



In Brief: Strategic Defence and Security Review – Headline Recommendations for the Armed Forces

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Five months after entering office the Coalition Government published its Strategic Defence and Security Review on 19 October 2010.

The following note is a guide to the principal recommendations and conclusions of that review **which relate to the Armed Forces** specifically. It also provides a list of suggested reading for initial reactions to the conclusions of the review. A more detailed paper on the wider recommendations of the SDSR, and their implications, will be published in the near future.

Library briefing SN/IA/5592, [Strategic Defence and Security Review](#) provides background on the SDSR, including a list of suggested commentary and opinion pieces. The [National Security Strategy](#), which was published on 18 October 2010, provides the strategic context for the decisions set down in the SDSR.

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1 Strategic Context – The National Security Strategy

At the outset the new Coalition government indicated its intention to formulate a new *National Security Strategy* (NSS) that would provide the overarching strategic context for the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR).

That strategy was published on 18 October 2010. This short section does not seek to reiterate all of the conclusions of the NSS, but provide a brief overview of the main points that are relevant to the conclusions of the SDSR and in particular the reconfiguration of military capability.

In short, the NSS identifies two complementary core strategic objectives:

1. Ensuring a secure and resilient UK.
2. Shaping a stable world- therefore acting to reduce the likelihood of risks affecting the UK or its direct interests overseas.

The UK national security effort will be directed towards delivering against these objectives and as such the National Security Council has identified four high priority risks to UK national security within the next five years: international terrorism and terrorism related to Northern Ireland; cyber attack; international military crises and major accidents or natural hazards. However, the NSS also acknowledges that while international terrorism is the UK’s principal national security threat for the present, over the next 20 years it is likely to face security threats from a range of sources and therefore “our ability to remain adaptable for the future will be fundamental, as will our ability to identify risks and opportunities at the earliest

possible stage. It will also be essential to maintain highly capable and flexible armed forces so that we can exercise military power when necessary".¹ The NSS also states that:

Our strategic interests and responsibilities overseas could in some circumstances justify the threat or use of military force. There will also be occasions when it is in our interests to take part in humanitarian interventions. Each situation will be different and these judgements will not necessarily be easy.²

Those long-term risks were set out in a three-tiered National Security Risk Assessment which is intended to inform the choices and priorities set down in the SDSR. The NSS highlights that those risks judged to be higher priority do not automatically warrant the allocation of greater resources; although it does recognise that tier 1 risks will drive the prioritisation of capabilities.

On this basis, the NSS suggests that the UK will need to maintain military capability across the whole spectrum of operations.

2 SDSR Headlines

The SDSR was published on 19 October 2010 and made the following headline recommendations for achieving the right balance of Armed Forces capabilities that the UK will need by 2020. The review is deliberately focused, however, on "the decisions that need to be taken in the next four years, and leaves to 2015 those decisions which can be better taken in the light of further operational experience in Afghanistan and developments in the wider economic situation".

2.1 Policy

- Operations in Afghanistan will be protected and given priority.
- To achieve the two core objectives identified in the NSS the UK, among other things, will be required to coordinate early warning and horizon scanning; establish civilian and military stabilisation capabilities that can be deployed together to help countries avoid crisis or deal with conflict; retain strategic military power projection to enhance security, deter or contain potential threats and support diplomacy; retain a minimum effective nuclear deterrent; retain an independent ability to defend the UK overseas territories militarily; invest in new capabilities such as cyber security; develop an Armed Forces capable of both stabilisation and intervention operations; retain the military ability to help evacuate UK nationals overseas; maintain collective security through NATO; establish greater sharing of military capabilities, technologies and programmes with key allies, including France and a Defence Industrial and Technology Policy that will allow independence of action, while allowing for increased off-the-shelf purchases of equipment and the greater promotion of defence exports.
- Further strategic defence and security reviews will be undertaken every five years.
- Priority must be given over the next decade to recovering capabilities damaged or reduced as a result of overstretch.

