



Library Note

Future Capability of the UK's Armed Forces

On 12 January 2017, the House of Lords will debate the future capability of the United Kingdom's Armed Forces in the current international situation. The Government (under David Cameron's premiership) set out its plans for the Armed Forces' future capabilities in the National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR 2015) published in November 2015. This outlined plans for a Joint Force 2025 capable of deploying an expeditionary force of around 50,000, including a maritime task group, a land division, an air group and a Special Forces task group. The Government stated that it would meet the NATO guideline of spending at least 2 percent of GDP on defence each year, and would also raise the defence budget by 0.5 percent a year in real terms, and invest £178 billion in defence equipment over the next decade (an additional £12 billion compared to previous plans). The SDSR 2015 made headline commitments to slightly increase the overall size of the regular Armed Forces, maintaining an Army of 82,000 and increasing the Royal Navy and RAF by 400 and 300 respectively, but pledged to reduce the Ministry of Defence's civilian staff by around 30 percent.

The UK had the fifth largest defence budget worldwide in 2015, and is one of only five of NATO's 28 members forecast to meet the 2 percent defence spending guideline in 2016. However, the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy expressed concerns in July 2016 that the Armed Forces would not be able to fulfil the wide-ranging tasks assigned to them with the capabilities, manpower and funding allocated in the SDSR 2015. There have been calls for the level of defence spending to be raised to 2.5 or 3 percent of GDP. The Ministry of Defence's equipment spending plans depend on meeting challenging efficiency savings targets, and its spending power could also be affected by the weakening of the pound and fluctuations in GDP. Although the Government has already begun acquiring some of the equipment outlined in the SDSR, concerns have been raised that the long lead time required for the development of new capabilities could leave the UK exposed in the short-term.

While the Government has acknowledged that much has changed in the international situation since the SDSR was published in November of last year, not least the vote in the referendum in June in favour of leaving the European Union, it has taken the view that the principal threats to the UK's interests have not changed significantly, and that the capabilities outlined in the SDSR remain the right choice for the current strategic context. Others have suggested that the Armed Forces' future capabilities need to be re-examined in light of the EU referendum, which could change the way the UK cooperates militarily with its EU partners; the victory in the US presidential election of Donald Trump, who has indicated he may not be as committed to the NATO alliance as his predecessors; and signs of increasing aggression on the part of Russia.

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I. Armed Forces Capability

I.1 Overview: Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015

The Government (under David Cameron's premiership) set out its plans for the Armed Forces' future capabilities in the [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#) (SDSR 2015) published in November 2015. The Government stated its intention to “strengthen our Armed Forces [...] so that they remain world-leading”, able to “project our power globally” and to “fight and work alongside our close allies, including the US and France, to deter or defeat our adversaries”.¹ It acknowledged that it had taken “tough decisions to balance the defence budget in 2010” at the time of the previous Strategic Defence and Security Review, but argued that it was “now in a position to invest in the highly deployable Armed Forces that we need to guarantee our security”.²

The SDSR 2015 set eight missions for the Armed Forces. The first four were described as “routine” missions, while the latter four would constitute the Armed Forces' contribution to the Government's response to crises:

- Defend and contribute to the security and resilience of the UK and Overseas Territories.
- Provide the nuclear deterrent.
- Contribute to improved understanding of the world through strategic intelligence and the global defence network.
- Reinforce international security and the collective capacity of our allies, partners and multilateral institutions.
- Support humanitarian assistance and disaster response, and conduct rescue missions.
- Conduct strike operations.
- Conduct operations to restore peace and stability.
- Conduct major combat operations if required, including under NATO's Article 5.³

To conduct these missions, and to “ensure that the Armed Forces are able to tackle a wider range of more sophisticated potential adversaries”, to “deploy more quickly and for longer periods” and to “make best use of new technology”, the SDSR 2015 set out a commitment to “develop a new Joint Force 2025”.⁴ The Government stated that this would build on Future

¹ HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), November 2015, Cm 9161, p 9.

² *ibid*, p 13.

³ *ibid*, pp 27 and 29. Article 5 enshrines the principle of collective defence, so that an attack against one member of NATO is considered an attack against them all.

⁴ *ibid*, p 29.

Force 2020, a major restructuring of the Armed Forces set out in the previous SDSR in 2010.⁵ The planning assumption under Joint Force 2025 is that the Armed Forces will be able to deploy an expeditionary force of around 50,000 (compared with around 30,000 planned in Future Force 2020), drawn from:

- A maritime task group centred on a Queen Elizabeth Class aircraft carrier with F35 Lightning combat aircraft, consisting of around 10–25 ships and 4,000–10,000 personnel.
- A land division with three brigades, including a new strike force, consisting of around 30,000–40,000 personnel.
- An air group consisting of around 4–9 combat aircraft squadrons, 6–20 surveillance platforms, 5–15 transport aircraft and 4,000–10,000 personnel.
- A Special Forces task group.
- Joint Forces, including enablers and headquarters of around 2,000–6,000 personnel.⁶

The SDSR 2015 states that when they are not deployed at this scale, the Armed Forces will be able to undertake a large number of smaller operations simultaneously, which might include:

- A medium-scale operation, often drawing mostly on just one service, such as our current counter-ISIL mission in Iraq.
- Multiple additional operations, ranging from specialist missions such as counter-terrorism or counter-piracy, through to broader, more complex operations such as the military support to tackle Ebola in Sierra Leone or the enduring naval presence in the Gulf.
- A wide range of defence engagement activities, such as training teams and mentoring.⁷

In support of these capabilities, the Government made a number of commitments in the SDSR 2015 relating to defence spending, personnel and equipment, which are examined in turn below. Commenting in July 2016 on the key overall role of the Armed Forces in responding to the full spectrum of threats to the UK and its interests, the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy highlighted its concern that the Armed Forces would “not be able to fulfil the wide-ranging tasks described in the NSS and the SDSR 2015 with the capabilities, manpower and funding” allocated.⁸

⁵ See HM Government, [Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review](#), October 2010, Cm 7948 and House of Commons Library, [Strategic Defence and Security Review: Defence Policy and the Armed Forces](#), 2 November 2010 for detailed information about the SDSR 2010 and Future Force 2020.

⁶ All information from HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), November 2015, Cm 9161, p 29 and Ministry of Defence, [SDSR 2015 Defence Key Facts](#), 24 November 2015, p 6.

⁷ HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), November 2015, Cm 9161, pp 29–30.

⁸ Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), 10 July 2016, HL Paper 18 of session 2016–17, p 26.

Similarly, the *Financial Times* reported in September 2016 that General Sir Richard Barrons, recently retired head of the UK's Joint Forces Command, had submitted a private memorandum to Sir Michael Fallon, Secretary of State for Defence, in which he contended that “capability that is foundational to all major armed forces has been withered by design”.⁹ Sir Richard is reported to have pointed out capability shortfalls such as the deployment of Navy ships and RAF planes without adequate munitions or protections; dependence on small numbers of highly expensive pieces of military equipment which the Armed Forces cannot “afford to use fully, damage or lose”; and “dangerously squeezed” manpower, leading to an over reliance on a small number of personnel with specialist skills, such as fighter pilots.

However, the Government has maintained that it is “confident that the strategy, and the policies and capabilities required to deliver it, are fully aligned with the available resources”.¹⁰

1.2 Defence Spending

The UK had the fifth largest defence budget worldwide in 2015, according to figures compiled by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).¹¹ The UK's defence budget was equivalent to \$56.2 billion, and the four countries with higher defence spending were: US (\$597.5 billion); China (\$145.8 billion); Saudi Arabia (\$81.9 billion, including Ministry of Interior Funding); and Russia (\$65.6 billion, under NATO defence spending definition). The UK is one of the few NATO countries to meet NATO's guideline to spend at least 2 percent of GDP on defence—only five of NATO's 28 members are forecast to do so in 2016: US (3.61 percent); Greece (2.38 percent); UK (2.21 percent); Estonia (2.16 percent) and Poland (2.00 percent).¹²

In the July 2015 Budget, the Government made a commitment to “meet the properly measured NATO pledge to spend 2 percent of national income on defence every year of this decade” and to raise the defence budget by 0.5 percent a year in real terms.¹³ This was restated in the SDSR 2015, where the Government pledged that it would continue to meet the NATO target, which would allow it to “increase the defence budget in real terms every year of this Parliament”, to deliver the commitment to increase the equipment budget by at least 1 percent in real terms, and to continue to meet the NATO target to spend 20 percent of the defence budget on researching, developing and procuring new equipment.¹⁴ The SDSR 2015 announced that the Government would spend £178 billion over the next decade on equipment and equipment support.¹⁵ This represented an additional £12 billion compared to the MOD's defence equipment plan published in October 2015, which set a budget of £166 billion for defence equipment for the following ten years.¹⁶

The Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015, published two days after the SDSR 2015, stated that the Government would invest £11 billion in new capabilities, innovation and the

⁹ Sam Jones, ‘Britain's ‘Withered’ Forces Not Fit to Repel All-Out Attack’, *Financial Times*, 16 September 2016.

¹⁰ Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: Government Response](#), 27 October 2016, HL Paper 56 of session 2016–7, p 6.

¹¹ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2016*, February 2016, ‘[Top 15 Defence Budgets 2015](#)’.

¹² NATO, [Defence Expenditures of NATO Countries 2009–2016](#), 4 July 2016.

¹³ HM Government, [Summer Budget 2015](#), 5 July 2015, HC 264 of session 2015–16, pp 26–7.

