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The 2015 SDSR: a primer

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1. What is the SDSR?

Summary

The Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) is the Government's foremost document on defence strategy and will be published on Monday 23 November 2015. Together with the National Security Strategy it will review the threats the UK faces, what capabilities the UK needs to respond to them and how to configure the Armed Forces accordingly.

New developments since the 2010 SDSR and NSS, in particular Russia's actions on NATO's eastern flank and the rise of Islamic State, combined with the end of operations in Afghanistan, have prompted calls for an overhaul of the SDSR and NSS. The last SDSR made significant cuts to Armed Forces personnel and equipment.

The Government has committed to meet the NATO target of spending 2% of GDP on defence every year for the rest of the decade. The Summer Budget 2015 announced the defence budget will rise by 0.5% (above inflation) each year from 2016-17 to 2020-21. This short note focuses solely on how the SDSR will impact the Armed Forces.

The Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) complements the National Security Strategy (NSS). Together they assess the UK's foreign policy and security objectives, identify national security risks to the UK and outlines how the UK intends to address these risks.

The NSS sets out the 'ends': what the UK seeks to achieve. The SDSR focuses on the 'ways' and 'means': the ways in which the UK seeks to achieve these ends and the 'means', the resources, the UK can devote to them.

Process

Work officially began on the SDSR after the 2015 election. It is led by the Cabinet Office and encompasses a broad range of Government departments, including the Home Office, the FCO and DFID. It is expected to take a wholesale approach to the issue of security, incorporating not only defence policy and the role and capabilities of the Armed Forces but also wider security issues such as homeland defence, counter terrorism, cyber and border security and international development.

When will it be published?

It will be published on Monday 23rd November 2015. The Comprehensive Spending Review will take place on 25th November 2015. No date has yet been given for the National Security Strategy and is it not clear whether it will be a separate document, as it was in 2010, or combined with the SDSR.

The last SDSR was published on 19 October 2010, the day after the NSS. The Coalition Government pledged to undertake a review every five years to avoid the gap that had developed between the 2010 SDSR and its predecessor, the 1998 Defence and Security Review.

2. What was in the 2010 SDSR?

Produced amid the financial crisis and budget cuts – the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review announced an 8% fall in real terms to the defence budget to 2014/15 - the 2010 SDSR made significant changes to the configuration of the armed forces and announced major equipment cuts. These included:

- No carrier strike capability until 2020 because of the decision to retire the Harrier aircraft and delaying the build of the new aircraft carriers to install the flight deck equipment needed for the carrier variant of the Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter¹
- Armed forces to be reduced by 17,000 personnel: 7,000 in the Army and 5,000 each in the Royal Navy and RAF
- A major restructure of the Armed Forces, known as *Future Force 2020*
- the withdraw from service of HMS Ark Royal
- No maritime patrol aircraft capability with the cancellation of the Nimrod MRA4 programme
- Reduced surface fleet of 19 frigates and destroyers from 23

For a detailed summary of the SDSR and the decisions affecting the armed forces, see Commons Library Paper [Strategic Defence and Security Review: Defence policy and the armed forces](#), SN05743.

Reaction to the 2010 SDSR

The SDSR was portrayed as a unique opportunity to rebalance the UK's defence priorities, commitments and spending. However it subsequently came under considerable criticism which crystallised around two themes:

- That it was a Treasury-led review, dictated by budgetary considerations, rather than a truly strategic assessment of the resources needed by the armed forces.
- The reductions to personnel numbers and cuts to equipment, prompting concern about the ability of the armed forces to fulfil all the tasks expected of them.

¹ The Government reversed this decision in 2012 and reverted to the STOVL variant of the Joint Strike Fighter. See Library note [The F-35 Joint Strike Fighter](#)

3. Expectations for the 2015 SDSR

The circumstances in which the 2015 SDSR are undertaken are vastly different to the situation in 2010.

Fears of further budgetary cuts were allayed by the Chancellor when he committed to spending 2% of GDP on defence on each year for the rest of the decade in the Summer Budget. This states the MOD's entire budget will rise by 0.5% (above inflation) each year from 2016-17 to 2020-21. Up to an additional £1.5 billion a year will also be available by 2020-21 to fund increased spending on the military and intelligence agencies. The MOD will have to bid for a share of this money.²

The global security environment seems to have become in many ways more unstable. The Defence Committee pointed to the emergence of concurrent threats from failing states, increasingly dominated by radical jihadist groups, which "represent a fundamental change in the nature of the threats to the UK and the character of warfare."³

The Chief of the Defence noted the global security context is one of uncertainty, instability, threat diversification, an increasing complexity in inter-state relationships, and the ever greater constraint on the use of force in his Chatham House speech previewing the SDSR. He observed "it has become ever more difficult to distinguish between transient threats of a non-existential nature and those threats which pose a more enduring danger to our national interest over time." CDS argued further that "there is no longer a simple distinction between war and peace. We are in a state of permanent engagement in a global competition."⁴

