



## DEBATE PACK

CDP 2018-0016 | 19 January 2018

# Size and strength of the British armed forces

**Westminster Hall**

**Wednesday 24 January 2018**

**9.30am – 11.00am**

**Debate initiated by Leo Docherty MP**

Compiled by:  
Tim Robinson

Subject specialists:  
Louisa Brooke-Holland  
Claire Mills

Statistician:  
Noel Dempsey

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# 1. Background

Media reports of rumoured plans to cut the army to 70,000 personnel has prompted much concern in Parliament about the current future size of the armed forces.

## Current numbers of personnel

There are three main ways to measure the number (strength) of military personnel, depending on whether one includes trained and untrained, Gurkhas and full time reserve personnel. The numbers differ depending on which method is used. The first in the list - total full time UK Armed Forces - is the most comprehensive: it includes the UK Regular Forces, Gurkhas, and Full Time Reserve personnel:

- Total full time UK Armed Forces: 155,474
- Total full time UK Regular Forces: 147,525
- Total trained full time UK Armed Forces: 137,280

All three services are currently below the requirement for trained strength. Overall there is a deficit of 5.6%, or 8,157 personnel, of the stated required strength (which is 145,437). So the Army's required strength is 82,646 but the actual strength, as of 1 October 2017, is 77,440.

When Reserves, all UK regular personnel, Gurkhas and other personnel are included, the total UK Service Personnel is 195,730. Volunteer Reserve personnel make up 19% of that number, numbering just over 37,000, on 1 October 2017.<sup>1</sup>

Further detailed analysis is available in library paper [UK defence personnel statistics](#) which provides information as of 1 October 2017. This is the most information available - the MOD used to produce monthly personnel statistics but has changed to quarterly reports. The next update is due in mid-February.

## Context

### National Security Capabilities Review

The National Security Advisor is leading a Government-wide National Security Capabilities Review (NSCR) and will include defence capabilities. The Government has not yet given a date for publication. The review has prompted considerable speculation in the media and in Parliament about what the potential impact on armed forces - concerns about possible cuts to the Navy's amphibious capability prompted a debate in [November 2017](#) on this subject. The defence aspects of the capability review was the subject of a debate in Westminster Hall in [October 2017](#) and was mentioned repeatedly in a debate on defence on [11 January](#)

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<sup>1</sup> [UK armed forces monthly service personnel statistics: October 2017](#), Ministry of Defence, 16 November 2017. Other personnel include the Serving Regular Reserve, Sponsored Reserve, Military Provost Guard Service, Locally Engaged Personnel and elements of the Full Time Reserve Service (FTRS).

[2018](#). And on [15 January](#) Julian Lewis asked an Urgent Question asking about the Review and its potential implications for the armed forces. Gavin Williamson, the Secretary of State for Defence, said that he could not provide information on the detail of the review until it concludes but did highlight the priorities for the Ministry of Defence:

I can assure the House that as long as I am Defence Secretary we will develop and sustain the capabilities necessary to maintain continuous at-sea nuclear deterrence, a carrier force that can strike anywhere around the globe and the armed forces necessary to protect the north Atlantic and Europe; and we will continue to work with our NATO allies.<sup>2</sup>

### **Size of the armed forces**

Reducing the size of the armed forces is reportedly one of the proposals being examined under the Review. Media reported last [autumn](#) the MOD was considering possible plans to reduce the army below the required strength of 82,000 to 70,000.

The 2015 Conservative party election manifesto committed to maintaining the armed forces at their current size and not to reduce the army below 82,000. However the 2017 election manifesto made no such commitment on Army numbers. It said: “we will maintain the overall size of the armed forces, including an army that is capable of fielding a war-fighting division.”

### **Recruitment and retention**

All three services, plus the Royal Marines, are actively recruiting. The Army’s new adverts has prompted some recent media coverage but the Royal Navy, RAF and Royal Marines are all running recruitment campaigns.