¹⁴ HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), November 2015, Cm 9161, p 27.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Ministry of Defence, [The Defence Equipment Plan 2015](#), October 2015, p 4.

defence estate, “to ensure that the Armed Forces are able to continue to project power with greater global reach”.¹⁷ This funding would be made up of:

- £7.2 billion delivered through efficiency savings including military and civilian pay restraint, reductions to the civilian headcount, and reductions in travel expenditure and professional fees.
- £2 billion delivered through the reprioritisation of existing funding.
- £2.1 billion from the Joint Security Fund, announced in the July 2015 Budget.¹⁸

Doubts have been expressed about the ability of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to find the planned efficiency savings. Trevor Taylor of the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) noted that even before the fall in the value of the pound following the referendum, which could make defence imports more expensive (see below), the MOD was “struggling to produce the efficiency savings required to make affordable the Equipment and Support plan”.¹⁹ The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy assessed that the MOD might “struggle” to make the expected efficiency savings over the next five years, and that the “ambitious” savings target presented a “significant risk” to the delivery of the defence capabilities set out in the SDRS 2015.²⁰ In particular, the Joint Committee was concerned that increased public sector employee costs (the ending of contracting out from employers’ National Insurance contributions which took effect from 1 April 2016 and the additional employers’ superannuation contributions announced in the March 2016 budget) would add more than 1 percent to the MOD’s 2019–20 budget, which would offset the planned increases to the defence budget. In response, the Government stated that the efficiency savings target was “intentionally challenging”, and that a “robust governance process” was in place for tracking and monitoring efficiency delivery across the MOD to ensure that any “emerging risks to successful delivery” were addressed.²¹

A number of concerns have been raised about how the 2 percent spending target is measured and about whether the proposed level of defence spending is sufficient to ensure the future capabilities of the Armed Forces. By way of background, the House of Commons Library has calculated that:

- In 2015/16, defence expenditure was £39.0 billion, the equivalent of 2.1 percent of GDP (September 2016 GDP figure for 2015/16).
- Between 2010/11 and 2015/16, defence spending, as measured by the UK’s NATO return, has been reduced by 6.9 percent in real terms.

¹⁷ HM Government, [Spending Review and Autumn Statement 2015](#), 25 November 2015, Cm 9162, p 80.

¹⁸ House of Commons Defence Committee, [Shifting the Goalposts? Defence Expenditure and the 2 Percent Pledge: Government Response](#), 30 June 2016, HC 465 of session 2016–17, p 11. The Joint Security Fund was announced in the July 2015 Budget, to provide funding of £1.5 billion a year for security-related activities (HM Treasury, ‘[Chancellor George Osborne’s Summer Budget 2015 Speech](#)’, 8 July 2015). The Ministry of Defence, the intelligence services and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office can bid for funding.

¹⁹ Trevor Taylor, ‘[Brexit and UK Defence: Put the Equipment Plan on Hold?](#)’, Royal United Services Institute, 6 July 2016.

²⁰ Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), 10 July 2016, HL Paper 18 of session 2016–17, p 25.

²¹ Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: Government Response](#), 27 October 2016, HL Paper 56 of session 2016–7, p 6.

- Using NATO's data, the UK average proportion of GDP on defence expenditure dropped from 2.6 percent to 2.1 percent between 2010 and 2015. It is expected to rise to 2.2 percent in 2016.
- The MOD's net cash requirement for 2015/16 was £36.4 billion, which compares to the figure of £39 billion on the UK's NATO return. The return to NATO includes elements of the Government's cyber security spending, parts of the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund relating to peacekeeping, war pensions and pension payments to retired MOD civil servants.²²

In April 2016, the House of Commons Defence Committee noted that the Government had achieved its commitment to spend 2 percent of GDP on defence in part by revising the criteria used to calculate the UK defence budget that is reported to NATO, so that it now included expenditure that had not previously been included, such as pensions.²³ Under the previous accounting methodology, the predicted spend for 2015/16 would have been equivalent to 1.97 percent of GDP, according to calculations by the RUSI.²⁴ While the Defence Committee accepted that the revised methodology conformed to NATO guidelines, it suggested that the Government had “shifted the goalposts” in comparison with previous years.²⁵ It also expressed concerns that the revision included one-off items of expenditure that could not be counted towards meeting the 2 percent target in future years.²⁶

Because the NATO threshold for defence spending is expressed as a proportion of GDP, it has been argued that fluctuations in GDP create uncertainties about the level of future defence spending. The Defence Committee pointed out in April 2016 (before the EU referendum) that if GDP were to rise, the Government's planned 0.5 percent annual real terms increase in the defence budget might not be sufficient to keep pace with meeting the 2 percent NATO target, and additional money would have to be found:

Whilst the Government has committed to an increase in defence expenditure of 0.5 percent annually over the next five years, UK GDP is projected to increase by about 2.4 percent annually over the same period. Using the new calculation criteria, this implies that UK defence expenditure will fall from 2.08 percent of GDP in 2015/16 to 1.85 percent of GDP in 2020/21. To fulfil the 2 percent commitment during this timeframe, further financial contributions will therefore be required: £2.7 billion in 2019/20 and £3.5 billion in 2020/21. The Government has indicated that this deficit will be remedied by an additional inclusion of intelligence funding, given that a significant proportion of annual expenditure from the Single Intelligence Account (SIA), which funds the UK intelligence agencies, is in support of military activities. Further sums from the new £1.5 billion Joint Security Fund should secure the 2 percent minimum until 2020, assuming that such an accounting strategy falls within the NATO guidelines.²⁷

Conversely, after the UK's referendum on EU membership in June 2016, the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy argued that if GDP were to fall, or to grow less quickly than previously predicted, “a stagnant or contracting UK economy might mean that the defence

²² House of Commons Library, [Social Indicators](#), 9 December 2016, p 15.

²³ House of Commons Defence Committee, [Shifting the Goalposts? Defence Expenditure and the 2 Percent Pledge](#), 12 April 2016, HC 494 of session 2015–16, p 5.

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*, p 3.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p 14.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p 6.

budget would be reduced in real terms”, which would “impact on the ambition and capabilities” set out in the SDSR 2015.²⁸ The Joint Committee stated its concern that “the changed economic climate following the UK’s vote to leave the EU will see the defence budget reduced in real terms, reversing the November 2015 decision to make additional funding available for defence”.²⁹

It has also been suggested that the fall in the value of the pound seen following the EU referendum could have an impact on defence equipment spending. Writing in August 2016, Trevor Taylor, from the think tank RUSI, observed that since the referendum result, the pound had fallen against the dollar by around 15 percent.³⁰ He calculated that “if this decline is sustained, the cost of Britain’s defence imports could increase by around £700 million per annum from 2018/19—around 2 percent of the total defence budget”. (At the time of the article’s publication, the pound was worth approximately \$1.30.³¹ It has subsequently fallen further, to approximately \$1.27, which would imply a larger potential shortfall.³²) He argued that this would equate to “a much larger cut” than 2 percent in the purchasing power of the equipment and support budgets, which would pose “a substantial challenge for defence planners and programmers”.

Noting the effect of a weaker pound on imports of raw materials, Baroness Buscombe (Conservative), a member of the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, questioned whether there was “sufficient flexibility in the defence budget to safeguard the necessary investment in our defence hardware for the coming years”.³³ Douglas Chapman (Scottish National Party MP for Dunfermline and West Fife), a member of the Defence Committee, asked the MOD in a written question what assessment it had made of the potential cost to the public purse of current and planned procurement contracts of a fall in the value of sterling.³⁴ In response, Harriett Baldwin, Minister for Defence Procurement, stated:

The Ministry of Defence addresses the impact of short term variations in foreign exchange rates as part of the routine financial management of the Defence programme. This includes the forward purchase of foreign currency at agreed prices using services provided by the Bank of England and HM Treasury. This approach provides the Department with a degree of price stability that is currently mitigating the effect of the sterling rate on the Department’s costs.³⁵

According to Trevor Taylor, the “short-term” period during which the Government has hedged its currency position is understood to be two years.³⁶

Questions have also been raised as to whether a defence expenditure of 2 percent of GDP is sufficient to maintain the UK’s full-spectrum defence capabilities. The Defence Committee

²⁸ Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), 10 July 2016, HL Paper 18 of session 2016–17, p 24.

²⁹ *ibid*, p 25.

³⁰ Trevor Taylor, ‘[The Ministry of Defence’s Post-Brexit Spending Power: Assumptions, Numbers, Calculations and Implications](#)’, RUSI, 12 August 2016.

³¹ *ibid*.

³² Bank of England, [Statistical Interactive Database—Daily Spot Exchange Rate against Sterling](#), accessed 13 December 2016.

³³ [HL Hansard, 8 December 2016, col 890](#).

³⁴ House of Commons, ‘[Written Question: Ministry of Defence: Procurement](#)’, 17 October 2016, 48369.

³⁵ *ibid*.