Afghanistan was the main effort of Defence in 2010. Combat operations ended in October 2014 for the UK and attention has shifted to operations against ISIL in the Middle East. The attacks in Paris prompted renewed debate about whether the UK should extend military offensive operations to Syria.⁵

Russia was barely mentioned in the 2010 SDSR but is likely to merit far more attention this time round. As part of the wider NATO response to Russia's actions in Ukraine, the UK will lead NATO's new Very High Readiness Force in 2017 and has committed a battlegroup of a 1,000 soldiers to the force every year for the rest of the decade.⁶

"It will be a hard-headed review of how we can deliver our national security strategy most effectively and efficiently."
Michael Fallon,
Defence Secretary,
[June 2015](#)

² [Summer budget 2015](#), 8 July 2015, HC 264 2015-16

³ Defence Committee, *Re-thinking defence to meet new threats*, 24 March 2015 HC 512 2014-15. The Defence Committee will publish a new report, [An SDSR checklist of potential threats](#), on 21 November 2015

⁴ [Chief of the Defence Staff speech at Chatham House](#), Chatham House, 15 September 2015

⁵ Commons Library Briefing Paper [ISIS/Daesh: the military response in Iraq and Syria](#), SN06995. See Commons Library Briefing Paper [France and Article 42\(7\) of the Treaty on the European Union](#), 18 November 2015, for further information on the invocation of the 'mutual defence' clause by France.

⁶ See Commons Library Briefing Paper [NATO's response to Russia](#), CBP7276, 7 August 2015

The SDSR is expected to provide a commentary on the future configuration of the armed forces, updating the *Future Force 2020* structure laid out in the 2010 SDSR, and discuss manpower.

The SDSR is also expected to discuss equipment including: surface ships; combat aircraft; surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities; unmanned (remotely piloted) systems; cyber-capabilities; Special Forces; and maritime patrol. The Chief of the Defence Staff has talked of the mismatch between the capabilities the UK has and those that it needs to meet the multiple demands of the current operating environment.⁷

The Defence Secretary, the Permanent Under Secretary and the Chief of the Defence Staff have identified the broad themes underlying the 2015 SDSR in recent commentary and speeches. These, Michael Fallon has said, are to be more international, more efficient and innovative.⁸

Jon Thompson, the Permanent Under Secretary, highlighted five of the key defence themes under development as part of the review:

- working with our allies to further strengthen the international dimension of Defence policy and planning;
- taking a more innovative approach across Defence;
- continuing to pursue efficiency and better productivity throughout Defence,
- better articulate the contribution MOD and the Armed Forces make to national security and prosperity;
- and working to put the value and contribution of our people at the centre of a revitalised Defence management.⁹

The next section will examine the changes made to the armed forces under the Coalition Government and explore what that might mean for the forthcoming SDSR.

⁷ [Chief of the Defence Staff speech at Chatham House](#), Chatham House, 15 September 2015

⁸ [Defence Secretary's speech to RUSI on the SDSR 2015](#), *Ministry of Defence*, 22 September 2015

⁹ ["PUS updates DE&S staff on SDSR"](#), *Desider*, November 2015

4. Significant developments under the Coalition and current Government

The 2010 SDSR announced significant changes to the configuration of the armed forces and an internal reform programme for the Ministry of Defence. Some of these elements are ongoing and this section provides a snapshot of some of the changes to personnel, equipment projects and reform programmes begun under the Coalition Government that are likely to feature in the 2015 SDSR. It is not intended to offer a comprehensive list of all the programme or reforms introduced by the Government.

4.1 People

Armed Forces Covenant

The Government pledged in the 2010 SDSR to renew the Armed Forces Covenant, which is a statement of the moral obligation which exists between the nation, the Government and the Armed Forces. The Covenant was published in May 2011 and its core principles were enshrined in law, for the first time, in the *Armed Forces Act 2011*. It applies to all three services. It does not create legally enforceable rights for personnel but the Defence Secretary is required to report annually to Parliament on the Covenant.

Box 1: Core principles of the Armed Forces Covenant

- No disadvantage: no current or former member of the armed forces, or their families, should be at a disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services.
 - Special consideration: special consideration is appropriate in some cases, particularly for those who have been injured or bereaved.
-

The Government also introduced a Community Covenant, to which all local authorities in Great Britain have signed up to, and a Corporate Covenant for businesses and charitable organisations. A new Covenant Fund will provide £10 million annually to organisations to support the wider armed forces community.

