



Strategic Defence and Security Review: Defence Policy and the Armed Forces

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Author: Claire Taylor

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Five months after entering office the Coalition Government published its National Security Strategy (NSS) and its Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) on 18 and 19 October respectively.

While the National Security Strategy attempts to set out the UK's strategic vision and objectives for the future, the SDSR attempts to establish a blueprint for meeting those goals. In contrast to previous reviews of this nature, the SDSR has taken a wholesale approach to the issue of security, incorporating not only defence policy and the role and capabilities of the Armed Forces but also wider security issues such as homeland defence, counter terrorism, cyber and border security and international development.

Library Briefing SN/IA/5742 sets out the foreign policy priorities of the Coalition Government and the main themes of the National Security Strategy.

This briefing note examines the main conclusions and recommendations of the SDSR as they relate to defence policy and the Armed Forces more specifically. It does not examine the wider security issues that form part of the SDSR.

Further detail on the implementation of the SDSR is expected to be published over the course of 2011. This note will be updated as appropriate.

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1 Background

1.1 Implications of the NSS for Defence Policy

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).

This short section does not seek to reiterate all of the conclusions of the NSS,¹ but provide a brief overview of the main points in that strategy as they relate to British defence policy, and in particular the reconfiguration of military capability.

In short, the NSS identifies two core strategic objectives:

¹ The NSS is examined in more detail in Library Standard Note SN/IA/5742, *Strategic Defence and Security Review: The Foreign Policy Baselines and the National Security Strategy*

1. Ensuring a secure and resilient UK by protecting the population, economy, infrastructure and territory from all major risks.
2. Shaping a stable world – The NSS makes it clear that securing the UK’s national interest necessitates continued full and active engagement in world affairs.

The UK national security effort will be directed towards delivering these objectives and as such the National Security Council has identified four high priority (Tier 1) 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 and the actions of non-state actors are the UK’s principal national security threat for the present, over the next 20 years the UK is likely to face security threats from a range of sources. Preventive action, such as conflict prevention, international aid and defence diplomacy is therefore a major theme in the review. However, the NSS also emphasises that “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”.² This new security posture has been coined ‘Adaptable Britain’. The NSS also states that:

No state currently has the combination of capability and intent needed to pose a conventional military threat to the territorial integrity of the UK. Yet history shows that both capability and intent can change, sometimes in a matter of only a few years. Our aim is to deter direct threats, including through our membership of NATO and, ultimately, our independent nuclear deterrent. But that does not mean that we would not have to become engaged in an international military crisis overseas if we judged that it constituted a threat to our national interests [...]

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.³

Those long-term risks are set out in a three-tiered National Security Risk Assessment, with each tier determined by relative likelihood and impact on the UK’s population, territory, economy, key institutions and infrastructure. A CBRN attack on the UK or its overseas territories, for example, is considered a tier two risk; while a large scale conventional attack on the UK by another state, an attack on an overseas territory or a conventional attack on another NATO or EU Member State to which the UK would have to respond, are all considered tier three risks. It is this hierarchy of risks that informs the choices and priorities set down in the SDSR. However, the NSS highlights that those risks judged to be of higher priority do not automatically warrant the allocation of greater resources;⁴ although it does recognise that tier 1 risks will drive the prioritisation of capabilities.

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

² HM Government, *A strong Britain in an age of uncertainty: the national security strategy*, Cm 7953, October 2010, p.18

³ HM Government, *A strong Britain in an age of uncertainty: the national security strategy*, Cm 7953, October 2010, p.30

⁴ Either because some capabilities, such as the UK’s strategic nuclear deterrent, are inherently more costly than others, or because some are already well resourced.

1.2 Overarching Principles of the SDSR

Where the NSS focuses purely on strategic context and the foreign policy goals of the UK, the SDSR, by contrast, represents the implementation strategy. It seeks to establish both the processes through which the broader strategic goals of the UK can be attained and the balances of resources and capabilities needed to deliver them.

This new approach to national security is all-encompassing. Unlike previous reviews which have focused solely on how defence and the Armed Forces need to be reconfigured in order to deliver on the UK's foreign policy objectives, the SDSR attempts to address security 'in the round', incorporating linked areas of policy including counter terrorism, intelligence, international aid, border and cyber security and homeland defence. While it looks out to the 2020 timeframe, in light of the current financial climate the majority of the recommendations and conclusions of this review are deliberately focused on the period of the current Comprehensive Spending Review to 2015.

While the detailed recommendations for each policy area stand alone in the SDSR they are linked by a number of overarching principles which reflects the multi-faceted approach that has been taken and the acknowledgement that security issues can no longer be regarded as mutually exclusive. Specifically, those principles encompass the idea of identifying and managing threats before they materialise in the UK; maintaining a broad spectrum of defence and other capabilities with sufficient flexibility to adjust to changing future requirements; strengthening mutual dependence with key allies and partners and establishing a more coherent and integrated approach to security across Government.

National Security Tasks

In order to deliver on all of the objectives of the National Security Strategy and effectively establish an Adaptable posture, eight cross-cutting national security tasks have, therefore, been identified in the SDSR:

1. Identify and monitor national security risks and opportunities.
2. Tackle at root the causes of instability, at home and abroad.
3. Exert influence to exploit opportunities and manage risks.
4. Enforce domestic law and strengthen international norms to help tackle those who threaten the UK and its interests.
5. Protect the UK and its interests, both overseas and domestically, from physical and electronic threats from state and non-state actors.
6. Help resolve conflicts and contribute to stability. Where necessary, intervene overseas including the legal use of coercive force in support of the UK's vital interests and to protect the UK's overseas territories.
7. Provide resilience for the UK by being prepared to respond to all kinds of emergencies, and maintain essential services.