³⁶ Trevor Taylor, ‘[The Ministry of Defence’s Post-Brexit Spending Power: Assumptions, Numbers, Calculations and Implications](#)’, RUSI, 12 August 2016.

concluded in April 2016 that NATO's 2 percent minimum figure had "value as a political statement in reinforcing the UK's commitment to defence both domestically and internationally", but that "achieving a pre-determined threshold for defence expenditure does not automatically deliver the ability to protect ourselves or our allies against the varied threats to NATO and UK defence and security".³⁷

In the Defence Committee's view, the world today is "at its most dangerous and unstable since the end of the Cold War", and "despite the UK's high ranking, relative to other NATO members, UK defence expenditure has fallen far too low in our national priorities". It concluded that "meeting the minimum—at a lower proportion of GDP than ever before—does not mean that defence is adequately resourced, following decades of successive cuts in expenditure".³⁸ The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, writing in July 2016, shared this conclusion.³⁹ The Defence Committee called for recognition from the Government that the figure of 2 percent was "a minimum—not a target" and urged that the Government should be "prepared to increase defence expenditure further, in order to reflect the increasing threats faced by both the UK and our allies".⁴⁰

In a letter to the *Times* in September 2016, Julian Lewis (Conservative MP for New Forest East), chairman of the Defence Committee, contrasted current defence spending with the situation in the 1980s, "the last time this country faced a threatening Russia as well as a major terrorist campaign", when the UK "invested between 4.3 percent and 5.1 percent of GDP on defence".⁴¹ He suggested that it was "a measure of just how low our expectations have fallen that we are supposed to celebrate just managing to meet the NATO minimum of 2 percent". Dr Lewis has called for a figure "more like 3 percent".⁴² Lord Dannatt (Crossbench), a former Chief of the General Staff, has suggested that "to modestly increase" defence spending from 2 to 2.5 percent of GDP would show "good leadership by the UK" at a time when the US is calling for Europe to "take a greater share of responsibility for its own defence".⁴³ He believed that "with the small size of the Armed Forces at the moment", the UK "runs the risk of being diminished further by not being able to do really effectively one of the things we've been very good at, which is using our military capability for wider purposes".

Responding to the Defence Committee's report in June 2016, the Government restated its commitment to defence spending, pointing out that the UK had the second largest defence budget in NATO, the largest in the European Union, and the fifth largest in the world, and was one of the only countries to meet the NATO 2 percent guideline.⁴⁴ The Government argued that with defence spending set to increase by £5 billion by 2020/21, it was giving "a clear demonstration that defence remains a national priority", despite it being "a time of pressure on public spending".⁴⁵ The commitment to spend 2 percent of GDP on defence "came after a thorough examination of the threats and risks", after which the Government had "decided on

³⁷ House of Commons Defence Committee, [Shifting the Goalposts? Defence Expenditure and the 2 Percent Pledge](#), 12 April 2016, HC 494 of session 2015–16, p 23.

³⁸ *ibid*, p 7.

³⁹ Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), 10 July 2016, HL Paper 18 of session 2016–17, p 24.

⁴⁰ House of Commons Defence Committee, [Shifting the Goalposts? Defence Expenditure and the 2 Percent Pledge](#), 12 April 2016, HC 494 of session 2015–16, p 27.

⁴¹ *Times*, 'Letters to the Editor', 21 September 2016.

⁴² BBC News, '[Ministry of Defence "Facing Extra £700m Costs Post Brexit"](#)', 10 August 2016.

⁴³ Chris Bond, '[Lord Dannatt—Why We Need a Bigger Army](#)', *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 13 December 2016.

⁴⁴ House of Commons Defence Committee, [Shifting the Goalposts? Defence Expenditure and the 2 Percent Pledge: Government Response](#), 30 June 2016, HC 465 of session 2016–17, p 13.

⁴⁵ *ibid*, p 14.

an appropriate level of funding”. It said this would be reviewed after five years alongside a new risk assessment and a new National Security Strategy/Strategic Defence and Security Review.

1.3 Personnel

With regard to personnel, the SDSR 2015 made headline commitments to slightly increase the overall size of the regular Armed Forces, by maintaining an Army of 82,000 and increasing the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force (RAF) by 400 and 300 respectively.⁴⁶ Plans to increase the Reserves to 35,000 would continue under the SDSR 2015.⁴⁷ It was announced that the number of civilians employed by the MOD would be reduced by almost 30 percent, to 41,000, by the end of this Parliament.⁴⁸

The previous SDSR in 2010 had planned on the basis of an Army of 95,000 by 2015 and 94,000 by 2020.⁴⁹ In July 2012, Philip Hammond, the then Secretary of State for Defence, announced a major restructuring of the Army, known as ‘Army 2020’, based on a future Army strength of 82,000 regular forces and 30,000 Reserves, to be achieved by 2020.⁵⁰ The Conservative Party manifesto for the 2015 general election contained a commitment to “maintain the size of the regular armed services and not reduce the Army to below 82,000”.⁵¹

Table I overleaf shows the size of the:

- military full-time trained strength of the three armed services;
- the volunteer Reserves trained strength; and the
- the civilian workforce

as at:

- 1 October (the figures used in a factsheet which accompanied the publication of the SDSR 2015);
- the most recent figures (1 November 2016 for the regular forces and the Reserves; 1 October 2016 for the civilian workforce); and
- the targets to be achieved by 2020, which will implement the commitments made in the SDSR 2015.

The table shows that in most areas the Armed Forces are below the number of full-time and reserve military personnel specified in the SDSR 2015. The way that the trained strength of the Army and Army Reserves is calculated changed from 1 October 2016. Prior to that date, ‘trained strength’ comprised personnel who had completed both Phase 1 and 2 training.⁵² From

⁴⁶ Ministry of Defence, [SDSR 2015 Defence Factsheets](#), November 2015, p 7.

⁴⁷ HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), November 2015, Cm 9161, p 33.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ See HM Government, [Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review](#), October 2010, Cm 7948, p 32.

⁵⁰ House of Commons Library, [Army 2020](#), 26 July 2012.

⁵¹ Conservatives, [The Conservative Party Manifesto 2015](#), April 2015, p 77.

⁵² Ministry of Defence, [UK Armed Forces Monthly Service Personnel Statistics 1 November 2016](#), 8 December 2016, p 2. Phase 1 training is basic service training; Phase 2 training is trade training (*ibid.*, p 3).

1 October 2016, 'trained strength' also includes those in the Army/Army Reserves who have completed Phase 1 training only, although the definitions for the Naval Service and the RAF are unchanged. By the new measure, the Army is approximately 2 percent over the target of 82,000 full-time personnel, but still around 12 percent below the target for Reserves. The Government stated in February 2016 that it expected to meet the target for Army Reservist strength by April 2019.⁵³

Table I: Size of Regular Armed Forces, Reserve Forces and Civilian Workforce

Service		1 Oct 2015	Latest Figure ^(a)	2020 Target	Latest Figure as % of 2020 Target
Military Full-Time Trained Strength	Royal Navy/Royal Marines	29,710	29,450	30,450	96.7
	Army ^(b)				
	<i>pre Oct 2016 measure</i>	80,430	79,000	82,000	96.3
	<i>post Oct 2016 measure</i>	-	83,620	82,000	102.0
	Royal Air Force	31,250	30,880	31,750	97.3
Total full time trained strength ^(b)	<i>pre Oct 2016 measure</i>	141,390	139,320	144,200	96.6
	<i>post Oct 2016 measure</i>	-	143,950	144,200	99.8
Volunteer Reserves Trained Strength	Maritime Reserve	2,190	2,400	3,100	77.4
	Army Reserve ^(c)	22,040	26,270	30,100	87.3
	RAF Reserves	1,740	1,990	1,860	107.0
	Total Reserves ^(c)	25,970	30,682	35,060	87.5
Civilian		56,860	56,420	41,000	137.6

Notes:

All figures rounded to the nearest ten.

- The latest figures for military full-time trained strength and volunteer reserves trained strength are as of 1 November 2016. The latest figures for the civilian workforce are as of 1 October 2016.
- Trained Strength comprises military personnel who have completed Phase 1 and 2 training for Royal Navy/Royal Marines, the Army (prior to 1 October 2016) and the Royal Air Force. Following the change in definition of trained strength for the Army, from 1 October 2016, trained strength for the Army comprises of personnel who have completed Phase 1 training. Figures for November 2016 are provided using both measures.
- Trained Strength comprises military personnel who have completed Phase 1 and 2 training for Maritime Reserve, the Army Reserve (prior to 1 October 2016) and the Royal Air Force Reserves. Following the change in definition of trained strength from 1 October 2016 trained strength for the Army Reserve comprises of personnel who have completed Phase 1 training. Therefore the figures for October 2015 and the latest figures are not calculated on the same basis.

Source: Ministry of Defence, [SDSR 2015 Defence Key Facts](#), 24 November 2015, p 8; Ministry of Defence, [UK Armed Forces Monthly Service Personnel Statistics: November 2016](#), 8 December 2016, Table 3a and Table 6a; Ministry of Defence, [Quarterly Civilian Personnel Report \(QCPR\) 1 October 2016](#), 10 November 2016, p 1.

⁵³ House of Commons, ['Written Question: Army: Reserve Forces'](#), 1 February 2016, 24485.