Future Force 2020

The 2010 SDSR laid out a new structure for the armed forces called Future Force 2020. Over the next decade the armed forces are to be reconfigured into three broad elements:

- The Deployed force – those engaged in operations
- The High Readiness force – units ready to respond to a crisis
- The Lower Readiness Force – forces returning from or preparing for operations¹⁰

¹⁰ See [Factsheet 5: Future Force 2020 – Summary of size, shape and structure](#)

Will the 2015 SDSR retain this structure, which the Defence Committee described as “manifestly the wrong structure” for the new global security environment that has evolved since 2010?¹¹

The concept of the **Whole Force** was introduced in the 2011 Defence Reform Review by Lord Levene. This encompasses not just regular personnel but reserves, MOD civilians and contractors. The Government describes it as “a way to deliver a balanced, resilient and fully integrated force structure.”¹²

The Army announced a complete restructure in 2012, prompted in part by cuts to the size of its regular forces. **Army 2020** removed 17 units from the order of battle, removing a number of infantry battalions and reducing the average size from 570 to 530.¹³ It reorganised the Army into two elements: a Reaction Force and an Adaptable Force. Both these forces are supported by Force Troops.¹⁴

Further changes to the armed forces were unveiled in a white paper in 2013.¹⁵ This focused on the **Reserve forces** and is designed to integrate Reserves far more closely with regular forces. The Government committed an additional £1.8 billion on Reserves over a ten year period. Reserves will now be able to deploy on a far greater range of operations and new financial incentives for both reservists and their employers are being brought in. The *Defence Reform Act 2014* initiated these changes and also changed the name of the Territorial Army to the Army Reserve.

Service personnel numbers

The regular armed forces have shrunk since the 2010 SDSR, prompting concerns about future manpower levels and the ability of the services to recruit and retain suitable personnel.¹⁶ The Chief of the Defence Staff spoke of critical manpower challenges and identified the ability to recruit and retain skilled people as one of the greatest risks facing the Defence Board.¹⁷

At the same time the MOD has sought to increase the number of Reservists, which has similarly prompted concerns about recruitment and retention.

The full-time armed forces is now lower by approximately 29,000 since the 2010 position.¹⁸ The 2010 SDSR laid out a reduction in each force and the planned force size by 2020. A subsequent internal Army review reduced the size of the regular army further, leaving it at its smallest

¹¹ Defence Committee, *Re-thinking defence to meet new threats*, 24 March 2015 HC 512 2014-15, summary and para 117

¹² [Annual report on the National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review](#), December 2014

¹³ [PQ 2057](#), 19 June 2015

¹⁴ For more detail see Commons Library Briefing Paper, [Army 2020](#), SN06396, 26 July 2012

¹⁵ Reserves in the Future Force 2020: Valuable and Valued, Cm

¹⁶ General Sir Nicholas Carter, the Chief of the General Staff, said the Army is going to be significantly challenged in recruiting over the next three to five years. *British Army Review*, Spring/Summer 2015, p8

¹⁷ Chief of the Defence Staff speech, *Chatham House*, 15 September 2015

¹⁸ [UK Armed Forces monthly service personnel statistics: September 2015](#)

since the mid-19th century.¹⁹ The Conservative 2015 manifesto committed to no further reductions to the Army.

Box 2: Personnel reductions under the Coalition Government

The 2010 SDSR and subsequent internal Army review outlined a total reduction of:

- 5,000 Royal Navy personnel by 2015 and a planned force size of 29,000 by 2020
- 5,000 RAF personnel by 2015 and a planned force size of 31,500 by 2020
- 19,000 Army personnel by 2015 and a planned force size of 82,000 by 2020

The overall target for the full-time trained strength by 2020 is 142,500 personnel.²⁰

The current plan is to increase the number of Reservists to 35,000 by April 2019:

- from 19,410 in 2012 to **30,000** for the Army Reserve
- from 1,830 in 2012 to **3,100** for the Maritime Reserve (Royal Naval Reserve and Royal Marines Reserve)
- from 970 in 2012 to **1,800** for the Royal Auxiliary Air Force.²¹

Altogether the Army is therefore working towards a total of 120,000 personnel under Future Force 2020: 82,000 Regular and 30,000 Reserves, totalling 112,000, plus a further 8,000 in training.

See Library Briefing Paper [Defence employment: Social Indicators](#), for statistics on the strength of the armed forces.

New employment model

The 2010 SDSR set out a wide ranging review of the terms and conditions of Service personnel, both Regular and Reserve. This process is ongoing.

The 'New Employment Model' will update the current package of terms and conditions of personnel and is being designed to make the armed forces attractive to personnel and potential recruits and address dissatisfaction among personnel on the impact of service life on families and the careers of spouses and civil partners. It is focusing on terms of service, accommodation, training and education, and pay and allowances.

Some changes, like a Forces Help to Buy Scheme and changes to Service Families Accommodation charging, have already been introduced. Further changes are to be rolled out during the current Government.