According to the most recent figures, in the 12 months to 30 September 2017, there was a net outflow of 2,740 personnel from the UK Regular Forces. The MOD said this difference has increased compared with the 12 months to 30 September 2016, where there was a net outflow of 1,930. In terms of numbers, intake into the trained and untrained UK Regular Forces was 12,270 in the 12 months to 30 September 2017. This has decreased from 13,650 in the 12 months to 30 September 2016.<sup>3</sup>

The Ministry of Defence is in the midst of a wide-ranging review of terms and conditions for personnel under the New Employment Model. Housing in particular has been a particular issue among service personnel, with unhappiness about the current state of service accommodation, the introduction of a new accommodation payment system and concerns about the Future Housing Model. The Chief of the General Staff, Sir Nicholas Carter, acknowledged the uncertainty among personnel brought about by changes to the provisions of housing and other terms and conditions of service in his new year’s message to

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<sup>2</sup> [HC Deb 15 January 2018 c611](#)

<sup>3</sup> [UK armed forces monthly service personnel statistics: October 2017](#), Ministry of Defence, 16 November 2017

personnel in Soldier magazine.<sup>4</sup> These changes apply to all three services.

Evidence of concerns about morale can be found in the [Armed Forces Continuous Attitudes Survey 2017](#). The survey reported morale of self, Unit and Service has decreased since 2016. In particular the survey found 61% of personnel perceived service morale to be low and only 9% described service morale to be high. The Royal Marines in particular had seen large decreases in morale (the survey was published in May 2017). Concerns about low morale in the armed forces have been by MPs and Peers raised in both Houses of Parliament.

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<sup>4</sup> "Army chief's new year message to serving soldiers", Soldier magazine, January 2018

## 2. Press Articles

The following is a selection of news and media articles relevant to this debate.

Please note: the Library is not responsible for either the views or accuracy of external content.

**HARMED FORCES Former Armed Forces minister exposes shocking military cuts and issues dire warning on UK's fading power**

The Sun  
16 January 2018  
Tom Newton Dunn

**Ex-Army head warns Hammond that reported cuts would be 'appalling' for defence**

Mail Online  
13 January 2018

**Plans to merge Plymouth's Royal Marines with paratroopers as part of drastic defence cuts say reports**

Plymouth Herald  
12 January 2018  
Gayle McDonald

**Defence cuts: 'Pinstripe warriors' take aim at forces**

The Times (Subscription required)  
12 January 2018  
Deborah Haynes

**Corbyn's Labour could defeat a Tory government on defence spending for the first time in our party's history**

Labour List  
7 December 2017  
Josh Arnold-Forster

**Conservative MPs warn new defence secretary over spending cuts**

The Guardian  
27 November 2017  
Ewen MacAskill

**Ministry of Defence braced for 'brutal' cuts in security review**

The Guardian  
24 November 2017  
Ewen MacAskill

**Cuts have left Army '20 years out of date' and Forces 'not fit for purpose'**

Daily Telegraph  
14 November 2017  
Ben Farmer

**General Ben Hodges warns Britain over armed forces cuts**

BBC Online  
9 November 2017  
Jonathan Beale

**British Army's advertising bill for recruitment rockets as manpower continues to fall**

Daily Mirror  
19 October 2017  
Ben Glaze

**Britain's armed forces being 'hollowed out' as recruitment stalls, Government-commissioned study finds**

The Independent  
4 September 2017  
Adam Lusher

**Children should be taught about army as part of National Curriculum, review finds**

Daily Telegraph  
4 September 2017  
Steven Swinford

**Britain's Armed Forces 'Woefully Under Strength'**

Forces Network  
20 July 2017

### 3. PQs

#### **Royal Navy: Capability and Strength**

15 Jan 2018 | 634 cc595–598

**Asked by: Kevin Foster**

What recent assessment he has made of the capability and strength of the Royal Navy.

**Answered by: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence**

The Government are committed to increasing our maritime power to project our influence across the world and promote national prosperity. Growing for the first time in a generation, we will spend £63 billion on new ships and submarines over the next decade. We are also committed to increasing the number of personnel in the Royal Navy.

**Asked by: Kevin Foster**

As the Minister will know, the strongest arm of the Royal Navy is the Royal Marines. Will he update the House on the work that is ongoing to transform the Royal Marines home base in south Devon into a world-leading facility and how it will enhance our national amphibious capability plans to ensure that we continue to meet our NATO and national priorities?

