*, London: MoD, 2011.



and Staff College, Defence Estates and the Defence Procurement Agency and Defence Logistics Organisation. In his time working for the 2010 Coalition government, Lord Levene reversed this centralising trend and sought to shift power away from the centre in favour of the frontline commands.

These two reports and their subsequent implementation have led to a whole series of over 40 defence transformation projects designed to make the MoD more efficient and responsive. Whilst an evaluation of their relative merits is beyond the scope of this report, they have led to a major restructuring of the MoD, significant reductions in its civilian workforce, changes in practice and culture.<sup>124</sup> As part of this, the Ministry of Defence now produces an annual 'Equipment Plan' which outlines the department's planned acquisition programme for equipment and its associated support costs over the next decade.<sup>125</sup> The aim of this process has been to prevent the situation which the coalition government inherited in 2010 when the planned programme was far in excess of envisaged funds.

As a result, the budget consists of a series of firm commitments, equipment that the armed forces envisage acquiring, and some degree of financial reserve to accommodate the costs of individual programmes increasing and priorities changing. In the early years of this process, the Ministry of Defence frequently found that it had been over-cautious with the result that at the end of the financial year it had not spent all the money allocated to it. In response to this, and also to try and tackle many of the criticisms levelled at the 2010 SDSR and afford many of the projects that were in the armed forces plans, the Cameron government decided in 2015 to significantly reduce the amount of unallocated funding in the ten-year forecast and limit the amount allocated to cover any equipment cost overruns.<sup>126</sup>

Linked to this is an ongoing review of the entire defence estate. The most recent study has concluded that the United Kingdom retains an excessive defence estate which it is unable to sustain.<sup>127</sup> At the same time, there is significant pressure within government on the Ministry of Defence to free up land which can be used for housing. This led the last government to

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124. See, for example, National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence – Strategic Financial Management in the Ministry of Defence', *HC.268*, session 2015-2016, London: TSO, 2015; National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence – Delivering the Defence Estate', *HC.782*, session 2016-2017, London: TSO, 2016; National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence – Impact of the Strategic Defence and Security Review on the Equipment Plan', *HC.319*, London: TSO, 2016.

125. *Financial Summary of the Defence Equipment Plan 2016*, Ministry of Defence, 2017.

126. National Audit Office, 'Ministry of Defence – The Equipment Plan 2016 to 2026', *HC.914*, session 2016-2017, London: TSO, 2017.

127. *A Better Defence Estate*, Ministry of Defence, 2016.

set the Ministry of Defence a target for land release by 2020.<sup>128</sup> One of the problems the Ministry of Defence has relates to the use of the land by the armed forces and the terms under which that land was acquired. In a significant number of cases the Ministry of Defence is finding that it needs to undertake a significant amount of remedial work which it lacks resources for. The MoD has also not earmarked funding to move units out of the bases earmarked for closure.<sup>129</sup>

During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a debate emerged concerning the Military Covenant – the relationship between the individual service person and the state. The casualties that resulted from the United Kingdom’s involvement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan suggested that the risks for service personnel were now far greater and thus their terms of service could not remain the same. The debate focused particularly on the conditions under which service personnel and their families were supported.<sup>130</sup> In response, the previous Labour administration recognised that much of the accommodation provided for service personnel and their families was of poor quality and devoted a considerable amount of funding to improving service accommodation. However, the backlog of work, together with some of the contracts their predecessor and successors entered into, has caused considerable problems. Moreover, the last three governments have all identified the challenge for service families of entering the property market. As a result, the last government announced the introduction of a new service model for individuals joining the armed forces with the goal of minimising disruption caused by regular moves between bases and shifting the focus to service personnel increasingly owning their own property and personnel commuting to work. This has all led to the imposition of a New Employment Model (NEM) for personnel, the impact of which is yet to be seen but it could well be quite considerable.

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128. *A Better Defence Estate*, Ministry of Defence, 2016.

129. National Audit Office, ‘Delivering the Defence Estate’, HC.782, session 2016-2017, London: TSO, 2016.

130. T. Edmunds & A. Forster, *Out of Step: The Case for Change in the British Armed Forces*, London: Demos, November 2007.

# Conclusions

## Looking ahead

As the new government takes office it has a series of challenges before it. The first will be whether to formerly embark on a further defence review. The next one had been fixed for 2020 as part of the fixed term parliament cycle. In their respective election manifestos, the Conservative Party gave no indication whether it would conduct another NSS and SDSR whilst the Labour Party indicated that it would embark on a further defence review. The arguments in favour of a further review centre on the United Kingdom's changed circumstances brought about by the 2016 referendum decision to leave the European Union. The argument here is that this is such a significant change that the government needs to articulate a way forward for British defence and security policy. The arguments against such a review are twofold: first, that it is too soon to conduct such a review, i.e. that the government is not in a position to provide a clear direction of travel, and second, and probably the clinching argument, that there simply is not the capacity in Whitehall and amongst ministers to carry out such a review whilst the BREXIT negotiations are in full swing.