¹⁹ See table 4 in [Defence Personnel Statistics](#), SN02183, for historical comparisons. See also Commons Library Briefing Note [Defence employment: social indicators](#), SN02621, for up to date personnel statistics.

²⁰ At 1st April 2015 the full-time trained strength is 144,120 which is 6,500 below the required strength for 2015. See table 5b and graph 5.1 in [UK Armed Forces Quarterly Personnel Report](#), 1 April 2015.

²¹ [Annual report on the National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review](#), December 2014, para 218

Service Complaints Ombudsman

The *Armed Forces (Service Complaints and Financial Assistance) Act 2015* streamlined the internal Service Complaints System and converted the independent Service Complaints Commissioner into an Ombudsman. Implementation is planned for January 2016.²²

Women in ground close combat

The Ministry of Defence is exploring whether to lift the exclusion on women from ground close combat roles. The exclusion was reviewed in 2014 when a decision to conduct a programme of physiological research to assess the risks and mitigation to women in ground close combat roles was made. Once these programmes are complete a decision on the exclusion is expected in mid-2016.²³

4.2 Equipment

The 2010 SDSR made significant and headline-grabbing cuts including retiring HMS Ark Royal, the Harrier fleet and the remaining Type 22 frigates; delaying into service the new aircraft carriers; switching to a different variant of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter and the cancellation of the Nimrod MRA4 maritime patrol aircraft programme.

There is no suggestion the forthcoming SDSR will cut a similar scythe through the current equipment programme. Key priorities for the SDSR are expected to focus on areas such as surveillance and reconnaissance, maritime patrol, unmanned systems, Special Forces, cyber capabilities, and counter-terrorism capabilities. It may also clarify the numbers of Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter aircraft and Type 26 frigates the Government intends to buy and how it envisages operating the two new aircraft carriers.

The Ministry of Defence has published an annual Defence Equipment Plan every year since 2011. The most recent, published in October, lays out a ten year budget for the equipment plan out to 2024/25 at £166 billion. This includes:

- £68.5bn on the procurement of new equipment
- £18.3bn on support arrangements for new equipment
- £65.5bn on support for existing, in-service equipment
- £4.3bn contingency provision
- £7.3bn unallocated headroom
- £2.2bn centrally held provision²⁴

Combat Aircraft

The fast-jet fleet is undergoing major change. The 2010 SDSR retired the entire Harrier fleet, then in service with both the RAF and Royal

²² An Ministry of Defence [factsheet](#) outlines the key changes to the complaints system and the new Ombudsman's powers, November 2015.

²³ [Women in ground close combat review paper](#), 1 December 2014

²⁴ Defence Equipment plan 2015. The contingency provision is to allow for cost increases in the core programme; the unallocated headroom is for projects not yet in the committed core programme

Navy, leaving only the **Tornado** GR4 and **Typhoon** in service. The retirement date for Tornado was brought forward to 2019²⁵, when the first new **Lightning II Joint Strike Fighter** is expected to enter service.

Operational demands placed on combat aircraft over the last five years has raised questions about future planned reductions.²⁶ In October 2014 the MOD delayed the disbandment of one Tornado squadron from 2015 to 2017. The Prime Minister said after the Paris attacks “we know we need the ability to carry out airstrikes so this money will provide for more fighter aircraft.”²⁷

Possible options include retaining Tornado beyond 2019 or delaying the retirement of Typhoon tranche 1 aircraft (there are three tranches), which are also due to leave service in 2019.

Typhoon is being enhanced under the Typhoon Future Capability Programme to provide an air-to-surface capability, as it was originally brought into service as an air-defence aircraft.

There are currently five front-line Typhoon squadrons and three front-line Tornado squadrons, plus an operational conversion unit squadron for each aircraft type.

The 2015 SDSR may also consider what comes after Typhoon when it retires in 2030. The MOD is jointly funding with France a two year study into a **future unmanned combat aircraft** that is due to end in 2016.²⁸

£17.4bn is allocated to the Combat Air sector in the Defence Equipment Plan 2015. Spending will peak between 2013/14 and 2016/17.

Reaper/Protector/Scavenger

Reaper is not a combat aircraft as such but it is the only remotely piloted aircraft in the UK's inventory that carries weapons. It is a medium-altitude, long-endurance vehicle that has been deployed in Afghanistan (2007 to 2014) and since 2014 over Iraq and Syria. It provides both an ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) and offensive capability.

The MOD is looking at a replacement for Reaper from 2018/9. This programme was known as Scavenger but renamed by the Prime Minister as Protector. The Prime Minister is calling for a fleet of at least 20 vehicles, double the current Reaper fleet. An advanced version of

²⁵ Prior to the SDSR the out of service date for the Tornado GR4 was 2025 ([HL Deb 16 November 2010 WA 178](#)). This was brought forward by the Coalition Government to 2021 ([HL Deb 25 November 2010 cWA365](#)) and again to the current retirement date of 2019 ([HC Deb 25 June 2012 c5W; HL2932](#), 18 November 2014). Two Tornado Squadrons were disbanded in March 2014.