**Answered by: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence**

In my previous role, I was responsible for the better defence estate strategy. I can confirm that it remains the intention to dispose of the Royal Citadel and Stonehouse in 2024 and Chivenor in 2027, and to provide units for the Royal Marines in either Plymouth or Torpoint. I cannot confirm exactly what form that will take at this stage, as further work is required, but I will update the House in due course.

**Asked by: Luke Pollard**

The lack of clarity and the leaks and confusion surrounding the national security review are really hitting morale, and morale affects capability in the Royal Navy. Given the uncertainty over Plymouth's HMS Albion and HMS Bulwark and, now, the leaked proposal to merge the Royal Marines with the Parachute Regiment, will the Minister clear up the confusion and rule out those Navy cuts and the merger?

**Answered by: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence**

I am sorry to have to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but I can only repeat what has already been said: the Government take the security of our nation incredibly seriously. I think it is far more important to ensure that the review is robust, comprehensive and detailed than to rush to make announcements simply to appease the hon. Gentleman.

**Asked by: Dr Julian Lewis**

May we take a moment to acknowledge the courageous service of Surgeon-Captain Rick Jolly, whose death has just been announced? He was the only person to be awarded a gallantry medal by both sides in the Falklands war.

Will the Minister please take back to those conducting the review the united opinion on both sides of the House that any loss of frigates and amphibious vessels before their due out-of-service dates would be totally unacceptable?

**Answered by: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence**

I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for highlighting the very sad passing of Commander Rick Jolly. He was indeed an absolute legend, and the service that he provided in the Falklands is worth reading about. It is unique to have been given awards for gallantry by both the United Kingdom and the Argentine forces. I also note my right hon. Friend's other point.

**Asked by: Chris Bryant**

Does not the passage of the Russian frigate Admiral Gorshkov through the English channel over Christmas prove that the Russians are intent on constantly observing our capability on the high seas, and is it not vital for us to maintain that capability at as high a level as possible?

**Answered by: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence**

Absolutely. The Russian activity in the north Atlantic is as high as it has been since the end of the cold war, which is why we constantly assess it and respond appropriately. I was delighted that, as ever, HMS St Albans accompanied that Russian vessel during its passage through the channel.

**Asked by: Richard Drax**

May I reiterate what Members on both sides of the House have said so far, and add my concerns to those that have already been expressed about the future of the Royal Marines and the Royal Navy? I believe that any cutting of the Royal Marines or any further part of our amphibious fleet—HMS Ocean having already gone to the Brazilians—is absolutely out of order and totally unacceptable.

**Answered by: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence**

My hon. Friend is a champion of the armed forces, and I am of course aware of his own service. I can only repeat what has already been said, but I entirely recognise the contribution made by both the Royal Marines and the Royal Navy. I was deeply honoured to be able to award green berets to our Royal Marines back in 2016, having accompanied them for a short run across the moor. I am only too well aware of what they are capable of, and I note my hon. Friend's concerns.

**Asked by: Jonathan Edwards**

What assessments have been undertaken of naval capability in response to the inevitable arms race in weapons of mass destruction which would follow the implementation of the United States' nuclear posture review?

**Answered by: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence**

I am sorry, but I did not catch the question. If I may, I will review it and write to the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr Speaker**

I think it would be fair to say that it was tangential to the subject of the strength of the Royal Navy.



**Asked by: Nia Griffith**

We have heard from the Government ad nauseam that the Royal Navy is growing when that is demonstrably untrue. There continues to be a sharp divide between rhetoric and reality. It is utterly unacceptable that the House should hear about significant potential cuts from the newspapers, as we did yet again this weekend. Can the Minister refute those reports, and confirm that we will not see a repetition of the 2010 scale of cuts in our armed forces?

