

THE STATE OF THE NATION'S ARMED FORCES



**A report for the UK National Defence Association
by Admiral The Lord West, General Sir Michael Rose
and Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon**

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Introduction

The most recent official review of defence and our armed forces, their capabilities and needs, was laid out in the Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010 (SDSR10). However, this Review was neither strategic nor truly about the nation's security. In fact SDSR10 was largely an exercise in justifying cuts to the defence budget, the Treasury's argument being that all the major departments of government should share equally in the financial sacrifices aiming at reducing the UK's budget deficit – irrespective of whether the department in question had already been cut year on year, as was evidently the case with defence. This fallacy of 'equal cuts for all' (all except, that is, the ring-fenced NHS and overseas aid) is illogical and ill-conceived. Over the past two decades, defence has been the Cinderella of the public services. Whilst the share of public expenditure devoted to health and welfare has skyrocketed, the proportion granted to defence has shrunk.

Defence has for far too long been a sacrificial lamb. The security of the United Kingdom is being severely compromised by the continued swingeing cuts to our Armed Forces. Indeed, as these three reports on the Navy, Army and Air Force show all too clearly, our armed forces have already lost many of their essential capabilities. The Royal Navy will have no aircraft carriers or Fleet Air Arm fixed wing aircraft for at least the next six (probably more) years, or long range maritime search aircraft to sweep the world's oceans. The Royal Air Force has been cut from 30 squadrons of fast jet aircraft to a mere 11, and the Army is being reduced to just 82,000 full-time personnel – a record low – with huge reliance on part-time Territorials to plug the gaps.

Since its formation in 2007 the UK National Defence Association has led the way in endeavouring to advise the people and politicians of this country of the risks and weaknesses that have been forced upon our armed forces. These have been very clearly highlighted in the reports written by three very experienced and knowledgeable retired senior officers: for the Royal Navy, Admiral The Lord West of Spithead; for the Army, General Sir Michael Rose; and for the Royal Air Force, Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon. We commend them to you all.

Cdr John Muxworthy RN
Chief Executive UKNDA

THE ROYAL NAVY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

By Admiral The Lord West

The ability of our military to protect the nation from the shock of the unexpected has diminished to a perilous degree. The Strategic Defence and Security Review of 2010 (SDSR10) hammered the final nail in the coffin as, notwithstanding that in the 1990s and early part of this century defence spending was the poor relation of welfare, health, education and overseas aid, all of which increased dramatically, it was based on narrow financial grounds and not the strategic needs of the nation. Whilst the nation's financial position was admittedly parlous, defence should have been ring-fenced by the government if they really believed, as David Cameron has stated, that defence and security are 'the highest priority'.

I have no doubt that today the Royal Navy is too small to meet all the commitments expected of it by the government and the British people. That does not mean that the Navy cannot be proud of its amazingly dedicated and well-trained people and some impressive kit.

So what of the Royal Navy/Naval Service today and in the future? I will break it down into our ultimate safeguard, the Deterrent, and three core offensive capabilities. These allow the nation to influence events worldwide; help prevent war; and if war is unavoidable, fight and win at arm's length from our home territory.

Since 1968 the Royal Navy has kept a ballistic-missile-firing submarine (SSBN) permanently at sea providing our ultimate insurance. The nuclear deterrent is currently vested in the four Vanguard class SSBNs which will start reaching the end of their operational lives from 2028 when HMS VANGUARD is 35 years old. It is planned to replace the four submarines one-for-one and some £4bn will have been spent on steel, design etc by 2015. However, the final procurement decision will be taken in the next parliament. Since these constitute our nation's ultimate insurance policy and are not war-fighting weapons, I hope the Treasury and the present or any future government will look at funding capital costs from outside the defence budget, as the pressure on the defence budget in the early 2020s is already huge. So far, alas, the Chancellor and Treasury remain obdurate.

One of the key core capabilities is carrier/maritime strike and in this area the government took a huge gamble when it removed that capability. In the SDSR it scrapped the Harrier force and HMS ARK ROYAL. In addition to the risk of an unexpected crisis demanding just that capability during the substantial period before it is restored, it will make the regeneration of the complex carrier operations much more difficult. However, to their credit, it does appear that both the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Defence now understand the strategic need for carrier strike and intend to run both the new ships, currently building at Rosyth. The convoluted machinations about aircraft type are now behind us and the F35B will form the key

carrier air component. We should purchase sufficient F35Bs to allow a full wing of about 30 aircraft to be embarked in the carriers; but in the interim the recent decision by the Secretary of State that the carriers will deploy with 12 F35 aboard, is a solid step in the right direction.

I remain concerned about the Airborne Early Warning (AEW) capability, currently so ably provided by Seaking7s, planned to pay off in the next five years whilst the replacement (Crowsnest) is not funded. The lesson of need for AEW, relearned at great expense in ships and men in the Falkland War, must not be forgotten. The Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) Merlin helicopter component has to an extent been protected and is even more important with the loss of our Maritime Patrol Aircraft (MPA) capability.