²⁶ Tornado aircraft are currently involved in Operation Shader in Iraq. Typhoon aircraft provide air defence to the UK and have served two Baltic Air Policing Missions in 2014 and 2015 and are slated to do so again in 2016. Both Tornado and Typhoon aircraft were involved in the Libya operation in 2011.

²⁷ [Lord Mayor's Banquet 2015: Prime Minister's speech](#), 16 November 2015

²⁸ For further information on this see Library Briefing Paper [Overview of military drones used by the UK armed forces](#), SN06493, 11 September 2015, section 3.4

Reaper appears the most likely option. The Main Gate of this programme is not expected until March 2016.²⁹

Maritime Patrol Aircraft

The UK does not have a dedicated Maritime Patrol Aircraft and the requirement for one is being considered as part of the 2015 SDSR.

The previous MPA, the Nimrod MR2, was withdrawn from service in March 2010. The intention was to replace it with the Nimrod MRA4 but this programme was cancelled by the 2010 SDSR. The MOD has robustly defended the decision to scrap the programme and said it has accepted the subsequent gap in capability. To retain relevant skills, service personnel have been embedded with allied nations maritime patrol capabilities, under the Seedcorn Initiative. There are a number of maritime patrol aircraft available on the market the UK could procure including, but not confined to, the Boeing P-8 Poseidon, the Airbus C295 and other offerings from L3, Kawasaki and Saab. Lockheed Martin is also reportedly proposing adapting the C130J Hercules transport aircraft that are retiring from 2022 to an MPA platform which would be known as the SC-130J MMA. The MOD has explored an unmanned option but said in the short-term, to 2025, an unmanned option could not provide the required wide-area surveillance.³⁰

Surveillance, transport and refuelling aircraft

The RAF has or is the process of taking delivery of a raft of new transport, refuelling and surveillance aircraft since the 2010 SDSR. This includes the A330 **Voyager**, a 14 strong fleet of aircraft providing transportation, aeromedical and air-to-air refuelling; the A400M **Atlas**, a 21 aircraft fleet that will replace the **C-130J Hercules** in the strategic and tactical air transport role; and the **C-17 Globemaster III**, providing a long-range, strategic, heavy-lift capability. The 2010 SDSR envisaged a fleet of 7 C-17 aircraft but in 2012 the Prime Minister announced the purchase of an eighth aircraft. The VC10 and the C130K Hercules aircraft have been retired.

The first of three new **Rivet Joint** surveillance aircraft (also known as Airseeker) entered service in 2014. The **Sentinel R1** long-range airborne surveillance aircraft was to have been withdrawn from service after the end of operations in Afghanistan according to the 2010 SDSR. However the MOD decided in 2013³¹ to extend its life until 2018 "to preserve a capability to conduct wide area surveillance of operational environments in the short term, and to allow the longer-term requirement to be considered during the next Strategic Defence and Security Review."³²

The Defence Equipment Plan 2015 envisages spending of £12.6bn in air support over the next ten years, peaking in 2015/16.

²⁹ For further information on this see Library Briefing Paper [Overview of military drones used by the UK armed forces](#), SN06493, 11 September 2015, section 3.1

³⁰ HC Deb 19 December 2013 c708W

³¹ HC Deb 6 February 2013 c235W

³² PQ 206091, 15 July 2014

Royal Navy surface fleet

The 2010 SDSR made a number of cuts to the Royal Navy's fleet: the withdrawal from service of HMS Ark Royal and HMS Illustrious; the retirement of the remaining Type 22 frigates and the retirement of three Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels. However the Navy is in the process of a major recapitalisation project involving two new aircraft carriers; six new destroyers; new type 26 frigates; three new offshore patrol vessels; new Astute hunter-killer submarines and the expected replacement of the strategic nuclear deterrent (Trident).

The Defence Equipment Plan 2015 allocates £19bn on surface ships and £43bn in spending on submarines over the next ten years.