Commenting on the apparent increase in the size of the Army that resulted from the change in the definition of “trained personnel”, Lord Touhig (Labour) asked the Government in November 2016 whether it had any plans to review the SDSR 2015 pledge to maintain the size of the Army at 82,000 personnel, and how they planned to get to grips with recruitment to the Navy and RAF.⁵⁴ Earl Howe, Minister of State for Defence, said that the Government had no plans to reopen the SDSR, as it had set out “a funded plan” to achieve the “clear objectives” of the National Security Strategy, based on a “clear-eyed assessment of the risks and threats we face”.⁵⁵ He said that the change in definition of trained strength was a reversion to previous methods, which included Phase I trained personnel as they had the “ability to engage in homeland resilience and in basic tasks that we place upon them in the UK”. Earl Howe acknowledged that there was “a way to go” on Navy and RAF recruitment, but maintained that the figures were “heading in the right direction”. As of December 2015, the Government expected to achieve the required numbers of personnel for the Royal Navy by 2022 and for the Royal Air Force by 2018.⁵⁶ The Government stated in December 2016 that the plan to expand the Reserve Forces to 35,000 by 2019 was “on track”.⁵⁷

Doubts have been expressed as to whether the level of manpower set out in the SDSR 2015 will provide sufficient capability. Witnesses giving evidence to the Defence Committee were “not [...] convinced that keeping to the status quo” in terms of proposed force size and training “would ensure that the full potential of new equipment could be maximised”.⁵⁸ The Defence Committee argued it was “imperative that training and personnel numbers do not suffer to the point where they render us in possession of a so-called Hollow Force: ‘exquisite’ equipment that cannot be maximised to its full potential”.⁵⁹

Similarly, the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy argued that the proposed force structure included “a low level of ‘spare capacity’ to provide flexibility and resilience in unexpected emergencies”, and that “it has proved difficult in practice to maintain a Reserve force of sufficient numbers trained to required levels”.⁶⁰ The Joint Committee concluded that despite the targets set out in the SDSR 2015, the “manpower fielded by the UK Armed Forces is inadequate bearing in mind the range, complexity and potential concurrency of tasks expected of them”.⁶¹ The Joint Committee also took the view that “the current establishment will not facilitate the effective use of the state-of-the-art equipment to be purchased as a result of the NSS and the SDSR 2015”.

With regard to force size, the Government stated that “initial findings” of the Army’s modernisation agenda suggested that “an integrated Army of 112,000 personnel [Regular forces plus Reserves] is sufficient to deliver the Army’s contribution to Joint Force 2025”.⁶² The size of the Royal Navy set out in the SDSR 2015 represented an uplift of 1,600 compared to the SDSR 2010; the Government argued that this uplift and “an ongoing process of internal

⁵⁴ [HL Hansard, 21 November 2016, col 1721](#).

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ House of Commons, ‘[Written Question: Armed Forces](#)’, 3 December 2015, 17875.

⁵⁷ HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015—First Annual Report 2016](#), 7 December 2016, p 12.

⁵⁸ House of Commons Defence Committee, [Shifting the Goalposts? Defence Expenditure and the 2 Percent Pledge](#), 12 April 2016, HC 494 of session 2015–16, p 29.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p 31.

⁶⁰ Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), 10 July 2016, HL Paper 18 of session 2016–17, p 22.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p 23.

⁶² House of Commons Defence Committee, [Shifting the Goalposts? Defence Expenditure and the 2 Percent Pledge: Government Response](#), 30 June 2016, HC 465 of session 2016–17, p 15.

reprioritisation and efficiency” would give the Navy “sufficient manpower to crew both aircraft carriers and Successor submarines”. The Government said that the increase of RAF Regular trained strength to 31,750 would go “some way to providing the manpower required to meet the new and extended capabilities agreed in the SDSR 2015”, but the RAF would need to “identify further reductions and rebalancing” to achieve commitments.⁶³ Overall, the Government argued that:

The Armed Forces are structured and trained to deliver their specified defence missions. The growth of the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force in the SDSR 2015 reflects new assumptions about the range, complexity and potential concurrency of tasks within the future operating environment. As new equipment is brought into service, a whole force approach to Defence that looks to deliver the skills we need across Regular, Reserve and civilian personnel and contractors will ensure we continue to evolve to meet our changing outputs. In developing new capabilities we will exploit the opportunities provided by new technologies and developments in integration to reduce our reliance on scarce specialist skills.⁶⁴

With regard to the civilian headcount, the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy pointed out that the 30 percent reduction set out in the SDSR 2015 came on top of a 30 percent cut in MOD civilian personnel already made since 2010.⁶⁵ The Joint Committee found it “questionable whether this scale of efficiencies can be made without reducing the MOD’s capacity to formulate and delivery policy”, and concluded there was a “risk” that the planned reduction “could undermine the Ministry’s ability to deliver the NSS and the SDSR 2015”.

The Government has maintained that the reduction will be achieved by “making defence significantly more efficient overall”.⁶⁶ It said that a Future Defence Civilian Programme had been established to identify and deliver the reductions, and its first priority was “to ensure that military capability and other key defence outputs are not adversely impacted”. The MOD is also developing a Civilian Workforce Strategy for 2020 and beyond, which the Government said in December 2016 was due to be published “shortly”.⁶⁷ An initial study to scope a range of MOD functions and activities for greater efficiency and better delivery models is due to conclude in early 2017.⁶⁸

⁶³ House of Commons Defence Committee, [Shifting the Goalposts? Defence Expenditure and the 2 Percent Pledge: Government Response](#), 30 June 2016, HC 465 of session 2016–17, p 16.

⁶⁴ Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: Government Response](#), 27 October 2016, HL Paper 56 of session 2016–17, p 5.

⁶⁵ Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), 10 July 2016, HL Paper 18 of session 2016–17, p 23.

⁶⁶ House of Lords, [Written Question: Ministry of Defence: Staff](#), 17 November 2016, HL3161.

⁶⁷ HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015—First Annual Report 2016](#), 7 December 2016, p 12.

⁶⁸ House of Lords, [Written Question: Ministry of Defence: Staff](#), 17 November 2016, HL3161.

I.4 Equipment

The SDSR 2015 made a number of commitments relating to equipment for the Armed Forces, including the following:

Air Command

- An additional two Typhoon squadrons, increasing the number of squadrons to seven. This will be delivered through enhanced productivity by extending the life of some earlier Typhoon aircraft and maintaining a larger number of pilots. The [SDSR 2015] also announced investment in Typhoon's capabilities, including ground attack, a new radar and a 10-year life extension.
- An increase in the number of F35 Lightning aircraft available for deployment from the new Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers in the early 2020s, from 15 to 24.
- Nine new Boeing P-8 Poseidon aircraft will be purchased to fill a capability gap left by the decommissioning of Nimrod MRA4 maritime patrol aircraft in the 2010 [SDSR].
- More than 20 new Protector armed remotely piloted aircraft will be procured—more than double the number of the Reaper aircraft that they replace.
- The Royal Air Force's Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance platforms—Rivet Joint, Sentinel, Shadow and E-3D Sentry—will be equipped with enhanced capabilities, additional crews and be extended in service from 2018 to beyond 2020.

Joint Forces Command

- The Special Forces equipment budget will receive an additional £2 billion.
- Sustained investment in satellite communications and new cyber and space capabilities.

Land Command (Army)

- Two new Strike brigades of up to 5,000 personnel will be established, based on the Ajax (previously Scout) armoured vehicle.
- The Apache attack and Chinook support helicopters will be upgraded.
- Warrior armoured fighting vehicles will be upgraded, and the life of the Challenger 2 tanks extended.

Navy Command

- The [SDSR 2015] confirms that two new Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers will enter service from 2018. One of these will be enhanced to support an amphibious capability.
- Three new logistics ships will be procured to support the fleet, in addition to two further Offshore Patrol Vessels.

- The [SDSR 2015] also announced the Department [MOD] would build eight of the new Type 26 Global Combat Ships (which are replacing the current Type 23 frigates), rather than the 13 originally planned, and instead develop and build a new class of lighter general purpose frigate [...]

Strategic Programmes

- The Government reiterated its commitment to the UK's Continuous At Sea Nuclear Deterrent. The four current Vanguard submarines [often colloquially referred to as 'Trident'] will be replaced under the Successor programme [...].⁶⁹

The Government reported on progress on equipment acquisition and development as of December 2016 in its first annual report on the SDSR 2015:

- In April 2016, 77 Brigade reached its initial operating capability [...]. Also in April 2016 the MOD confirmed that it would acquire more than 20 Protector Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) through a contract with the United States;
- in July 2016 we signed the contract to purchase nine P8 Maritime Patrol Aircraft and an agreement with the US government to buy 50 new Apache attack helicopters, with delivery expected to start in 2019 and 2020 respectively [...]
- in August 2016, we announced the purchase of a third ultra-lightweight Zephyr UAV, in addition to the two announced in February [...]
- the Army is working to deliver a modernised war-fighting division, including two new Strike Brigades, supported by delivery of the new Ajax armoured vehicles;
- in December 2016, the third and last of the RAF's new Rivet Joint aircraft is scheduled to be delivered, extending our airborne intelligence gathering capability; and
- in spring 2017, the first of our new aircraft carriers, HMS Queen Elizabeth, will start sea trials; in summer 2017, steel-cutting will begin for the first of the Royal Navy's next generation Type 26 frigates; and the MOD will soon sign a contract for two additional Offshore Patrol Vehicles, to be delivered in 2019.⁷⁰

The Government also reported that following a vote in the House of Commons in July 2016 in favour of maintaining the continuous at sea nuclear deterrence, the MOD had signed the delivery phase one contract in September 2016, initiating the construction of HMS Dreadnought, the first 'Successor' submarine.⁷¹

⁶⁹ National Audit Office, [Impact of the Strategic Defence and Security Review on the Equipment Plan](#), 14 June 2016, HC 319 of session 2016–17, pp 13–14. For more detailed analysis of the background relating to the Maritime Patrol Aircraft, combat aircraft and the Navy's surface fleet, see section 5.11 of House of Commons Library, [The 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review](#), 22 January 2016.

⁷⁰ HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015—First Annual Report 2016](#), 7 December 2016, p 11.

⁷¹ *ibid*, p 13. For further background information about replacing the nuclear deterrent, see House of Commons Library, [Replacing the UK's 'Trident' Nuclear Deterrent](#), 11 July 2016.