**Answered by: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence**

It is deeply disappointing that the hon. Lady once again comes to the Dispatch Box almost trying to talk down our Royal Navy. As is clear from the opening comments, we are absolutely committed to some £63 billion-worth of investment in our Royal Navy. Only shortly before Christmas we saw the Queen Elizabeth arriving in Portsmouth, after £120 million worth of investment in Portsmouth. We have now laid the first contracts for the first three Type 26s, and we are looking at Type 31s, and there are also nine new P-8 aircraft. The investment in our Royal Navy is significant, so for the hon. Lady to come to the Dispatch Box and simply try to talk it down is deeply disappointing.

**Asked by: Nia Griffith**

Once again we do not seem to have very clear answers on that front. We also know that a lack of personnel is a driving factor for decisions in the Royal Navy. Capita is failing miserably on recruitment targets, failing to deliver savings, and is still bungling its IT systems, so what specific steps will the Minister be taking to get to grips with this situation?

**Answered by: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence**

We seem to be switching seamlessly from the Navy to the Army. [Interruption.] If it is in order, that is fine, but there is continuing work on recruitment in the Army. I am pleased to say that compared with this period last year, applications are up about 20%. There have been some minor glitches in the new computer system, but they are being ironed out and I am confident that we will see recruitment into the Army increasing.

**Armed Forces****07 Dec 2017 | 116440****Asked by: Kevan Jones**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many Operational Pinch Points there are in the (a) Naval Service, (b) Army Service and (c) RAF Service; and what assessment he has made of the underlying reasons for any deficits in trained strength.

**Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence**

As at 1 October 2017 there were 15 Operational Pinch Points (OPPs) in the Naval Service, 7 in the Army and 11 in the Royal Air Force.

OPPs may come from ensuring that our personnel do not go over guidelines on how much time should be spent on operations in any one year, and/or a competitive job market for the trades or areas of

expertise involved. The single Services closely monitor any OPPs and apply a range of measures to manage them.

**Army: Staff**

**05 Dec 2017 | 116903**

**Asked by: Kevan Jones**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what the regular Army's full-time trade trained strength was in each of the last 12 months

**Answering member: Tobias Ellwood | Ministry of Defence**

Defence Statistics regularly publish Armed Forces Personnel statistics. The full time trade trained strength of the Army can be found in table 3c at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/uk-armed-forces-monthly-service-personnel-statistics-2017>

**Army Reserve**

**23 Nov 2017 | 113382**

**Asked by: Chris Ruane**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, how many people were recruited into the army reserve in each month since January 2014 for which figures are available; and what the total strength was of the army reserve in each of those months.

**Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence**

The strength of the Army Reserve is regularly published by Defence Statistics in the UK Armed Forces monthly service personnel statistics which can be found at the following link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-armed-forces-monthly-service-personnel-statistics-index>

The number of people recruited into the Army Future Reserve 2020 each month since January 2014 is shown in the attached table.

The table shows total intake and a breakdown of those who joined the Army Reserve either untrained or already trained. Prior to 1 October 2016, Army Reserve trained intake comprised personnel who were Phase 1 and Phase 2 trained. From 1 October 2016 onward, Army Reserve trained intake comprises of personnel who are Phase 1 trained.

**Armed Forces: Cuts**

**14 Nov | 785 cc1935-1936**

**Asked by Lord Craig of Radley**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the comments made by General Ben Hodges, Commander of United States Forces in Europe, that the United Kingdom would be unable to maintain its international commitments if its Armed Forces were cut further.

**Answered by: The Earl of Courtown**

My Lords, the UK Armed Forces are fulfilling all their international commitments. Her Majesty's Government will ensure that they can continue to do so. The national security capability review is being conducted to make sure that the UK's investment in national security capability is as joined-up, effective and efficient as possible. We take the views of the US, our closest ally, seriously and we will continue to consult with them.

**Asked by: Lord Craig of Radley**

I welcome the noble Earl to his multi-portfolio today. Are the Government aware that General Hodges is but one of a number of senior United States military personnel who have criticised with dismay the reducing size and shape of our Armed Forces? Can he therefore confirm that there is no intention—which would earn further rebuke—to cut the size of our Armed Forces, for example in the Royal Marines, or to curtail flying training for helicopter pilots?