The next core capability is the Amphibious force. The Royal Marine Commando brigade and its amphibious shipping are in a relatively good state. However, the decision in SDSR10 to reduce the size of the force, put one Landing Platform Dock in reserve and to sell one Landing Ship Dock (Auxiliary), were damaging. The Seaking4s of the Commando Helicopter Force are coming to the end of their lives and the Fleet Air Arm will take over the Merlin3 troop-carrying helicopters from the RAF. That is good news but the marinsation and long-term support of the commando Merlins is not funded. It is essential.

The final core striking force is that of our nuclear attack submarines (SSNs). These capital ships are critical in a number of warfare areas. Able to deploy globally, covertly at high speed they are area denial platforms but also capable, courtesy of their Tactom cruise missiles, of carrying out deep precision strike. In addition, they provide special-forces insertion and complex intelligence gathering. I have no doubt that we need a minimum of 8 SSNs to meet the tasks required by the nation but the ASTUTE programme has encountered numerous difficulties and our current T class are fast reaching the end of their economical lives. By the late 2020s the RN will have 7 ASTUTE class but before then the number of usable SSNs will dip to about 5.

To enable these core capabilities to operate safely and effectively, to protect our trade and conduct a myriad of tasks in UK waters and around the globe, the Navy needs other crucial assets: the DD/FF (destroyers and frigates) force and its embarked helicopters (in the future the WILDCAT), Mine Countermeasure (MCM) forces, the Royal Fleet Auxiliary (seaborne logistic support), patrol vessels and the hydrographic squadron.

Lack of sufficient funding has had a devastating impact on the DD/FF force, which consists of only 19 ships – soon to be six Type 45 destroyers and 13 Type 23 frigates. Going back 15 years, the 1998 Strategic Defence Review identified a need for about 32 escorts, planned to be 12 Type 45 destroyers and 20 frigates (Type 23 and the follow-on design). What is quite clear is that the current and planned force level is insufficient. The Type 45 is a most impressive ship and will provide a crucial layer of air defence so critical to carrier and amphibious operations in 'hot' war; but the Type 23 are ageing

and 13 hulls means that only five can be deployed on a continuous basis. Our nation needs more and the Type 26 (frigate) programme is crucial, but we should plan for a class of 26 hulls if we really intend to meet the UK's strategic need.

Underlying everything is a story of insufficient hulls and lack of investment in key areas mentioned above plus a number of capabilities such as the Collaborative Engagement Capability (CEC); but more worryingly such basics as updates to equipment and stores support. Manpower is stretched exceedingly thin and I would describe the situation as fragile. The Naval Service is therefore far from being as robust as the nation has a right to expect. Indeed, unless there is a conscious decision to increase the percentage of GDP spent on defence to 3% and properly fund the RN/Naval Service, I consider we will live to regret it. In the final analysis it is vital to the survival and wealth of our nation and people.

ARMY 2020

By General Sir Michael Rose

Following the Strategic Defence and Security Review, a 20% reduction in the Army's manpower was announced by the Defence Secretary. This will bring down Regular trained strength to 82,000 whilst the Reserve employable strength will be raised to 30,000. Once the Army has withdrawn from Afghanistan in 2014, these measures will allow the MOD to meet its budgetary restraints. However, the substantial cuts in regular manpower will require a major structural transformation of the Army – something that will represent the most significant change that the Army has faced in over 50 years.

In essence the Army will be divided into two unequal parts, the Reaction Forces and the Adaptable Forces. The former component will comprise three high readiness armoured infantry brigades and one air assault brigade – something that it is hoped will allow the Army to sustain a single brigade operation over a prolonged period of time. The second component, the Adaptable Forces will comprise a pool of seven lightly equipped Regular and Reserve brigades. These will be organised on a regional basis and used to meet Britain's standing commitments in Cyprus, Brunei, the Falkland Islands, and for ceremonial duties.

In addition, the Adaptable Forces will reinforce the Reactions Forces where necessary and they will also undertake military capacity building for overseas indigenous armies as well as providing military support to homeland defence. Finally a centralised pool of force troops consisting of artillery, engineer, signals, logistics, intelligence and medical elements will be created to support both the Reaction and Adaptable Forces.

It is intended that the new structure and force levels will be able to meet the security challenges of an increasingly uncertain world beyond the current operation in Afghanistan. Given the great dependency on reservists in the new structure, the Army Reserve, as the former Territorial Army is now termed, will be given an extra £1.8bn in funding over the next 10 years and the number of training days per soldier will be raised from 35 to 40 days. At the same time consultation will take place between the MOD, the reserve soldiers, their employers and their families.

The concept for Army 2020 is thus based on the critical assumption that the Reserve can recruit to its required level of manning. If it cannot, then this is likely to prove fatal to Army 2020's strategic viability. Given the past run down of the TA, including the closure of TA centres, the reduction in man training days and lack of funding for recruiting campaigns, it is clearly not possible to increase the trained manpower in the Reserves in time to compensate for regular soldiers being made redundant – a process that is already one third completed.