This leads onto the impact of Brexit for the United Kingdom. It is first worth noting that whilst the 2015 NSS/SDSR set out a vision for defence and a planning framework that was supposed to deliver a series of capabilities by 2025, it chose to ignore the possibility that the referendum result could lead to the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. This was despite the scare about Scottish Independence in 2014. It was also obvious that the SNP government in Scotland might view a vote to leave the European Union as grounds for a further referendum on Scottish independence. On 23 June 2016, the result of the referendum was to leave the European Union and the Scottish government raised the possibility of a further referendum on independence.<sup>131</sup> Their subsequent poor performance in the 2017 general election led their leader, Nicola Sturgeon, to argue that a further referendum should merely be deferred.<sup>132</sup> The potential consequences of Scottish independence for defence and security

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131. 'Sturgeon: Independence May Be Best for Scotland amid Brexit Upheaval', *The Guardian*, 25 July 2016, available at: [www.theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com).

132. 'Nicola Sturgeon Puts Scottish Independence Referendum Bill on Hold', *BBC online*, 27 June 2017, available at: [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk).

were hotly contested in 2014 and remain the same today.<sup>133</sup> Suffice to say, the UK's armed forces have been designed as a unitary force and their division would, at best, prove a challenge.

The conventional wisdom is that the effects of Brexit on UK defence and security policy should be negligible.<sup>134</sup> As the 2015 NSS/SDSR made clear, the UK's defence and security policy is centred on its membership of NATO and this has not changed. Moreover, in the immediate aftermath of the Brexit vote ministers were keen to emphasise that the UK would not turn inwards and the UK would remain committed to its international role. However, the fiscal realities resulting from the Brexit decision have yet to be recognised by the government or Ministry of Defence, and their scale is likely to have a profound effect on the defence and security budget.

What is definite is that in the immediate aftermath of the Brexit vote sterling fell to a 30-year low against the dollar and also fell against the Euro.<sup>135</sup> For the Ministry of Defence the immediate effect of this is likely to be sizeable because significant elements of its equipment programme are being acquired from the US notably F-35B Joint Strike Fighters, Boeing P-8As, Boeing AH-64Es and the missile tubes for the Trident successor boats. The RUSI think-tank has suggested this deficit amounts to some £700m per annum.<sup>136</sup> The funding to cover this will have to come from other parts of the defence budget. The easiest way to offset this will be to adopt the usual policies of delay and obfuscation. In addition, in the short term most forecasts are that the UK's GDP will contract. Thus, the UK may maintain its commitment to the NATO 2% target but the cash value is likely to be considerably lower thus adding to the immediate fiscal pressure on the defence budget.

Adding to the pressure on the defence budget will be questions about its direction of travel. As is already becoming apparent, there are likely to be at least two, if not three, pulls on defence. The first will be that to NATO. The British government will be expected to show its ongoing commitment to NATO as a sign that it is not withdrawing from the world stage or abandoning its European partners. The parliamentary vote on the

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133. A. Dorman, 'More than a Storm in a Tea Cup - The Defence and Security Implications of Scottish Independence', *International Affairs*, Vol. 90, No.3, May 2014, p. 679-96; C. Fleming, 'After Independence? The Challenges and Benefits of Scottish-UK Defence Cooperation,' *International Affairs*, Vol. 90, No.4, July 2014, p. 761-771.

134. B. Kienzle, 'Why 'Defence' Does not Serve as a Suitable Argument in the Brexit Debate', *Defence-in-Depth* (blog), 17 June 2016, available at: [defenceindepth.co](http://defenceindepth.co); T. Cross, 'Stiffen You Sinews and Vote Leave – 'Brexit Will Make Britain Great again'', *Telegraph online*, 25 May 2016, available at: [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk).

135. Sky News 'Pound Could Fall to Dollar Level, Experts Warn', 7 July 2016: [news.sky.com](http://news.sky.com).

136. T. Taylor, 'The Ministry of Defence's Post-Brexit Spending Power: Assumptions, Numbers, Calculations and Implications' *RUSI Commentary*, 12 August 2016, available at: <https://rusi.org>.

replacement of the existing Trident force and the UK's leadership of one of the trip-wire battalions deployed to Estonia are symptomatic of this. In opening the debate on the Trident successor system Theresa May emphasised the UK's commitment to the NATO 2% target<sup>137</sup> whilst at the Farnborough International Air Show the contracts for the 9 Boeing P-8As and 50 Boeing AH-64E Apache attack helicopters were announced.