Aircraft carriers

The 2010 SDSR announced only one of the two new **Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers** currently under construction would be brought into operation, with the second to be kept at extended readiness or possibly to be sold. The future of the second carrier, HMS Prince of Wales, was to be reviewed in the 2015 SDSR. However the Prime Minister pre-empted this when he announced on the eve of the NATO summit in September 2014 that HMS Prince of Wales will be brought into service. This will ensure a carrier is available at all times. HMS Queen Elizabeth is expected to commence sea trials in 2017 and enter service in 2020 with an initial carrier strike capability provided by Lightning II aircraft. The overall cost of the carrier programme is £6.2 billion.³³

Frigate/destroyer fleet

The 2010 SDSR outlined a future surface fleet of 19 frigates and destroyers, down from the then current fleet of 23. The four remaining Type 22 frigates were decommissioned as a result. The remaining 13-strong fleet of **Type 23 frigates** are expected to be progressively replaced from 2022 onwards by the new **Type 26 frigate**, also called the Global Combat Ship. The main gate decision of the Type 26 has yet to be made. All six new **Type 45 destroyers** are now in service.³⁴

Since 2013 the UK Missile Defence Centre has been conducting a research and development trial exploring the potential for the Royal Navy's Type 45 to deploy a **Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence** (TMBD) capability.

Part of this trial has been testing the Sampson multi-function radar,³⁵ part of the Sea Viper air defence system, in detecting and tracking ballistic missile targets. In September 2013 the Type 45 HMS Daring successfully detected and tracked two medium-range ballistic missile targets at a US testing range in the Pacific.

³³ HC Deb 6 November 2013 c251-254

³⁴ The original requirement was for 12 vessels of the class, but the Ministry of Defence announced in July 2004 this would be cut to eight, and this was further reduced in June 2008 to the six previously contracted. The 2010 SDSR confirmed the fleet of six.

³⁵ The Sampson E/F-band multi-function radar can simultaneously detect and track hundreds of separate and varied targets at ranges of up to 400km.

In October 2015 an at-sea demonstration of a ballistic missile interception was also conducted by NATO warships as part of Exercise Joint Warrior. The demonstration was the first of its kind in European waters and was intended to test and evaluate interoperability between participating warships.

The outcome of the MDC's research and development trial is expected to inform any future decision on establishing a TBMD programme for the Type 45, which Ministers have acknowledged is being examined within the context of the 2015 SDSR.³⁶

Other surface vessels

The Coalition Government signed contracts for three new **River-class** patrol vessels which will enter service from 2017. It also ordered four new **Royal Fleet Auxiliary tankers**³⁷ which are being built by a South Korean firm with customisation to be undertaken by A&P Group in Falmouth. The first in class, RFA Tidespring, is expected to enter service in 2016.

The 2015 SDSR may discuss how they intend to replace the current 15-strong fleet of **mine counter-measure vessels** that will begin to leave service in the 2020s.³⁸ Little has been said on this. The MOD is funding various demonstrator programmes focusing more on off-board unmanned systems rather than new hulls.

Submarines

HM Naval Base Clyde will become the Submarine Centre of Specialisation from 2020 and will be home to the new *Astute*-class and the Successor class.

The Royal Navy is progressively taking delivery of seven new **Astute**-class nuclear hunter-killer submarines (SSNs) to replace the outgoing *Trafalgar*-class. The first two boats (HMS *Astute* and HMS *Ambush*) have already entered service and the third, HMS *Artful*, began sea trials in summer 2015 and is expected to enter service at the end of the year. The remaining four vessels are already under construction.

As a result of decisions to defer the Main Gate of the Successor submarine programme to 2016, decisions were also taken to slow down the build programme for the *Astute* in order to maintain steady production and "avoid a production gap in the submarine construction industry."³⁹ As such construction work on the *Astute* class is currently planned until 2024. Changes to the *Astute* programme and introduced delays have added approximately £1.5 billion to the total cost of the programme.⁴⁰

³⁶ HC Deb 24 February 2014, c66W; HL Deb 15 September 2015, GC253 and HL Deb 5 November 2015, c1764

³⁷ The project is known as the Military Afloat Reach and Sustainability (MARS) programme.

³⁸ [HL Deb 7 December 2010 cWA24](#)

³⁹ National Audit Office, *Major Projects Report 2011*, HC1520-I, 2010-12, 16 November 2011

⁴⁰ *ibid*

The **Successor** programme is about the design, development and manufacture of a new class of four submarines that will replace the current Vanguard class submarines that make-up part of the UK's nuclear capability. Parliament voted in 2007 to retain the strategic nuclear deterrent. In early 2016, a decision on taking that programme forward into the manufacture phase, referred to as Main Gate, will be taken. The Government has indicated it will seek the approval of Parliament for this decision.⁴¹

The 2010 SDSR reviewed the UK's nuclear declaratory policy, announced plans to reduce the number of warheads deployed on board Vanguard submarines and to reduce the overall nuclear warhead stockpile to no more than 180 by the mid-2020s.

Tanks and armoured vehicles

The Government ordered 589 new **armoured vehicles** for the Army in a £3.5bn contract placed in September 2014. Known originally as Scout, the family of vehicles have since been renamed **Ajax**. There will be six variants: reconnaissance (Ajax), reconnaissance support (Ares), command and control (Athena), equipment repair (Apollo), equipment recovery (Atlas) and engineering reconnaissance (Argus).