**Answered by: The Earl of Courtown**

I thank the noble and gallant Lord for his question. He is quite right that concerns were raised in the newspapers by General Hodges. The fact is that all these budgets are under some pressure or other. Any speculation about the measures the Government will take through the NSCR is exactly that—speculation. No decisions have been taken. Rumours in the press have been misleading and deeply unhelpful.

**Asked by: Lord Tunnicliffe**

My Lords, we are to have a national security and capability review—that is code for “more defence cuts”. We have a statement from Ben Hodges, commander of the US Army in Europe, who said that if the UK,

“can't maintain and sustain the level of commitments it's fulfilling right now, then I think it risks kind of going into a different sort of category”—

that is code for “we will become second-class allies”. How does the Minister reconcile this with the Statement by the then Defence Secretary, Philip Hammond, in 2013, when he said—nay, boasted:

“The savings that I have agreed will have no impact on military manpower or equipment”?

He went on to say:

“The ambitious and far-reaching reforms we began in 2010 have eliminated the £38 billion black hole and balanced the defence budget for the first time in a generation. We are determined to ensure that the Armed Forces of the future have the resources they need to deliver our nation's security”.

There has been an impact on manpower and equipment. We have failed to balance the defence budget and Ben Hodges clearly believes that in the future we will not have the resources to deliver our nation's security.

**Answered by: The Earl of Courtown**

My Lords, I repeat that our Armed Forces are fulfilling their commitments across the globe and this Government will ensure that they continue to do so. I remind the House—as many Ministers have in the past—that our investment of 2% of UK GDP in defence gives us a leadership role in operations and exercises. To name just some of the activities currently under way, we are proud of our leading role in NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence, NATO air policing and NATO standing naval forces. We continue to play a pivotal role in coalition operations against Daesh.

**Asked by: Lord Dannatt**

My Lords, I fully respect the right of General Hodges to pass comment on his closest ally, as he sees it. It is difficult to give reassurance right across the board but there are certain yardsticks as far as UK defence capability is concerned that an ally watches very carefully, one of which is our ongoing capability to field a division in a future conventional conflict of at least two combat brigades. That has always been our intention, our policy, and what we have managed to do. Can the Minister give an assurance that this remains our policy in this very important yardstick area?

**Answered by: The Earl of Courtown**

My Lords, the noble Lord, with his great knowledge—far more than mine—has asked a question that I cannot answer. I can say that the NSCR is being undertaken to ensure that the UK’s investment in national security capabilities is as joined-up, effective and efficient as possible.

**Asked by: Lord Campbell of Pittenweem**

My Lords, is it not the harsh, unpalatable truth that we are cutting not into fat or even muscle but now into the very bones of our defence capability? How else can one explain the decision—not speculated but in fact—to reduce the number of replacement Apache helicopters from 50 to 38 and, further, to consider the sale of HMS “Albion”?

**Answered by: The Earl of Courtown**

My Lords, as I said earlier, press reports are pure speculation. There are always pressures on our defence budget but we will continue to enable our Armed Forces to carry out the job that we ask them to do in defending this country.

**Asked by: Earl Attlee**

My Lords, my noble friend the Minister will be aware that I am not convinced that we have struck the right balance between overseas aid and defence but is it not clear that, with the notable exception of France, the defence effort of our European partners is, relatively speaking, pathetic? Will the Minister encourage our European partners to increase their defence effort and meet the 2% target?

**Answered by: The Earl of Courtown**

My Lords, I thank my noble friend for his question. There are in fact six EU states that meet the 2% NATO target, including the United Kingdom, Estonia, Greece, Poland and Romania. I should add that France does not meet that target but falls a couple of points behind. As

for meeting the 0.7% and the 2% targets, I think our country is the only one to manage that.

### **Army Reserve**

**10 Oct 2017 | 105418**

#### **Asked by: Chris Ruane**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment has been made of impact of the closure of Army Reserve centres on levels of recruitment.

#### **Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence**

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on the 18 July 2017 to Question 4377 to the hon. Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr Smith). We continue to make good progress with recruitment into the Army Reserve. The total strength of the Army Reserve was 30,140 as at 1 August 2017, which is an increase of 960 since 1 August 2016.