¹ HM Government, *A strong Britain in an age of uncertainty: the national security strategy*, Cm 7953, October 2010, p.18

² HM Government, *A strong Britain in an age of uncertainty: the national security strategy*, Cm 7953, October 2010, p.30

- Closer partnership with key allies is a core strategic principle for the SDSR. There will be five key priorities: maintaining the relationship with the US; establishing new models of practical bilateral defence and security co-operation with allies, most specifically France; pushing for an effective and reformed UN; retaining NATO as the cornerstone of UK defence and pushing for an outward-facing EU.
- The UK has long been clear that it would only consider using nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances of self defence, including in defence of NATO allies and it will remain deliberately ambiguous about precisely when, how and at what scale the UK would contemplate their use.

2.2 Defence Budget

- The defence budget will rise in cash terms but fall by 8% in real terms by 2014/15. Assuming a real terms budget cut of exactly 8.0% the defence budget will rise by 1.1% in cash terms by 2014/15, an annual average cash increase of 0.3%. This will be confirmed in the Spending Review.
- The defence budget will continue to meet the unofficial NATO target of 2% of GDP.

2.3 Armed Forces

- Future forces, although smaller than at present, will retain their geographical reach and their ability to operate across the spectrum of operations from high-intensity intervention to enduring stabilisation activity.
- The UK will be more selective in its use of the Armed Forces, deploying them only where key UK national interests are at stake; where there is a clear strategic aim; where the likely political, economic and human costs are in proportion to the likely benefits; where there is a viable exit strategy and where justifiable under international law.
- There will be renewed emphasis on conventional forces to deter potential adversaries and reassure partners; a greater coordination of civilian and military expertise in both conflict prevention and crisis response; the establishment of a small permanent capability to enhance cross-departmental homeland security crisis response and a tailored defence diplomacy programme.
- The UK will maintain its ability to act alone militarily.
- The contribution of the Armed Forces to the overall national security tasks will be defined by seven Military Tasks, as opposed to the current 18. Those tasks will be: defending the UK and its overseas territories; providing strategic intelligence; nuclear deterrence; supporting civil emergency organisations in times of crisis; defending UK interests through strategic power projection and expeditionary interventions; providing a defence contribution to UK influence and providing security for stabilisation.
- The new Defence Planning Assumptions envisage the Armed Forces in the future will be configured to conduct:
 - An enduring stabilisation operation at around brigade level (up to 6,500 personnel) with maritime and air support where necessary, while also conducting:

- One non-enduring complex intervention (up to 2,000 personnel), and
 - One non-enduring simple intervention (up to 1,000 personnel)
- Or
- Three non-enduring operations if not already engaged in an enduring operation
- Or
- For a limited time and with sufficient warning, committing all effort to a one-off intervention of up to three brigades and air and maritime support (around 30,000 personnel)
- The future force structure will provide the ability to deploy highly capable assets quickly, but also prepare a greater scale and range of capability if required. Therefore a small number of the most capable units will be held at high readiness; some capabilities will be held at extended readiness including aspects of the amphibious force; the ability to re-generate capabilities will be maintained; while greater operational co-operation will be sought with allies.

Royal Navy

- The manpower requirement of the Royal Navy will be reduced by 5,000 personnel to 30,000 by 2015. The expectation is that the Navy will require 29,000 personnel by 2020.
- By 2020 the fleet of frigates and destroyers will be reduced from 23 to 19 vessels. Four frigates will be decommissioned.
- One Bay-class amphibious support ship will be decommissioned and one landing and command ship will be placed at extended readiness.
- **Aircraft Carriers** – While there are few circumstances in the short term in which the ability to deploy air power from the sea will be essential, in the longer term the ability to deploy air power globally without the need for overseas basing and overflight rights remains. Therefore it is necessary to retain an operational carrier.

HMS Ark Royal will be decommissioned immediately. Either the remaining aircraft carrier HMS Illustrious or the helicopter carrier HMS Ocean will be decommissioned following a short study of which provides the most effective helicopter platform capability.

The MOD will continue to procure the Queen Elizabeth class of aircraft carrier. One vessel will be held in extended readiness (or potentially sold)³; while the operational carrier will be fitted with catapults and arrestor gear to enable it to routinely fly 12 of the conventional carrier variant of the Joint Strike Fighter aircraft, while retaining the capacity to deploy up to 36 aircraft as previously planned. It will also allow the carrier to be interoperable with American and French aircraft. The installation of catapults and arrestor gear will delay the introduction of the carrier from 2016 to 2020. The aim will be to bring the planes and the carriers into service at same time. The overall number of JSF aircraft to be procured will be reduced.