The 2010 SDSR announced plans to reduce holdings of **Challenger 2** main battle tanks by around 40%, leaving a support main battle tank fleet of 227 Challenger Main Battle tanks.⁴² The Life Extension Programme for the Challenger 2 tank is intended to extend their use to 2035. The programme is currently in the concept phase. The MOD is also extending the life of **Warrior** infantry fighting vehicle through the Warrior Capability Sustainment Programme.

Helicopters

The 2012 Defence Rotary Wing Capability Study confirmed plans to move to four core fleets of helicopters across the armed forces that will serve until at least 2040: the Chinook, Wildcat, Merlin and Apache helicopters. The Puma Mk2 fleet will also remain in service until 2025. Upgrades to the fleets are underway and new Merlin Mk2, Puma Mk2, Chinook Mk6 and Navy and Army Wildcat helicopters are all in service. A contract was placed in 2014 for Merlin Mk3 helicopters, which will also transfer to Joint Helicopter Command. The latter was formed in 1999 as a tri-service organisation to bring together battlefield helicopters under one command.

The **Apache** Capability Sustainment Programme is exploring options to replace the Army's current AgustaWestland/Boeing Apache AH-64D (known as Apache AH Mk1 in the UK) attack helicopters which are needing replacement due to obsolescence. The US State department authorised in August a potential foreign military sales deal to remanufacture 50 helicopters to the AH-64E standard. This work would be carried out by Boeing. AgustaWestland is also bidding for the work.

⁴¹ See Commons Library Paper *Replacing the UK's Trident nuclear deterrent*, CBP7353, 26 October 2015

⁴² HC Deb 9 November 2011 c364W & HC Deb 30 April 2012 c1150W

The SDSR may provide further clarity for this programme which, if left untreated, would result in a complete loss of the attack helicopter capability from 2020 to 2025.⁴³

Detailed information on the MOD's major equipment projects, including costs (where known) and timeframes, can be found in the National Audit Office's *Major Projects 2015 and Defence Equipment Plan 2015 to 2025*.

Cyber-security

In 2010, the [National Security Strategy](#) identified hostile attacks on UK cyber space by other states and large scale cybercrime as a 'tier one' threat to national security, alongside international terrorism, international military crises and natural disasters.⁴⁴ In response, the Government established the National Cyber Security Programme (NCSP), to help meet the objectives of the strategy, and in November 2011, published the UK's first [Cyber Security Strategy](#).⁴⁵ The Cyber Security Strategy set out how the UK would tackle cyber threats to promote economic growth and protect national security. The Prime Minister said the Government will invest in a "new generation of cyber defences to block and disrupt attacks before they can harm our United Kingdom."⁴⁶

For the armed forces, the Joint Forces Command has led in the development and integration of defence cyber capabilities since April 2012. The Defence Cyber Operations Group, DCOG, is an organisation within the Joint Forces Command.

The most recent [annual report of the Strategic Defence and Security Review](#) published in December 2014 stated that:

The MOD is working to put cyber in the mainstream across defence, to develop a full-spectrum military cyber capability, including a strike capability, and to recruit cyber reserves ensuring that the Armed Services can draw on the best outside expertise.⁴⁷

In September 2013, a new [Joint Cyber Reserve was set up](#) as a division of the Joint Forces Command.⁴⁸ Announcing the creation of this new cyber unit, the then Defence Secretary, Philip Hammond MP, confirmed that reservists would work alongside regular forces to protect critical computer networks and safeguard vital data.

4.3 Reform of the Ministry of Defence

Alongside the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), the government also announced that it would conduct a full organisational review of the Ministry of Defence. Lord Levene subsequently published

⁴³ Major Projects Report 2015 and Defence Equipment Plan 2015 to 2025, *National Audit Office*, HC 488

⁴⁴ HM Government, [A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy](#), (October, 2010).

⁴⁵ HM Government, [The UK Cyber Security Strategy: Protecting and promoting the UK in a digital world](#), (November, 2011).

⁴⁶ [Lord Mayor's Banquet 2015: Prime Minister's speech](#), 16 November 2015

⁴⁷ HM Government, [Annual Report on the National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review](#), December 2014, para 113

⁴⁸ MOD, ["New cyber reserve unit created"](#), *gov.uk*, 29 September 2013

his proposals for reorganising the Ministry of Defence in 2011. Measures that have come into effect include a smaller head office, a restructure Defence Board and the creation of a new **Joint Forces Command** to strengthen the development of joint enables and joint warfare development. Reviewing the progress made, Lord Levene said in 2014 he had been impressed with the “fundamental transformation” of the MOD.⁴⁹