Second, there will be an expectation, particularly from the US, that the UK's armed forces will have an enhanced global presence in support of the rebalancing of UK trade outside Europe. For example, the US Navy is looking to the new British aircraft carriers to share the commitment to maintain an aircraft carrier in or near the Persian Gulf on a permanent basis.

Third, there will be pressure from the remaining members of the EU for the UK to continue to support EU missions and share responsibility for the evacuation of European citizens. That said, Mrs Merkel's comments following the recent G-7 meeting about the reliability of the United States and United Kingdom would suggest that Europe's leaders are beginning to acknowledge that the impact of Brexit will not just be on the United Kingdom.<sup>138</sup>

Lurking in the background is the future of Northern Ireland. The European Union is one of the organisations underpinning the Good Friday Agreement and its future commitment to this remains open to question. At present, there is an open border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic as part of the Common Travel Area that covers the British Isles. Much of the argument in favour of Brexit revolved around the control of the UK's borders. With the Irish Republic remaining in the European Union and committed to the free movement of people, the lack of a sealed border with Northern Ireland would leave an open door for those wishing to enter the United Kingdom. Sealing the border would not only pose a significant security challenge but also raise question marks about the continuation of the Northern Ireland Agreement and the peace that currently prevails in Northern Ireland. Thus, the British government is confronted with either closing the border and thus potentially reawakening the conflict in Northern Ireland or leaving the border open and thus unable to control immigration from the EU.

The new British government will also need to set out a new defence industrial strategy tied directly to its growth agenda. With the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union it will potentially no longer

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137. T. May, *House of Commons Parliamentary Debates – UK's Nuclear Deterrent*, 18 July 2016, Vol. 623.

138. D. Charter, 'Europe Can No Longer Rely on Britain and US, Merkel Warns', *The Times*, 29 May 2017.

need to comply with existing European laws and thus can change the basis upon which it engages with the world's arms markets. Thus, it could potentially return to offering and/or guaranteeing loans for such sales although this will be complicated where it produces equipment in partnership with EU states. It will also be able to decide the degree to which it opens its domestic market and who has access to this market.

Finally, the new government will need to consider whether to correct the British Army's increasing dominance of the Ministry of Defence and rising share of the defence budget. As an island nation with interests scattered across the globe, the government will need to reflect on the degree to which it matches the country's needs with the goals of the three Services.

## Facing political uncertainty

In the introduction the question of whether the United Kingdom is at a turning point was raised. As outlined above, Theresa May's government finds itself in a difficult position both domestically and internationally. There are a series of threats and potential challenges to the United Kingdom's position and interests which suggest the next few years will prove challenging. Added to this will be the effect of Brexit.

Domestically, the support for Jeremy Corbyn in the general election alongside that with some of the nationalist parties suggests that the public in general has had enough of austerity. Yet, the United Kingdom's financial situation remains weak, the national debt continues to grow, the current account remains in deficit and there is much uncertainty associated with Brexit. Across government there are calls for more spending and concerns about what further austerity will mean for local services.

Politically Prime Minister May's position can at best be described as precarious with the majority of analysts assuming that there will be a further election within a year. The Conservative Party have the tricky problem of deciding upon a new leader whilst the incumbent is still in office and has not indicated that she intends to resign. At the same time, the narrow majority that the Conservative-DUP pact has means that the government could fall to a no confidence vote at any time should half a dozen of its members chose not to support the government.

This all leaves the future of the United Kingdom's defence and security policy in a precarious and troubled position. It now looks highly unlikely that the government will formerly embark on a review of its national security and defence policies. It would rather not undertake such an exercise, yet the state of the MoD's budget mean that even with a degree of

hollowing out of capabilities, delays, short terms savings in training and exercises and so forth the current equipment programme is unaffordable. What looks more likely is that there will quietly be a review undertaken within the MoD to rebalance the budget in a similar manner to the 2011 'Three Month Exercise' or the 1981 Nott Review.

Judging by the letters to *The Times* and the various leaks that have already taken place the three services are already seeking to defend their fiefdoms. Any cuts to the armed forces will inevitably be unpopular with Conservative backbenchers. This would suggest that the only way forward for Theresa May is to continue to hollow out capabilities, defer and delay programmes where she can and leave the unpopular decisions to her successor. What we are unlikely to see is any additional resources being devoted to defence. The only thing that might change this will be a catastrophic event which would change public opinion and forces the government to devote significantly greater resource to defence.





# Appendix

## Current British Deployments overseas

The table below provides an indication of where the UK's conventional forces are deployed at a particular moment in time. Inevitably it excludes some capabilities such as Special Forces and UAV deployments. It also excludes forces on exercise, exchange and liaison personnel and others deployed to high commissions and embassies overseas.