³ This will be reviewed in the next SDSR in 2015.

Procurement of the conventional carrier variant instead of the STOVL variant of JSF will provide longer range, greater payload and will be cheaper, reducing through-life costs by approximately 25%.

- The Harrier fleet will be retired in 2011.
- The Royal Marine brigade will be retained.
- The Astute-class submarine and Type 45 destroyer programmes will be completed and the MOD is committed to procuring the Type 26 frigate.
- **Trident** – The UK's strategic nuclear deterrent will be retained. However, the number of operational launch tubes on the submarine will be reduced from 12 to eight and the number of warheads deployed from 48 to 40. The operational stockpile of nuclear warheads will be reduced from less than 160 to fewer than 120; while the overall stockpile will be reduced from no more than 225 to no more than 180. Continuous-at-sea deterrence will be maintained.

Initial gate of the Trident programme will be at the end of 2010 and Main Gate will be around 2016. The service life of the current Vanguard class submarines will be extended and the first replacement platform will enter service in 2028. A decision on the number of submarines that will be procured will be taken at Main Gate.

These decisions will reduce costs by £750m over the spending review period and £3.2bn over the next ten years.

- The Merlin helicopter force will be upgraded to enhance its ability to support amphibious operations.
- The Royal Navy estate will be rationalised. Both Portsmouth and Devonport will be retained.

Royal Air Force

- By 2020 the RAF will be based around two platforms: the Typhoon and the JSF, with one third of aircraft retained at high readiness. The A400M (22 aircraft) and seven C17 transport aircraft, the future strategic tanker aircraft and an expanded fleet of unmanned air vehicles will complement that fleet.
- The Nimrod MRA4 programme will be cancelled.
- The three variants of the Tristar transport/tanker aircraft will be withdrawn from service from 2013 as the RAF transitions to the 14-strong fleet of A330 (future strategic tanker aircraft). The VC-10 aircraft will be reduced to undertake air-to-air refuelling only prior to its withdrawal in 2013.
- The Hercules C130J transport aircraft will be retired from service by 2022, a decade earlier than planned, in order to transition to the A400M.
- The Sentinel airborne ground surveillance aircraft will be withdrawn from service once it is no longer required to support operations in Afghanistan.
- The Harrier fleet will be retired in 2011.

- The Tornado fleet will be maintained, albeit in reduced numbers.
- The RAF will be reduced by 5,000 personnel to 33,000 by 2015. The expectation is that the RAF will require 31,500 personnel by 2020.
- The RAF estate will be rationalised. RAF Kinloss and two other bases will no longer be required by the RAF, although no decisions have yet been taken on their future as some bases may be retained for forces returning from Germany or retained for other purposes. Final decisions on the defence estate will be taken on the basis of detailed investment appraisals and wider impact assessments.

British Army

- The Army will be reduced by 7,000 personnel to approximately 95,500 by 2015. There will be no changes to combat units involved in Afghanistan. It is expected that the Army will require 94,000 personnel by 2020.
- To enhance the focus on front-line capabilities, the four regional divisional headquarters will be replaced by a single UK support command and at least two of the Army's 10 regional brigade headquarters will be closed.
- Communications and logistics support to headquarters ARRC will be reduced.
- The Army will reduce by one the number of deployable brigades and reconfigure into five multi-role brigades which will be self-supporting.
- 16 Air Assault brigade will remain as a specialist brigade.
- The FRES reconnaissance and utility vehicle programmes will be retained.
- Heavily armoured vehicles, including Warrior infantry fighting vehicles, Challenger II, AS90 artillery and Titan and Trojan engineer vehicles will be reduced, although sufficient numbers will be retained to conduct operations in high threat situations. Challenger will be reduced by 40% and AS90 artillery by 35%.
- Half of the remaining forces in Germany will return to the UK by 2015, with the aim of withdrawing all forces by 2020.
- The MOD will purchase 12 additional heavy lift Chinook helicopters to give a total of 60, and extend the life of the Puma helicopter to ensure that there is sufficient capability for UK forces in Afghanistan.