### **Armed Forces**

**07 Sep 2017 | 7013**

#### **Asked by: Nia Griffith**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Answer of 20 July 2017 to Question 5260, on the Navy, whether the personnel numbers targets have changed from SDSR 2015 for each Service; and what the personnel targets are for each Service by 2025.

#### **Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence**

The Government is committed to maintaining the overall size of the Armed Forces.

### **Armed Forces: Recruitment**

**18 Jul 2017 | 4377**

#### **Asked by: Nick Smith**

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of the effect of recent reserve centre closures on recruitment to the armed forces.

#### **Answering member: Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence**

A very small number of Reserve Centres have closed in the recent past. Recruitment into the Reserve Forces is a key consideration when determining the location of Reserve units. We continue to make good progress with Reserves recruitment. In the 12 months to 1 May 2017, 6,570 people joined the Reserves, taking the total strength to 36,310, an increase of 4.1% since 1 May 2016.

## Army

14 Jul 2017 | 3380

### Asked by: Toby Perkins

To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what his policy is on the size of the British Army; and if he will make a statement.

**Answering member:** Mark Lancaster | Ministry of Defence

We will maintain the overall size of the Armed Forces, including an Army that is capable of fielding a war-fighting division.

## Defence Spending

10 Jul 2017 | 627 c15

### Asked by: Barry Sheerman

The Secretary of State will know that his Department recently stated that the trained strength of our armed forces is down below 140,000. If we are to keep people in our armed services satisfied, can we go back to what they were proud of—the tradition of taking in a lot of trainees and being one of the best trainers in the world?

### Answered by: Sir Michael Fallon | Ministry of Defence

We are one of the best trainers in the world, and our armed forces training is highly respected the world over. Other countries are constantly telling me that they want more places at Cranwell, Sandhurst and Dartmouth; they also want our armed forces to go out and train, as we are doing in Ukraine and Nigeria; and we have the largest apprenticeship programme in the country.

## 4. Other Parliamentary material

### 4.1 Urgent Questions

#### **National Security Capability Review [Extract]**

**15 Jan 2018 | 634 c611-623**

#### **Asked by: Dr Julian Lewis**

I rise to request urgent clarification of the radical reductions in conventional military forces provisionally proposed by the national security capability review, together with an explanation of the reasons for undertaking the review and the financial constraints under which it is being conducted.

#### **Answered by: Gavin Williamson | Ministry of Defence**

In the 2015 strategic defence and security review, the Government identified four principal threats facing the UK and our allies in the coming decade: terrorism, extremism and instability; state-based threats and intensifying wider state competition; technology, especially cyber-threats; and the erosion of the rules-based international order.

As the Prime Minister made clear in her speech to the Lord Mayor's banquet late last year, these threats have diversified and grown in intensity. Russian hostility to the west is increasing—whether in weaponising information, attempting to undermine the democratic process or increased submarine activity in the north Atlantic. Regional instability in the middle east exacerbates the threat from Daesh and Islamic—Islamist terrorism, which has diversified and dispersed. Iran's well known proxy military presence in Iraq, Syria and elsewhere poses a clear threat to UK interests in the region and to our allies.

Like other Members, I have seen much of the work that our armed forces continue to do in dealing with these threats. It is because of these intensifying global security contexts that the Government initiated the national security capability review in July. Its purpose is to ensure that our investment in national security capabilities is joined up, effective and efficient. As I said in oral questions, since I became Defence Secretary I have asked the Department to develop robust options to ensure that defence can match the future threats and challenges facing the nation. Shortly, when the national security capability review finishes, the Prime Minister, with National Security Council colleagues, will decide how to take forward its conclusions. I would not wish to pre-empt that decision.

Although the detail must wait until after the NSCR concludes, I can assure the House that as long as I am Defence Secretary we will develop and sustain the capabilities necessary to maintain continuous at-sea nuclear deterrence, a carrier force that can strike anywhere around the globe and the armed forces necessary to protect the north Atlantic and Europe; and we will continue to work with our NATO allies. The Prime Minister, the Chancellor and I will be doing all we can to ensure that we have a sustainable budget, so that we can deliver the right capabilities for our armed forces.