Location	Political framework	Size	Components	Comment
<b>Afghanistan</b>	NATO – Operation Resolute Support	450	1 Infantry battalion (-)	The deployment is focus around the Afghanistan military academy.
<b>Albania</b>	OSCE	2		Observers
<b>Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden</b>	National	n/d	1 DDGHM; 1 LPH; 1 LSD; 1 AORH	LPH fulfilling flagship role normally carried out by US carrier. Royal Navy maintains one escort (currently DDGHM) and one RFA support ship within range of Persian Gulf.
<b>Ascension Island</b>	National	20		UK air base maintained mid-Atlantic.
<b>Atlantic (North) Caribbean</b>	National	n/d	1 AORH	UK maintains one ship in region to participate in counter-narcotics work, support for disaster relief and deterrence for dependent territories.
<b>Atlantic (South)</b>	National	n/d	1 FFGHM	Royal Navy maintains one escort or SSN within range of Falklands a part of conventional deterrence posture and flag-waving.
<b>Bahrain</b>	National	60	1 BAe 146	Maritime base maintained.
<b>Belize</b>	National	17		Jungle Training facility maintained.
<b>Bosnia-Herzegovina</b>	EU-EUFOR – Operation Althea OSCE	4		UK also provides an infantry company on rotation for reinforcement.
		2		
<b>British Indian Ocean Territory</b>	National	40	1 Navy/Marine Detachment	Force maintained at Diego Garcia where US maintains an airfield.

<b>Brunei</b>	National	2000	1 Gurkha Battalion; 1 jungle training centre; 1 helicopter flight with 3 Bell 212	UK provides guarantee to Sultan of Brunei.
<b>Canada</b>	National	250	2 training units; 1 hel fit Gazelle AH1	UK uses Canadian ranges for all arms battle group training. 3-4 units rotate through each year.
<b>Cyprus</b>	National	2270	2 Infantry Battalions; 1 helicopter flight with 4 Bell 412 Twin Hueys, 1 radar	UK maintains sovereign bases in Cyprus to provide an air bases with access to the Middle East and beyond, as a base to station an infantry force partially acclimatized for warmer climates and also as a listening base for the region. Op Shader is the UK operation against Islamic State. The UK also remains an important contributor to the UNFICYP mission and the other UK forces on the island can provide additional support.
	Operation Shader	650	6 Tornado GR4; 6 Typhoon FGR4; 1 Sentinel R1; 1 E-3D Sentry; 1 A330 MRTT Voyager K3; 2 C-130J Hercules	
	UN - UNFICYP	275	Infantry company	
<b>Democratic Republic of Congo</b>	UN - UNNUSCO	5		
<b>Egypt</b>	MFO	2		
<b>Falkland Islands</b>	National	1010	1 Infantry company (+); 1 air defence detachment with Rapier; 1 PSO; 4 Typhoon FRD4; 1C-130J Hercules	These forces provide for the protection of the dependent territory.
<b>Germany</b>	National	4,400	1 armoured infantry brigade (-).	This brigade is in the process of moving to the United Kingdom.
<b>Gibraltar</b>	National	560	Royal Gibraltar Regiment; 2 patrol boats	Other assets are deployed on a temporary basis.
<b>Iraq</b>	Operation Shader	550		

<b>Kenya</b>	National	260		Training team. Infantry battalions use exercise facilities.
<b>Mali</b>	EU-EUTM UN-MINUSMA	30 2		
<b>Mediterranean Sea</b>	EU – EU NAVFOR MED  NATO	n/d	1 LSD; 1 AGS 2 SNMG; 1 MCO	In support of countering refugees/migrants.
<b>Moldova</b>	OSCE	2		
<b>Nepal</b>	National	60		Gurkha training team
<b>Netherlands</b>	National	120		
<b>Nigeria</b>	National	30		Training Team
<b>North Sea</b>	NATO	n/d	1 MHC	
<b>Oman</b>	National	70		Includes loan service personnel
<b>Persian Gulf</b>	National	n/d	2 MCO; 2 MHC; 1 LSD	Operation Kipion: Mine countermeasures force acting as a deterrent
<b>Qatar</b>	National	n/d	1 RC-135W Rivet Joint	Operation Shader
<b>Serbia</b>	NATO OSCE	1 12	KFOR Kosovo	
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	National	10		Training team
<b>Somalia</b>	UN - UNSOM	41+3		Contingent plus observers
<b>South Sudan</b>	UN - UNMISS	9		
<b>Uganda</b>	EU – ETM Somalia	4		
<b>Ukraine</b>	OSCE National	29 100		Training team
<b>United Arab Emirates</b>	National	n/d	C-17; 1 C-130J; A330 MRTT	
<b>United States</b>	National	660		

Source: IISS, *The Military Balance 2017*, (London: Routledge, 2017), pp.174-175



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