Defence procurement

The Coalition Government unveiled its approach to defence acquisition in a White Paper published in February 2012: *National Security Through Technology* (Cm 8278). The Government committed to purchasing defence equipment through open competition and buying off the shelf where appropriate. It also committed to protecting the UK’s operational advantage and freedom of action when acquiring equipment. This is known as Operational Sovereignty. The Government also committed to increase opportunities for small and medium size enterprises. The Government published the Defence Growth Partnership in July 2014 which outlines the way in which the Government intends to work with business to grow the defence export market, foster greater collaboration and innovation and improve competitiveness, funded by a £30 million pot over three years from 2015 onwards.⁵⁰

Reforming DE&S

Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) is responsible for buying and supporting equipment for the armed forces. The Government announced its intention to convert DE&S into a Government-owned, Contractor-operated entity, in 2013. A White Paper was published and legislation brought forward in mid-2013.⁵¹

However the competition for a contractor to run the new GOCO was halted in December 2013 because only one of the two then remaining consortia in the process formally submitted a bid. Instead, DE&S was converted into a bespoke central Government trading entity on 1 April 2014. It is in the middle of a three year reform process to make it “match-fit” by 2017. The *Defence Reform Act 2014* provides for the future conversion of DE&S into a GOCO if the Government wishes to rerun the competition.

4.4 Defence estate

The 2015 Summer Budget announced an additional £1.5 billion a year by the end of Parliament will be available to fund increased spending on the military and intelligence agencies. The MOD will have to bid for a

⁴⁹ See the [Defence Reform](#) section of the MOD website for the 2011 report and subsequent annual reports.

⁵⁰ [Delivering growth: implementing the strategic vision for the UK defence sector](#), July 2014

⁵¹ *Better Defence Acquisition: improving how we procure and support Defence equipment*, Cm 8626, was published in June 2013. The Defence Reform Bill was introduced to the Commons in July 2013.

share of this money.⁵² The final allocation of these funds will be determined by the SDSR and the Spending Review. The Treasury has said the additional funding is conditional on the armed services producing further efficiencies within their existing budgets and specifically identified further rationalising of the MOD's estate.⁵³

Basing

The MOD has reviewed and rationalised the Defence Estate since the 2010 SDSR. This includes closing several sites, transferring a number of RAF bases to the Army and enlarging some Army bases to accommodate the return of forces from Germany.

Withdrawal from Germany

British forces have been permanently stationed in Germany since 1945. The Government announced in the 2010 SDSR all the forces will be withdrawn by 2020. It means that the Army will be almost completely UK-based for the first time in decades. The Army Basing Programme has relocated around 74% of personnel from Germany since 2010. The remaining units will relocate in 2016, 2017 and in 2019.⁵⁴

New base in Bahrain

The UK is constructing a new, permanent naval base in Bahrain. Agreement was reached between the two countries in December 2014. The UK has had a base in Bahrain since the 1950s and four Royal Navy minehunters are based there. The new Mina Salman Support Facility, known as HMS Juffair, will provide accommodation, life support facilities and storage.

⁵² [Summer budget 2015](#), 8 July 2015, HC 264 2015-16

⁵³ [Spending Review 2015](#), 21 July 2015, HC 9112 2015-16

⁵⁴ [Final Army moves from Germany set for 2019](#), Ministry of Defence, 5 November 2015

5. Further Reading

The Commons Library has published a separate reading list on the 2015 SDSR. This includes Library and Parliamentary material examining the 2010 SDSR and articles and commentary looking ahead to the 2015 SDSR. It can be accessed online: [The 2015 SDSR: a reading list](#).

Appendix: the military tasks and defence planning assumptions

The SDSR identified seven military tasks and the Defence Planning Assumptions that underpin them.

The Seven Military Tasks

- defending the UK and its Overseas Territories
- providing strategic intelligence
- providing nuclear deterrence
- supporting civil emergency organisations in times of crisis
- defending our interests by projecting power strategically and through expeditionary interventions
- providing a defence contribution to UK influence
- providing security for stabilisation.

The Defence Planning Assumptions

The type, frequency, duration and location of operations the Armed Forces may expect to be able to undertake:

- an enduring stabilisation operation at around brigade level (up to 6,500 personnel) with maritime and air support as required, while also conducting:
- one non-enduring complex intervention (up to 2,000 personnel), and
- one non-enduring simple intervention (up to 1,000 personnel);

or alternatively:

- three non-enduring operations if we were not already engaged in an enduring operation;

or:

- for a limited time, and with sufficient warning, committing all our effort to a one-off intervention of up to three brigades, with maritime and air support (around 30,000, two-thirds of the force deployed to Iraq in 2003).

A non-enduring operation is defined as lasting less than six months while an enduring operating lasts for more than six months and require rotation of units over a period of time. A stabilisation mission is a longer-term mainly land-based operation to stabilise and resolve conflict situations, normally in partnership with others.

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