The SDSR 2015 committed the MOD to increase spending on its Defence Equipment Plan by £12 billion. Analysing the impact of this, the National Audit Office (NAO) noted that the total plan for 2015–2025 was £166 billion, made up of a core programme of £153 billion, ‘headroom’ of £9 billion and a contingency of £4 billion.⁷² The total plan for 2016–2026 after the SDSR 2015 commitments are included is £178 billion, with a contingency of £5 billion; thus the value of the core programme has increased by £20 billion. The MOD intended to fund the new commitments in the SDSR 2015 with additional funding of £6.4 billion from the Joint Security Fund, £10.8 billion formerly allocated to the core programme which was held as ‘headroom’ in previous plans, and with the balance coming from reinvesting efficiency savings.⁷³

The NAO noted that the updated plan would require the MOD to achieve an additional £8.7 billion of savings, £5.8 billion from within the core equipment programme and £2.8 billion reallocated to equipment from a wider savings programme across the department.⁷⁴ In the NAO’s assessment, this represented “perhaps the biggest challenge to the affordability of the [Defence Equipment] Plan since its inception”.⁷⁵ It also expressed the view that the MOD’s plan to incorporate £10.8 billion of existing ‘headroom’ into the core programme would “considerably reduce the resources available within the Plan to fund new requirements in the future”.⁷⁶

The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy has raised concerns about the possibility of capability gaps in Joint Force 2025 because of the lead time that will be required to develop the new capabilities.⁷⁷ It doubted, for example, that the new maritime task group centred on two new aircraft carriers and F-35 Lightning aircraft would be fully operational and effective by 2025. The Joint Committee therefore suggested it was “questionable” whether Joint Force 2025 would meet the national security challenges faced by the UK, and concluded that the UK could “remain exposed in the short term”.⁷⁸

One particular area where concerns about potential capability gaps have recently been highlighted is in relation to the Royal Navy’s surface fleet.⁷⁹ The SDSR 2015 changed previous plans to replace the Royal Navy’s existing 13 Type 23 frigates with Type 26 frigates on a one-for-one basis.⁸⁰ Instead, there would be eight new Type 26 frigates and initially five of a new class of General Purpose Frigates (GPF, unofficially referred to as Type 31). In a report published in November 2016, the Defence Committee expressed its “conviction” that the current number of frigates and destroyers (19 in total) and personnel “inadequately reflects the potential threats and vulnerabilities facing the UK and its interests overseas”.⁸¹ It suggested that the SDSR 2015’s commitment to build “at least” five General Purpose Frigates “implicitly

⁷² National Audit Office, [Impact of the Strategic Defence and Security Review on the Equipment Plan](#), 14 June 2016, HC 319 of session 2016–17, p 6.

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p 7.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p 9.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p 7.

⁷⁷ Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), 10 July 2016, HL Paper 18 of session 2016–17, p 21.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p 22.

⁷⁹ This issue is explored at greater length in House of Commons Library, [The Royal Navy’s New Frigates and the National Shipbuilding Strategy: December 2016 Update](#), 14 December 2016.

⁸⁰ HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), November 2015, Cm 9161, p 31.

⁸¹ House of Commons Defence Committee, [Restoring the Fleet: Naval Procurement and the National Shipbuilding Strategy](#), 21 November 2016, HC 221 of session 2016–17, p 7.

acknowledged the need to increase this woefully inadequate total” from the current “dangerous and [...] historic low”.⁸²

Given that the assessment and demonstration phases of the Type 26 programme have already been extended by a total of more than two years, and that the programme “appears to be under severe financial pressure”, the Defence Committee highlighted a risk that the Type 26 frigates would not be ready in time to replace the retiring Type 23 class:

The first Type 23 will come out of service in 2023 and the rest of the class will follow on an annual basis. This means that one new Type 26 will have to enter service every year from 2023 onwards, if even the current total of 19 frigates and destroyers is to be maintained. Delivering the Type 26 class (and subsequently the GPFF) to match that timetable will be challenging. Extending the life of some of the Type 23s to accommodate the construction schedule of the Type 26 is not a cost-effective option and would risk diverting the funds available to the Royal Navy away from the Type 26 programme (or other programmes, such as the GPFF and the Carrier programme). The alternative—to decommission Type 23s before they are replaced—would represent a dangerous downgrading of the capabilities of the Royal Navy. Furthermore, it would signify a failure of the Government to honour its promise to maintain a surface fleet of even 19 frigates and destroyers—a figure which, we believe, is already woefully low.⁸³

Having heard concerns from witnesses about a potential downgrading of capabilities of the General Purpose Frigate—currently in its concept phase—the Defence Committee also warned that it must “provide the Royal Navy with the capabilities it requires” and not become “a less capable ship which is there merely to meet the Government’s commitment to 19 frigates and destroyers, and possibly to be suitable for export”.⁸⁴

The Government undertook in the SDSR 2015 to publish a National Shipbuilding Strategy in 2016 to “lay the foundations for a modern and efficient sector capable of meeting the country’s future defence and security needs”, with the acquisition of the Type 26s a central part of the strategy.⁸⁵ In November 2016, Sir John Parker published an independent report commissioned by the Government to inform the National Shipbuilding Strategy.⁸⁶ Sir John concluded that:

The current situation is that fewer (more expensive) ships than planned are ordered too late. Old ships are retained in service well beyond their sell by date with all the attendant high costs of so doing. This ‘vicious cycle’ is depleting the RN [Royal Navy] fleet and unnecessarily costing the taxpayer. It needs to be broken [...]⁸⁷

⁸² House of Commons Defence Committee, [Restoring the Fleet: Naval Procurement and the National Shipbuilding Strategy](#), 21 November 2016, HC 221 of session 2016–17, p 29.

⁸³ *ibid*, p 19.

⁸⁴ *ibid*, pp 21–3 and 29.

⁸⁵ HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), November 2015, Cm 9161, p 76.

⁸⁶ Sir John Parker, [An Independent Report to Inform the UK National Shipbuilding Strategy](#), November 2016.

⁸⁷ Sir John Parker, [Letter to the Secretary of State for Defence and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury](#), 3 November 2016.

He made 34 recommendations for a “sea change” in the way the Government procures ships for the Royal Navy. His core conclusions were that the Government and industry needed to:

- Govern the design and specification of the Royal Navy (RN) ships to a target cost within an assured capital budget and inject pace to contract on time;
- design ships suitable for both Royal Navy and export;
- build via a regional industrial strategy to achieve competitive cost and reduced build cycle time;
- maintain RN fleet numbers over the next decade via urgent and early build of Type 31e (General Purpose Frigate);
- use Type 31e as the pathfinder project to implement the recommendations of the review.⁸⁸

The Government said it would publish a full response and implementation plan in spring 2017 in the National Shipbuilding Strategy.⁸⁹

2. International Situation

2.1 Overview: Impact on Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015

Since the Government set out its vision for the Armed Forces’ future capabilities in the SDSR 2015, there have been a number of events which could be argued to herald a change to the strategic context for defence, such as the vote in the referendum in June 2016 in favour of the UK leaving the EU; the election in November 2016 of Donald Trump as the next President of the United States; and increasing signs of Russia asserting itself militarily. The Government has taken the position that notwithstanding such important events, the principal threats to the UK’s interests have not changed significantly, and that the defence commitments outlined in the SDSR 2015 continue to allow the UK to face up to the threats and challenges posed by a changing world. Presenting the first annual update on the National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015 to Parliament in December 2016, Amber Rudd, the Home Secretary, stated:

[...] much has changed since the National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review was published in November of last year—not least the United Kingdom’s historic decision to leave the European Union. But the principal threats to our national security remain the same. We are witnessing the resurgence of state-based threats—as displayed most obviously by Russia’s actions in Syria and Ukraine; terrorism and extremism threaten our security; cyber attacks are on the increase from both state and non-state actors, and we face renewed challenges to the rules-based international order that provides the bedrock of our security. Some of the great global challenges of our time, such as the phenomenon of mass migration, have become more pronounced in the last 12 months.

⁸⁸ Sir John Parker, [Letter to the Secretary of State for Defence and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury](#), 3 November 2016.

⁸⁹ HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015—First Annual Report 2016](#), 7 December 2016, p 29.

We should be confident of the United Kingdom's ability to rise to these challenges, drawing on our great strengths as a nation, and the relevance and strength of our National Security Strategy.

The decision to leave the EU carries significant implications for the UK in many areas of political and economic engagement. In the national security context, however, the threats and challenges to UK national security have not fundamentally changed as a result of the decision to leave. The UK remains fully and strongly committed to Europe's defence and security and we continue to play an active role in security and defence cooperation across Europe. As we leave the European Union, we will be more prominent than ever: an outward-facing, global partner at the heart of international efforts to security peace and prosperity for all our people.⁹⁰

Earl Howe, Minister of State for Defence, took a similar line in November 2016, commenting more specifically on the defence capability implications of leaving the EU and other recent geopolitical events:

The question is whether the Joint Force 2025 concept that we set out in the SDSR is the right choice for the current strategic context. We are clear that it is. It is a concept that is about making more effective use of our Armed Forces because it both invests in new capabilities and makes better use of the people we have. Of course, with more people and more equipment we could do more, but we are satisfied that the Armed Forces will be the right size to meet our defence and security requirements.