**Asked by: Dr Julian Lewis**

I thank the current Defence Secretary—*[Laughter.]* That is not meant to be funny. I thank him for confirming what the previous Defence Secretary told the Defence Committee, namely that the capability review resulted from intensified threats to the United Kingdom. If the threats are intensifying, why has the review provisionally proposed radical reductions in our conventional armed forces, and why is it required to be fiscally neutral, as the National Security Adviser recently told the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy? Who has imposed that financial restriction? The Ministry of Defence? Unlikely. The Treasury? Almost certainly.

If new threats have intensified, is not more money needed, unless of course previous conventional threats have seriously diminished? If previous conventional threats have diminished, why did the National Security Adviser claim to the Defence Committee in a letter:

“Because the main decisions on Defence were taken during the 2015 SDSR, this review is not defence-focused”?

If this review is not defence-focused, and if the 2015 plan therefore still applies, why should thousands of soldiers, sailors and airmen be lost, elite units merged or aircraft frigates and vital amphibious vessels scrapped, long before their out-of-service dates?

Finally, is it not obvious that we are bound to face such unacceptable choices as long as we continue to spend barely 2% of GDP on defence? Even after the end of the cold war and the taking of the peace dividend cuts, we were spending fully 3% in the mid-1990s. Defence is our national insurance policy, and it is time for the Treasury to pay the premiums.

**Answered by: Gavin Williamson | Ministry of Defence**

I thank the current Chairman of the Defence Committee—I think we are only ever current—for raising those points. In the NSCR, we are looking at the threats that the country faces, and everything that was done in 2015 is relevant today. As I pointed out, the Prime Minister herself has highlighted the fact that the threats are increasing, and we are having very active discussions right across Government about how best we can deal with those threats. There is an awful lot of speculation and rumour in the press, but that is what we expect of the press.

As I mentioned earlier, we need to ensure that we have the right capability, whether that is a continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent, our special forces, or an Army, Navy and Air Force that have the right equipment and capability to strike in any part of the globe. That is what we have to deliver. I am afraid that I cannot be drawn on the details at the moment, but I will be sure to update the House regularly, as the national security capability review develops, on the conclusions of the review and how we can best deal with them.

**Asked by: Nia Griffith**

I am grateful to you, Mr Speaker, for allowing this urgent question, because Members on both sides of the Chamber have had enough of



constantly reading about proposed defence cuts in the newspapers while Government Ministers stonewall questions in the House.

May I press the Secretary of State actually to answer the questions posed by the Chair of the Defence Committee about the national security capability review? Is it the case that the defence element of the review is to be hived off? If so, when can we expect that part to be published? We live in a time of deep global uncertainty, and the risks that we face continue to grow and evolve. Can the Secretary of State confirm that the review will carry out a thorough strategic analysis of those risks, and make a full assessment of the capabilities required to deal with them effectively? It is complete nonsense to have a review without also reviewing the funding, yet that is precisely what this Government propose to do.

Although we must develop and adapt our capabilities as the threats that we face continue to evolve, this review must not become a contest between cyber-security and more conventional elements. Will the Secretary of State recognise that Britain will always need strong conventional forces, and that money must be made available for both? He must not rob Peter to pay for Paul.

There is significant concern about cuts to personnel, with numbers already running behind the stated targets across all three services. The Government still maintain that they aim to be able to field a “warfighting division”, but will the Secretary of State admit that this simply will not be possible if the Army is reduced to the levels speculated? What is the Government’s target for the size of the Army? They broke their 2015 manifesto pledge to have an Army of over 82,000, and they have now broken their 2017 pledge to maintain the overall size of the armed forces because, in reality, numbers have fallen.

Finally, will the Secretary of State tell us what specific steps he is taking to stop defence cuts, beyond posing with dogs outside the MOD and briefing the papers about his stand-up rows with the Chancellor? The fact is that we cannot do security on the cheap, and the British public expect the Government to ensure that defence and the armed forces are properly resourced.