Reserve Forces and Specialist Capabilities

- A review of the Reserve Forces will be undertaken. That review will be conducted over a six-month period and will examine their future role and structure.
- There will be extra investment in Special Forces; while retaining the size of the UK's regular Special Forces front line units.
- A UK Defence Cyber Operations Group will be established.

Personnel

- The Military Covenant will be renewed and formalised.

- The current package of terms and conditions will be updated. Service and civilian allowances will be reduced.
- The provision of healthcare to Service personnel will be enhanced by an extra £20m per year.
- The MOD civil service will be reduced by 25,000 by 2015 to 60,000 personnel.

2.4 Miscellaneous

Defence Training Review

Outside of the SDSR, the MOD also announced that the contract for the Defence Training Review programme had been cancelled. The DTR project had been intended to combine the technical and engineering training for each of the three Services on a single site at St Athan. In a Written Ministerial Statement the MOD confirmed that the Metrix Consortium had been unable to deliver an “affordable and commercially robust proposal within the prescribed period” but that “collocation on as few sites as possible remains [...] the best solution for the Armed Forces” and that it was still hoped that any future defence training solution would still be based at St Athan. Work on alternative options will begin as soon as possible, with the announcement on future plans expected in spring 2011.⁴

3 Initial Reactions – Suggested Reading

The debate on the SDSR has been wide ranging and is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. The following is a selection of articles, editorials and commentary setting out initial reactions to the recommendations of the SDSR. A list of suggested reading covering the debate prior to the publication of the review is available in Library briefing [SN/IA/5592](#), *Strategic Defence and Security Review*.

- Professor Michael Clarke, “[Has the defence review secured Britain’s place in the world?](#)”, *RUSI Commentary*, 19 October 2010
- Michael Codner, “[SDSR: what next for Britain?](#)”, *RUSI Commentary*, 19 October 2010
- Professor Michael Clarke, “[Preliminary briefing: the National Security Strategy 2010](#)”, *RUSI Commentary*, 19 October 2010
- Douglas Barrie, “[No strategic shrinkage? The RAF might see it differently](#)”, *IISS Commentary*, 19 October 2010
- “[Britain lowers its military sights](#)”, *IISS Commentary*, 19 October 2010
- “[Cuts cast doubts over UK navy’s global reach](#)”, *IISS Commentary*, 19 October 2010
- “[Britain’s ‘uncertain’ National Security Strategy](#)”, *IISS Commentary*, 18 October 2010
- “Contentious decisions left hanging”, *The Financial Times*, 20 October 2010
- “Better than feared, but doubt remains”, *The Financial Times*, 20 October 2010
- Philip Stephens, “How the carriers sank a defence strategy”, *The Financial Times*, 19 October 2010

⁴ [MOD Press Release](#), 19 October 2010

- [“Strategic defence review means end of Iraq-scale military interventions”](#), *The Guardian*, 19 October 2010
- [“And the winner of the defence review is...David Cameron”](#), *The Guardian*, 19 October 2010
- [“Telegraph view: our Armed Forces pay for Labour’s neglect”](#), *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 October 2010
- Video – [“Defence review: James Arbuthnot ‘cuts are a gamble”](#), *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 October 2010
- Video – [“Defence review: ‘end of UK punching above its weight’ says Thomas Harding”](#), *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 October 2010
- [“Leading article: the fiscal tail wags the military dog”](#), *The Independent*, 20 October 2010
- [“Forces left unable to launch ‘major’ missions overseas”](#), *The Independent*, 20 October 2010
- Steven Jermy, [“We are taking the greatest risks with our capability to defend these islands”](#), *The Times*, 20 October 2010
- [“Cuts condemned as ‘unworthy’ of those who risk their lives for Queen and country”](#), *The Times*, 20 October 2010
- [“After the review can Britain still defend itself?”](#), *The Times*, 20 October 2010
- [“Painful, but not fatal”](#), *The Economist*, 19 October 2010