[...] We are not complacent about Russian capabilities, the political change in the United States or Brexit. We remain, however, fully committed to NATO and our European partners, with whom we will deter threats across a wide spectrum in order to protect our people.⁹¹

Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach, Chief of the Defence Staff, said in the Annual Chief of the Defence Staff lecture in December 2016 that the National Security Strategy had been re-examined "as a result of the turbulence this year" and there were no plans to change it as it was "really pretty good".⁹² Others, however, have proposed that the UK's strategic priorities and resources should be reviewed again in light of the changing international situation. For instance, Lord Boyce (Crossbench), a former Chief of the Defence Staff, has suggested that leaving the EU would "surely demand that we be prepared to operate more autonomously" and that the capabilities outlined in the SDSR 2015 therefore needed to be re-examined.⁹³ Similarly, Lord Craig of Radley (Crossbench), another former Chief of the Defence Staff, has argued that further expansion in front-line personnel numbers, in ships and in aircraft was "becoming more rather than less necessary as we move to the post-Brexit scenario".⁹⁴ Writing shortly after the

⁹⁰ House of Commons, '[Written Statement: Annual Report on the National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review](#)', 7 December 2016, HCWS329. The first paragraph quoted here repeats wording used by the Prime Minister, Theresa May, in the foreword to the [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015—First Annual Report 2016](#), 7 December 2016.

⁹¹ [HL Hansard, 21 November 2016, col 1722](#).

⁹² Royal United Services Institute, '[Annual Chief of the Defence Staff Lecture 2016](#)' (video), 14 December 2016.

⁹³ [HL Hansard, 21 November 2016, col 1721](#).

⁹⁴ [HL Hansard, 8 December 2016, col 877](#).

referendum result, Professor Malcolm Chalmers of RUSI proposed that the Government should:

[...] use a new Strategic Defence and Security Review as an opportunity to recast its defence and security strategies in response to the new circumstances which an exit [from the EU] will create. It should make a point of working with key European partners, especially France and Germany, in doing so. It is unrealistic to expect that the defence budget can be entirely exempted from the expenditure cuts that will probably be needed in a post-exit spending review. With the limited resources that are available, the Government should make clear that its strategic priorities will be focused on areas of common interest with the UK's European allies, rather than on more global roles.⁹⁵

The following sections outline some of the possible implications of the EU referendum, the election of Donald Trump as US President, and tensions with Russia in the context of military capabilities.

2.2 Leaving the European Union

Under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), EU member states have developed institutional structures for the management of military operations, but they contribute military assets to operations on a case-by-case basis, rather than the EU having its own military assets.⁹⁶ It has been the UK's longstanding position that "the EU should act militarily only where NATO cannot or chooses not to act, or where it can add particular value".⁹⁷ The UK has therefore sought to ensure that EU defence capabilities and structures complement rather than duplicate those of NATO.

Over the last ten years, the UK has contributed to eleven military CSDP missions.⁹⁸ As of June 2016, the UK had around 120 service personnel deployed on five EU missions, principally on Operation Sophia, the EU's naval operation countering migrant smugglers in the central Mediterranean.⁹⁹ The UK has also made a significant contribution to Operation Atalanta, the EU counter-piracy operation off the coast of Somalia, providing the Operation Commander, the Operation Headquarters Facilities (OHQ) at Northwood, and on average 70 members of OHQ staff (approximately 60 percent of the total OHQ).¹⁰⁰ It is one of only five EU nations capable of providing a national military headquarters suitable as a headquarters for EU military operations.¹⁰¹ The UK has also participated in initiatives within the CSDP intended to improve the military assets and capabilities of EU member states, such as the European Defence Agency (EDA) and EU Battlegroups.¹⁰²

⁹⁵ Malcom Chalmers, ['Brexit Decision: The UK Needs to Become the EU's New Best Friend'](#), Royal United Services Institute, 24 June 2016.

⁹⁶ See House of Lords Library, [Leaving the European Union: Foreign and Security Policy Cooperation](#), 13 October 2016 for more detailed background on the UK's participation in CSDP and prospects for continued cooperation post-Brexit.

⁹⁷ HM Government, [Review of the Balance of Competences between the United Kingdom and the European Union: Foreign Policy](#), 22 July 2013, p 65.

⁹⁸ House of Commons Library, [Brexit: Impact Across Policy Areas](#), 26 August 2016, p 169.

⁹⁹ House of Commons, ['Written Question: Armed Forces: Deployment'](#), 6 June 2016, 38800.

¹⁰⁰ HM Government, [The UK's Cooperation with the EU on Justice and Home Affairs, and on Foreign Policy and Security Issues](#), 9 May 2016, p 10.

¹⁰¹ Sophia Besch, [EU Defence, Brexit and Trump](#), Centre for European Reform, 14 December 2016, p 3. The others are France, Germany, Greece and Italy.

¹⁰² Not all members of the EU are members of the European Defence Agency—Denmark has chosen not to participate (European Defence Agency, ['Member States'](#), accessed 20 December 2016). The EU has two

Given that the EU's collective military capability depends on contributions from member states, it has been argued that the main defence impact of leaving the EU would be on the capability of the EU, rather than that of the UK. The House of Commons Library has suggested that:

In terms of military power and projection, therefore, the UK's withdrawal is more likely to place the EU at a disadvantage, with fewer assets and capabilities at its disposal. This is particularly true of certain strategic assets such as tactical airlift and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets. From the UK's standpoint, its ability to project military power would be largely unaffected, and any military shortfalls could be compensated for through bilateral arrangements with countries such as France and Germany.¹⁰³

The UK has a history of bilateral defence cooperation with France. The Lancaster House Treaties signed in 2010 set up close cooperation on defence issues between the two countries, both at the operational and industrial levels, with a combined joint expeditionary force and several major industrial projects.¹⁰⁴ The SDSR 2015 described the bilateral defence and security relationship as “extremely close”, and promised it would be further strengthened.¹⁰⁵ In March 2016, David Cameron, the then Prime Minister, and François Hollande, the French President, “recommitted to further strengthening the rich bilateral defence relationship”, based on the three pillars of cooperation on operational matters, capability projects and nuclear technology.¹⁰⁶ Harriett Baldwin, Minister for Defence Procurement, and her French counterpart Laurent Collet-Billon, Délégué Général pour l'Armement, signed agreements in mid-December 2016 on the next phase of the UK-France Unmanned Combat Air System (UCAS) Demonstrator Programme, further hydrodynamics testing cooperation and a support contract for Ajax, Warrior and French Jaguar weaponry.¹⁰⁷

The SDSR 2015 also stated the Government's commitment to “work to intensify our security and defence relationship with Germany”, including strengthening cooperation on operations, missions and training, as well as enhancing interoperability.¹⁰⁸ As part of this closer cooperation, Sir Michael Fallon announced on 7 October 2016 that the Royal Navy's newest helicopter would fly from a German frigate on Mediterranean operations next year.¹⁰⁹ The UK-German Ministerial Equipment and Capability Cooperation dialogue supports further joint development of the Typhoon and A300M aircraft, and has launched 27 joint projects across all areas of defence.¹¹⁰

Battlegroups at a time on stand-by for deployment as a rapid reaction force. Each Battlegroup consists of around 1,500 personnel combined from multinational forces contributed by EU member states and non-member states, led by a Lead Nation. The concept has been fully operational since 2007, but an EU Battlegroup has never been deployed. For further information see House of Lords Library, [Leaving the European Union: Foreign and Security Policy Cooperation](#), 13 October 2016.

¹⁰³ House of Commons Library, [Brexit: Impact Across Policy Areas](#), 26 August 2016, p 169.

¹⁰⁴ House of Lords European Union External Affairs Committee, [Franco-British Cooperation on Defence: More Necessary than Ever](#), 13 July 2016.

¹⁰⁵ HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), November 2015, Cm 9161, p 52.

¹⁰⁶ HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015—First Annual Report 2016](#), 7 December 2016, p 22.

¹⁰⁷ Ministry of Defence, [UK Strengthens Defence Partnership with France](#), 16 December 2016.

¹⁰⁸ HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015](#), November 2015, Cm 9161, p 52.

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Defence, [UK and Germany Step Up Defence Cooperation on Day of Unity](#), 7 October 2016.

¹¹⁰ HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015—First Annual Report 2016](#), 7 December 2016, p 22.

Post withdrawal from the EU, the UK could potentially continue to contribute some of its military capabilities to EU CSDP missions and Battlegroups. Non-EU member states have been present in almost all CSDP missions and operations since the first EU Police Mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2003, although they have contributed with differing levels of involvement.¹¹¹ Non-EU member states can be invited by member states to participate in EU Battlegroups.¹¹² Sir Michael Fallon explained to the House of Commons Defence Committee in mid-July 2016 that the UK would continue to have strategic interests in the success of EU CSDP missions:

[...] we participate in these missions because there is a British national interest in these missions; we don't just do it because we want to be good Europeans. We have a trading interest in suppressing piracy off the Horn of Africa, for example. We have a very strong interest in trying to curb illegal migration from the African littoral into Europe. We have an interest in those particular missions. We have invested blood and treasure [...] in bringing peace in the Balkans. We have an interest in making sure that EU mission is successful. I myself don't see the British interest in some of those missions diminishing. Of course, we will not be members of the European Union, and we will not be participating in the same way, but we will certainly have a national interest in the success of those missions, because if they are not successful, our trade, security and immigration will be affected.¹¹³

He would not speculate on whether Britain would be involved in particular CSDP missions after leaving the EU, but he argued that there was “no reason” that the UK’s withdrawal from the EU “should inhibit future cooperation with missions that are in our direct interest”.¹¹⁴ The first annual report on the SDSR 2015, published in December 2016, observed that the Government would “need to make decisions on the extent of future UK involvement in EU Foreign Security and Defence missions”.¹¹⁵

However, under current arrangements, troop contributions from non EU member states are sought after plans have been established, meaning that non-member states lack influence over the mandate or objectives of a mission, and the UK would no longer be able to take command roles or contribute military headquarters, as it is currently doing for Operation Atalanta.¹¹⁶ Sophia Besch, from the Centre for European Reform think tank, has suggested that while the EU “wants to retain access to British capabilities and expertise for its operations and missions”, there would be political issues to navigate when setting up arrangements for doing so:

[...] to include the UK in the EU’s military activities post-Brexit, London and Brussels will have to negotiate a third-country association agreement. The EU manages partner country contributions to operations through so-called Framework Participation Agreements—key EU partner countries like Norway, the US, Canada and Turkey have negotiated such deals [...] Under the current arrangements, third states such as Canada become actively involved only at a late stage of operational planning, and are forced to accept the EU’s objectives.