**Answered by: Gavin Williamson | Ministry of Defence**

I think that all Government Members recognise the importance of making sure that we maintain conventional forces, and the fact that we have to have a continuous at-sea nuclear deterrent; but we cannot have one and not the other. We have to ensure that we have that ability so that, if we are in a point of conflict, there is deterrence at so very many levels. That is why having robust armed forces—the Army, Navy and Air Force—is so incredibly vital.

The Government and the Conservative party made a clear commitment in our manifesto to maintaining numbers. We are working to ensure that we get the recruitment methods right, so that we can give many people right across the country the opportunity to be able to join the Army, Navy and Air Force. I have to say that if we are choosing between parties when it comes to who will prioritise defence, and who will ensure that our armed forces and this country’s national interests are

protected, I know which party I would choose, and it sits on this side of the House.

I will continue to work with the Army, Navy and Air Force to ensure that we get the very best deal for our armed forces. We have a vision as to what we wish to deliver for this country: a robust, global Britain that can project its power right across the globe. We recognise that that is done not just through cyber-offensive capabilities, but the conventional armed forces. As I said earlier, as the national security capability review starts to conclude, I will update the House on the conclusions and how it will be developed.

[...]

## 4.2 Statements

**National Security Capability Review**  
15 January 2018 | 788 460-463

## 4.3 Debates

**Defence Review**  
18 January 2018 | 788 cc17-31GC

**Defence**  
11 January 2018 | 634 cc503-578

**Royal Marines**  
28 November 2017 | 787 cc643-664

**UK Defence Forces**  
23 November 2017 | 787 cc293-333

**UK Amphibious Capability**  
21 November 2017 | 631 cc298-323WH

**Armed Forces Pay**  
1 November 2017 | 630 cc826-877

**Defence Capability**  
19 October 2017 | 629 cc396-420WH

**Armed Forces Pay**  
14 September 2017 | 628 cc399-412WH

**Future Shape of the Armed Forces**  
19 July 2017 | 627 cc337-360WH

## 4.4 Early Day Motions

### **NATIONAL SECURITY AND CAPABILITY REVIEW**

**EDM 712 (session 2017-19)**

**19 December 2017**

**Jack Lopresti**

That this House notes the Government's National Security and Capability Review; recognises concerns about the adequacy of the current financial settlement for the Ministry of Defence; urges the Government to undertake a thorough Strategic Defence Review to ensure adequate resources for HM Armed Forces, so that they may safeguard the nation in uncertain times.

### **ARMED FORCES PAY**

**EDM 326 (session 2017-19)**

**14 September 2017**

**Ruth Smeeth**

That this House notes that the pay of Armed Forces personnel has been capped at one per cent in 2017-18 and that this represents another below-inflation pay settlement; further notes that the size of the Army, Royal Air Force and Royal Navy and Royal Marines is below stated targets; notes that dissatisfaction with pay has been identified by service personnel as a reason for leaving their respective force; and calls on the Government to end the public sector pay cap for the Armed Forces and give Armed Forces personnel a fair pay rise.

## 5. Further reading

Mark Francois, **Filling the Ranks: Report for the Prime Minister on the State of Recruiting into the United Kingdom Armed Forces**, July 2017

Michael Clarke, **General Election 2017: Bad Times for Hard Facts on Defence Spending, RUSI Commentary**, 12 May 2017

**National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom**, Cm9161, HM Government, November 2015

**Debate on a motion relating to Defence**, House of Commons Library, CDP 2018-0002, 9 January 2018

**UK Defence Personnel Statistics**, House of Commons Library, CBP-7930, 21 November 2017

**UK amphibious capability in the 21st century**, House of Commons Library, CDP 2017-0231, 17 November 2017

**Armed Forces pay**, House of Commons Library, CDP 2017-0211, 31 October 2017

**The Government's review of defence capability**, House of Commons Library, CDP2017-0187, 17 October 2017

**Armed Forces Pay**, House of Commons Library, CDP 2017-0164, 12 September 2017

**Future shape of the armed forces**, House of Commons Library, CDP 2017-0142, 17 July 2017

**All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Armed Forces**

**All-Party Parliamentary Group on Defence and Security Issues**

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