Furthermore, since the average length of engagement for TA soldiers is about three years, it is simply unachievable in this time frame, even with 40 annual training days per man, to train reservists to regular standards. Some limited respite might be gained by the fact that many regular soldiers now being made redundant will become full time reservists. However in the long term a serious capability gap is likely to emerge between what the Army can actually do and what is currently being planned.

The British Army has already lost one war in Iraq, and although the outcome of the war in Afghanistan is unknown, in classic terms of having imposed our will on the enemy through the use of military force, it is unlikely to have won this war either by 2014. Even if the reserve and regular components can recruit to their targets, in future the considerable limitations in the levels of firepower and mass that can be applied in any situation will make it difficult for Army 2020 to make any significant contribution to future conflict. What is needed in stabilization operation is mass, i.e. large numbers of soldiers on the ground for protracted periods of time. This is essential in any people's war for only with sufficient numbers of troops on the ground will it be possible to provide vital and continuing levels of security throughout a theatre of operations necessary to win the confidence and support of the people.

As General Gage wrote to Lord Germain at the start of the American War of Independence in 1775, when asking for reinforcements to be sent to North America: '...a large force will terrify and win friends, a small force will encourage many people to support the rebels.'

Britain today has only a small force, the consequences of which are easily foretold.

THE ROYAL AIR FORCE IN 2013

By Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon

The Royal Air Force today is close to one third the size it was 20 years ago. In manpower terms, this has meant a reduction in uniformed strength from over 90,000 to an anticipated 31,000. Squadrons of fast jet, the weapon carrying element of the service have reduced from some 30 Squadrons to 11.

Whole capabilities are absent today such as Maritime Patrol and Long Range Electronic Reconnaissance, whilst the loss of the Harrier GR9 fleet has left the nation with no sea-borne offensive air support in addition to a serious reduction in numbers of close air support aircraft so vital in operations such as Libya or Afghanistan.

Air Transport and Air-to-Air (AAR) Refuelling is reliant on aircraft some almost 50 years old, and the difficulties and costs of maintaining such venerable machines has resulted in numbers being cut.

Making better reading, the helicopter fleet has some very capable aircraft although numbers are still less than the task requires. Moreover, the weapons and reconnaissance suites available to the Tornado GR4 are world class and will be available to Typhoon in due course which will make this aircraft truly multi-role. The F-35B Joint Strike Fighter will, it is hoped, enter service with the RN and RAF later in this decade; numbers are still uncertain and the UK has opted for the least capable version in terms of range and payload. RAF ISTAR contributes comprehensively to joint operation needs through the UK network enabled capability and is an increasingly important aspect of warfare.

In this context, the Reaper RPAS (Remotely Piloted Air System) is providing a superb range of information to military commanders and intelligence analysts. The Sentinel has provided excellent service and been used extensively on operations. Its future, despite its important and presently unique capability is uncertain. So, too, the Sentry E3-A AWACS aircraft unless it receives the planned upgrade to its systems needed to enable it to operate seamlessly alongside the NATO, French and US fleets. Long Range Electronic Reconnaissance is planned to be re-provided within three years by Rivet Joint, an American aircraft and system. No replacement for Maritime Patrol is funded as yet.

The Voyager (A330-200), transport and AAR, aircraft is entering service in the transport role and when cleared for AAR will provide a modern and very capable aircraft for this role, allowing the VC-10s and Tristars to be retired. The numbers of tanker platforms are less than originally envisaged and it remains to be seen whether this number and the reduced offensive air support capability will be sufficient in a future conflict. The relatively small number of C-17 aircraft have a vital role in strategic AT, and the A400M, which will replace the Hercules tactical transport aircraft later this decade is under development in Spain. Although likely to be a capable aircraft, it is not replacing the C-130J on a 1:1 basis.

In space and cyber warfare, the RAF has a vital role to play. It is the lead service in space operations and a key player in anti cyber attack. In training, the redundancy programme has involved a major reduction in recruiting, with training virtually on hold. This will pick up in 2013. Solutions for future pilot basic flying training are still being evaluated. During the Libya operation, a shortage of crews resulted in training crews having to be used on the front line, with a concomitant reduction in operational training.

Against this background of cuts and uncertainty, the RAF has been on continuous operations since 1991. It has performed outstandingly over this period and its reputation amongst knowledgeable interests remains very high. Nevertheless, there have been problems with support of the other Services which has frustrated all concerned. These have arisen almost exclusively from lack of numbers, the unserviceability of ancient equipment and inadequate spares provision. It is the matter of numbers which is the greatest challenge in the years ahead.

Mass matters, and all the armed forces, the Royal Navy and RAF in particular, will have to find a better balance between the demands of high tech warfare and the simple fact that quantity has a quality of its own; it will require an honest recognition that without the United States we are severely restricted in what we can actually achieve. The Libyan campaign against a small, quickly defeated, air force still required 70% of the support flights to be flown by the US. Europe has a long way to go to be able to operate effectively on its own and further reductions in defence spending unless accompanied by much better value for money will put at risk the ability to operate alongside the USAF in other than a token capacity.



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