¹¹¹ Thierry Tardy, *CSDP: Getting Third States on Board*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, March 2014.

¹¹² European External Action Service, *Common Security and Defence Policy: EU Battlegroups*, April 2013, p 2.

¹¹³ House of Commons Defence Committee, *Oral Evidence: Warsaw NATO Summit and Chilcot Report*, 19 July 2016, HC 579 of session 2016–17, Q17 and Q19.

¹¹⁴ *ibid*, Q22 and Q23.

¹¹⁵ HM Government, *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015—First Annual Report 2016*, 7 December 2016, p 8.

¹¹⁶ Hilkje Distra, ‘UK and EU Foreign Policy Cooperation After Brexit’, *RUSI Newsbrief*, 5 September 2016.

The UK will not want to accept the subordinate role that the EU currently assigns to non-EU troop-contributing countries. British officials have indicated that they want to negotiate a ‘privileged’ partnership with the EU—though they have not yet specified what that entails. This means that the political fall-out from a worsening relationship between the EU-27 and London could affect the security and defence relationship as well [...]

The EU would want to avoid being held hostage by the UK: if Britain makes unrealistic demands in negotiations on the terms for its participation in CSDP now, it might in the future be equally awkward in negotiations on whether to mount specific operations, and how to conduct them. A privileged status for the UK will also likely encounter resistance from other third countries that will want to protect their own arrangements.¹¹⁷

Nick Witney, a former British civil servant and the first chief executive of the European Defence Agency, has argued that since EU defence cooperation “has always been, and will continue to be, something undertaken on an entirely voluntary basis, by each member state, to the extent it chooses, as a sovereign nation”, no ‘leave’ principles would be “compromised” by continuing defence cooperation with European partners after the UK’s withdrawal from the EU.¹¹⁸ In his view, “some sort of privileged partnership between the UK and EU looks like a reasonable goal”, but the difficulties of defining it, embodying it in treaty change, and its relatively lower priority compared to “untangling” economic and migration issues, would mean that such a partnership might not be achieved “for many years”.

There has been speculation that the UK’s withdrawal from the EU could provide impetus for the remaining member states to further develop their defence capabilities. Nicholas de Larrinaga, Europe Editor of *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, argued that in the absence of the UK, there could be greater defence cooperation among the remaining member states through the European Defence Agency:

Of all the 27 members of the European Defence Agency (EDA), the UK has long been the most unwilling. The UK has consistently blocked increases to the EDA budget or projects that could impinge on national sovereignty in defence. With the UK gone and the other major European defence sceptic, Denmark, not a member of the EDA, the ground is now clear for the EDA to march forwards. More serious efforts towards pooling and sharing in defence, joint procurement, and over the longer term a European army seem an inevitable result. It is true that the UK is one of the biggest contributors to the EDA budget, but as the total budget is a miserly €30 million this gap should not prove hard to fill.¹¹⁹

On 15 November 2016, European defence ministers agreed to raise the European Defence Agency’s budget to €31 million, the first time in six years that the UK had not vetoed an increase.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Sophia Besch, [EU Defence, Brexit and Trump](#), Centre for European Reform, 14 December 2016, p 8.

¹¹⁸ Nick Witney, [‘Brexit and Defence: Time to Dust Off the ‘Letter of Intent’?’](#), European Council on Foreign Relations, 14 July 2016.

¹¹⁹ Nicholas de Larrinaga, [‘Analysis: The Defence Implications of the UK Leaving the EU’](#), *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 24 June 2016.

¹²⁰ Brooks Tigner, [‘European Defence Agency Finally Gets a Budget Increase’](#), *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 16 November 2016.

At the European Council meeting in December 2016, EU heads of state and government (including Theresa May) agreed a new EU security and defence package, consisting of three main pillars:

- New political goals and ambitions for Europeans to take more responsibility for their own security and defence.
- New financial tools to help member states and the European defence industry to develop defence capabilities (the European Defence Action Plan).
- Concrete actions as follow-up to the EU-NATO joint declaration which identified areas of cooperation.¹²¹

The first pillar developed from a Security and Defence Implementation Plan (SDIP) presented to all foreign and defence ministers of EU member states in November 2016 by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini.¹²² These proposals included: improving the EU's rapid response units (Battlegroups); boosting joint funding for military operations; strengthening the European Defence Agency; reforming operational planning structures; and triggering permanent structured cooperation.¹²³ The Lisbon Treaty allowed for the possibility of 'permanent structured cooperation', where a decision can be taken by qualified majority for a group of willing member states to undertake closer defence cooperation by aiming to achieve certain levels of defence spending, aligning their equipment and force interoperability, filling capability gaps and undertaking joint procurement. Member states do not have a veto over permanent structured cooperation, but unwilling member states would not be required to take part.

These measures, while representing a move towards increasing the EU's military capabilities, do not amount to the 'EU Army' often mentioned in tabloid headlines. For example, Sophia Besch of the Centre for European Reform has described Ms Mogherini's proposal for an EU operational headquarters as "rather modest", as it would be limited to non-executive military missions (ie non-combat missions).¹²⁴ While France and Germany—and Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission—support the establishment of an EU operational headquarters for planning and conducting civil and military operations, other countries such as Poland, Latvia and Lithuania are against duplicating NATO structures. Mike Penning, Minister of State for the Armed Forces, said that the SDIP was "consistent with the UK's guiding principles: nothing should undermine or duplicate NATO, which remains the cornerstone of European defence".¹²⁵

Doubts have been expressed as to how much these measures would enhance the EU's defence capabilities in practice. For instance, Javier Solana, former NATO Secretary-General and former EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, and Steven Blockmans from the Centre for European Policy Studies think tank, said that while the measures "deserve

¹²¹ European External Action Service, '[EU Security and Defence Package](#)', 15 December 2016. The European External Action Service [Defence Package: Factsheet](#) contains a more detailed summary of the measures within each of the pillars.

¹²² European External Action Service, '[Mogherini Presents Implementation Plan on Security and Defence to EU Ministers](#)', 14 November 2016.

¹²³ Sophia Besch, [EU Defence, Brexit and Trump](#), Centre for European Reform, 14 December 2016.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ House of Commons, '[Written Question: EU Defence Policy](#)', 22 November 2016.

support”, the package was “not a game-changer”.¹²⁶ They argued that the measures in the package “in and of themselves [...] fail to provide the EU with the level of input needed to effectively meet current and future challenges”. They believed that “without a common agreement on which capabilities can be scrapped, which new ones should be developed together for what purpose”, the spending targets laid out in the current package—for example to spend €500 million a year on military research and development—were “unlikely to be reached any time soon”.

2.3 United States and NATO

A few days after the referendum on EU membership, in response to a question about how the MOD would ensure future defence cooperation with allies and partners, Sir Michael Fallon, Secretary of State for Defence, described NATO as the “bedrock” on which “our defence of the United Kingdom rests”.¹²⁷ NATO also featured strongly in a speech Sir Michael made in July 2016, in which he laid out the three key themes of the Government’s approach to defence under Theresa May’s premiership: defending the UK’s values of democracy, the rule of law and freedom; ensuring a stronger NATO for a stronger defence; and the US-UK partnership.¹²⁸ He said that leaving the EU meant the UK would be “working harder to commit to NATO and our key allies”. In his speech to the Conservative Party conference in early October 2016, Sir Michael suggested that the UK would remain a key player in European defence, but through the prism of NATO:

Leaving the EU does not mean we are stepping back from our commitment to the security of our continent. We will continue to have the biggest defence budget in Europe—meeting the 2 percent NATO spending target. And we will lead in NATO—the cornerstone of our defence—putting troops on to its eastern border next year. But we will go on blocking an EU army, which would simply undermine NATO. We will step up, not away from, our global responsibilities.¹²⁹

However, the election of Donald Trump as the next President has raised question marks over the United States’ ongoing commitment to the NATO alliance. During the election campaign, Mr Trump described NATO as “obsolete” and suggested that if he won, the US might have to “let NATO go” or give other members an ultimatum to increase their defence spending or leave the alliance.¹³⁰ In another interview, Mr Trump indicated that he would only be prepared to provide military support to an ally under attack if they had made a sufficient contribution to the costs.¹³¹ This would deviate from the principle of collective defence enshrined in Article 5 of NATO’s founding treaty that an attack against one NATO member is considered as an attack against them all.¹³²

It remains to be seen to what extent Donald Trump will follow through on these comments once in power. Following Mr Trump’s election victory, President Obama said on 15 November

¹²⁶ Javier Solana and Steven Blockmans, ‘[EU Defence Plan is ‘No Game-Changer’](#)’, *EU Observer*, 16 December 2016.

¹²⁷ [HC Hansard, 27 June 2016, col 2](#).

¹²⁸ Ministry of Defence, ‘[Speech: Britain’s Global Role: Stepping Up](#)’, 22 July 2016.

¹²⁹ Conservatives, ‘[Fallon: Our Armed Forces—Delivering Security and Opportunity](#)’, 4 October 2016.

¹³⁰ Demetri Sevastopulo and Geoff Dyer, ‘[Trump Brands NATO “Obsolete” Ahead of Tough Wisconsin Primary](#)’, *Financial Times*, 3 April 2016.

¹³¹ ‘[Transcript: Donald Trump on NATO, Turkey’s Coup Attempt and the World](#)’, *New York Times*, 21 July 2016.

¹³² NATO, ‘[Collective Defence—Article 5](#)’, 22 March 2016.

2016 that Donald Trump had indicated to him that he would not pull out of NATO.¹³³ General James Mattis, Mr Trump’s nomination for US Defense Secretary, is reported to be committed to the US’s existing alliances.¹³⁴

The UK Government has continued to emphasise the role of NATO and the UK’s special relationship with the US following Mr Trump’s victory. According to a Downing Street spokesperson, in a telephone conversation on 28 November, Donald Trump and Theresa May agreed on “the importance of the [NATO] alliance, the need for more NATO members to meet the target of spending 2 percent of GDP and the role that NATO can play in addressing diverse threats”.¹³⁵ In the first annual report on the SDSR 2015, published in December 2016, the Government stated that the US remained the UK’s “pre-eminent partner” and “cooperation with the US in planning, intelligence command and control, operational burden sharing and operational delivery” continued to expand. The Government said it expected the UK and US to “remain strong and close partners” under President-elect Trump.¹³⁶

Malcolm Chalmers, Deputy Director of RUSI, sounded a note of caution in relation to defence prospects under a Trump presidency.¹³⁷ He believed that Mr Trump’s “repeated questioning of the value of America’s military alliances” and his “evident sympathy for Russian President Vladimir Putin’s actions in Ukraine and Syria” should not be assumed to be “passing fancies”. In this light, Professor Chalmers suggested a number of actions that the Government should take to decrease the UK’s dependence on US military capabilities:

[...] the Ministry of Defence should begin to review areas in which British conventional capabilities are overly reliant on US support. It should also devote more attention to what it might involve—in technical and also doctrinal terms—if the US were to refuse to help in a future military crisis. In some cases, it may be possible to reduce the degree of dependency at relatively modest cost. In other cases, the Government might have to contemplate moving to a less ambitious strategic posture in the event of a US retreat from its international commitments.

[...] the start of the Trump presidency will coincide with a significant growth in UK dependence on purchases of US weapons systems, including new combat and maritime patrol aircraft, attack helicopters and missiles. The annual financial cost of defence imports is already due to increase by some £700 million, as a result of the depreciation of sterling. Questions must now also be asked about the strategic dependency that reliance on US military systems, including US black-box software, is creating, and whether the consequent risks remain acceptable in the new circumstances in which we find ourselves.

[...] the result of the US election points to the need for a review of the UK’s historic scepticism towards EU defence cooperation. Ministers will want to focus primarily on the potential for deepening bilateral defence cooperation, especially with France and

¹³³ David Smith, ‘[Barack Obama Says Donald Trump will not Abandon NATO Commitment](#)’, *Guardian*, 15 November 2016.

¹³⁴ Sophia Besch, [EU Defence, Brexit and Trump](#), Centre for European Reform, 14 December 2016.

¹³⁵ Rowena Mason, ‘[Trump and May “Agree on Importance of NATO” in Second Phone Call](#)’, *Guardian*, 29 November 2016.

¹³⁶ HM Government, [National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015—First Annual Report 2016](#), 7 December 2016, p 21.

¹³⁷ Malcolm Chalmers, ‘[Preparing British Defences for a Trumpian World](#)’, Royal United Services Institute, 11 November 2016.

Germany. Yet, given the enhanced risk that an unpredictable US present could veto future use of NATO as an organiser of future collective action, the UK may also see a shared interest with its European allies in creating a more credible institutional back-up. In these circumstances, the UK could gain much needed credibility with those allies if it were now to relax its veto on the proposal for an EU operational headquarters, a block which will in any case no longer be useable once Brexit takes effect.¹³⁸

A possible example of the type of consequences of dependency on the US that Professor Chalmers referred to was signalled when Donald Trump tweeted on 12 December 2016 that the F-35 fighter jet programme and costs were “out of control”.¹³⁹ He added that “billions of dollars can and will be saved on military (and other) purchases” once he took office in January 2017. The UK has taken delivery of seven F-35B aircraft, currently has seven on order and plans to buy a total of 138 over the lifetime of the programme.¹⁴⁰ Francis Tusa, editor of *Defence Analysis*, said that: “If the US were to cancel the programme in its entirety tomorrow, the UK would truly be up a creek without a paddle”.¹⁴¹ In such an event, the UK would reportedly lose the £2 billion it has contributed to the research and development of the jet, and would be left with no aircraft to go on the new Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers. The *Telegraph* reported that defence experts such as Francis Tusa and Liz Quintana of RUSI doubted that the US would pull out of the programme altogether, but were the US to cut its order numbers, it could push up the overall costs for the UK’s outstanding purchases.¹⁴²

2.4 Russia

Concerns have been raised about the capabilities of the UK and NATO to respond to further actions by Russia in Eastern Europe following its military actions in Crimea and the Ukraine and instances of what the Defence Committee has termed “threatening behaviour” towards NATO members, such as flying military aircraft close to British NATO airspace.¹⁴³ For example, it was reported in August 2016 that a leaked report produced in March 2016 under the direction of General Sir Nick Carter, the Chief of the General Staff, stated that:

In the unlikely event of a direct confrontation between NATO and RUS [Russia], we must acknowledge that RUS currently has a significant capability edge over UK force elements [...]

Due to the fact that some of our high end military capabilities have been eroded since 2003, we must find ways to ‘fight smarter’ at the tactical level, acknowledging that some adversaries may be armed with weapons that are superior to our own.¹⁴⁴

According to another leaked internal MOD briefing seen by the *Telegraph* in November 2016, British military intelligence raised “doubts over the UK’s ability to combat the threat posed by the Kremlin’s new Armata tank” and “questioned why the Government had no plans for a rival

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁹ Donald J Trump, [‘Personal Twitter Account’](#), 12 December 2016.

¹⁴⁰ House of Commons, [‘Written Question: Joint Strike Fighter Aircraft’](#), 15 December 2016.

¹⁴¹ Ruth Sherlock, Ben Farmer and Alan Tovey, [‘Defence Experts Warn of ‘Disaster’ for Britain After Donald Trump Suggests Undoing ‘Out of Control’ F-35 Fighter Jet Project’](#), *Telegraph*, 12 December 2016.

¹⁴² *ibid.*

¹⁴³ House of Commons Defence Committee, [Russia: Implications for UK Defence and Security](#), 28 June 2016, HC 107 of session 2016–17, p 5.

¹⁴⁴ Barney Henderson and Press Association, [‘Russia Can Outgun British Troops, Leaked Report Suggests’](#), *Telegraph*, 9 August 2016.

tank for at least 20 years”.¹⁴⁵ Sir Richard Barrons, the recently retired head of the Joint Forces Command, warned in September 2016 that in his view the UK and its NATO allies had “no effective plan for defending Europe from a Russian attack because of splits in the alliance”.¹⁴⁶ He said that while Russia could “deploy tens of thousands of troops into NATO territory within 48 hours, backed by warplanes and ships”, it would take NATO “months” to do the same.

The House of Commons Defence Committee questioned Sir Michael Fallon in November 2016 about what armed forces capabilities would be available in the event of an East-West confrontation in Europe.¹⁴⁷ Sir Michael maintained that the SDSR in 2015 had already evaluated the “multiple”, “concurrent” and “complex” threats to the UK, including the threat of a serious confrontation in Europe and that “nothing much” had changed in the nature of those threats since December 2015.¹⁴⁸ He maintained that the SDSR 2015 contained contingency plans to deal with any developments such as an East-West confrontation, for example the ability to fight at an increased divisional level.¹⁴⁹ He argued that the UK was able to make a commitment to defending the borders of NATO—for example, deploying a battalion of about 800 personnel to Estonia as part of an enhanced forward presence—because “we have strength in reserve”.¹⁵⁰ He said that forward deployment functioned as “an earlier tripwire so the force there does not have to wait for tension to escalate”, and that this would act as “deterrence, to make it clear to any potential aggressor that NATO is ready to respond”. Sir Michael disagreed with a suggestion made in a recent book written by Sir Richard Shirreff, former Deputy Supreme Allied Commander of NATO, and mentioned by a member of the Defence Committee, that war with Russia was “likely next year”, although he agreed that there had been “much greater Russian aggression this year”.¹⁵¹

Julian Lewis, chair of the Defence Committee, made the point that in recent years, the focus had moved from the threat of state-on-state war to asymmetrical warfare and wars of choice. He argued that “with the lessening of goodwill—to put it mildly—between Russia and NATO countries”, the world had returned to “a more traditional scenario”.¹⁵² In response, Sir Michael Fallon asserted that the SDSR was “very clear that we regard state-based threats as on a level with non-state actors now”, and the Government was aware of the need to make sure that the equipment programme was “adjusted” to deal with all types of threat.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁵ Robert Mendick, Ben Farmer and Roland Oliphant, ‘[UK Military Intelligence Issues Warning Over Russian Supertank Threat](#)’, *Telegraph*, 6 November 2016.

¹⁴⁶ Deborah Haynes, ‘[NATO Has No Plan if Russia Invades, Warns Ex-General](#)’, *Times*, 19 September 2016.

¹⁴⁷ House of Commons Defence Committee, *Oral Evidence: The SDSR and the Army*, 1 November 2016, HC 108 of session 2016–17, Q229.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, Q227.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, Q229.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*, Q233.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, Q234.

¹⁵² *ibid.*, Q257.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

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