8. Work in alliances and partnerships wherever possible to generate stronger responses.⁵

The means by which these tasks are to be achieved, and the resources to be devoted to them over the next five years subsequently form the main content of the SDSR.

Alliances and Partnerships

The SDSR reiterates that “internationally, we rarely act alone”. More effective alliances and partnerships, and not just those in the defence field, therefore form one of the overarching principles of the review.

It subsequently identifies five key priorities for international engagement going forward, all of which cut across each of the policy areas under discussion:

1. The UK’s defence, security and intelligence relationship with the US is central to the UK’s national interest.
2. New models of practical bilateral defence and security co-operation with a range of allies and partners.
3. An effective and reformed United Nations.
4. NATO as the cornerstone of the UK’s defence.
5. An outward facing EU that promotes security and prosperity.

On that basis, the SDSR sets out the intention of the UK to intensify its bilateral defence and security relationships. Focus will be given to prioritising key allies, emerging powers, key regional actors, countries that provide the UK with basing access, overflight rights and who supply the UK with energy and other natural resources, and on those countries where defence activity can add most value, such as countries where the military plays a prominent role in national policy making. Enhancing the effectiveness of key multilateral institutions such as the UN, NATO, EU, the G8, G20 and the Commonwealth is also identified as a priority.

From a military perspective, new models of practical bilateral co-operation will focus on those countries with a similar defence and security posture to that of the UK or those allies with whom the UK co-operates in multinational operations. Building on the idea that the UK will rarely act alone on the world stage, the SDSR reiterates that “should we [the UK] need to conduct major operations overseas, it is most likely that we will do so with others”. As outlined above, NATO remains the cornerstone of the UK’s defence posture, although the paper does emphasise UK support for EU military and civilian action in this area. However, the paper acknowledges NATO primacy and makes clear that support for EU military operations will only occur “where it is clear that NATO is not planning to intervene”.⁶ UK participation in the EU’s anti-piracy Operation *Atalanta* will continue with the provision of a frigate for a period in early 2011 and the provision of the Operational HQ at Northwood until the end of the current mandate of that operation in December 2012.

⁵ Further detail on the planning guidelines under each of the tasks is set out on p11 and 12 of the National Security Strategy and in accompanying [fact sheet number 4](#).

⁶ HM Government, *Strategic Defence and Security Review*, Cm 7948, October 2010, p.62

Importantly, and a theme of the SDSR which many have argued is a direct implication of budget and capability cuts, the review sets out the commitment of the UK to seek legally binding mutual guarantees with allied nations if “in the context of multilateral operations, we agree with other nations that we will rely on them to provide particular capabilities or conduct particular military roles or missions, and they will likewise rely on us...”.⁷ The feasibility of losing carrier strike capability for the next ten years, and the likelihood of operating only one aircraft carrier beyond 2020 (both of which are examined below), is largely premised on this idea. The review also outlines the intention of the UK to seek strengthened relationships with those nations with whom the UK “can share capabilities, technologies and programmes, ensuring that collective resources can go further” either through bilateral equipment collaboration or off-the-shelf purchases.⁸ The UK’s relationship with the US but also increasingly with France, is considered essential to this aim. The SDSR firmly states that the UK will intensify its security and defence relationship with France, and “where possible, develop future military capabilities in complementary, cost effective ways”.

Indeed, the Franco-British Summit on 2 November 2010 agreed various measures on closer defence co-operation including maximising capabilities, establishing joint defence equipment programmes and fostering closer industrial co-operation. A bilateral Defence and Security Co-operation Treaty will specifically set out measures to develop co-operation, including the sharing and pooling of materials and equipment, the building of joint facilities, mutual access to each country’s defence markets and industrial and technological co-operation. A separate nuclear treaty has also been agreed setting out measures for collaboration on nuclear stockpile stewardship. The summit also agreed a Letter of Intent which will create a new framework for exchanges on operational matters.

Further information is available online at: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/latest-news/2010/11/pm-welcomes-president-of-france-for-uk-france-summit-56505> and <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/UkfranceDefenceCooperationTreatyAnnounced.htm>

Structural Reform and Accountability

Given the new approach to national security, and in order to bring all of the different strands of work together in a coherent, co-ordinated and effective manner, both the NSS and the SDSR acknowledge the need for strong leadership and guidance at the centre of Government.

The newly established National Security Council, supported by the new National Security Adviser, will therefore be responsible for overall decision making and overseeing the implementation of both the NSS and the SDSR. The Council will meet on a weekly basis. Relevant Ministers will take responsibility for coordinating priority areas of work across government; while implementation of the NSS and the SDSR will be driven by a cross-departmental Implementation Board, chaired by the Cabinet Office and attended by lead officials. It will monitor progress, risks and issues and identify areas of concern. The Board will provide six-monthly updates to the Prime Minister and the NSC.

Strategic horizon scanning and early warning will form a fundamental part of this central co-ordination and therefore the SDSR identifies several key enablers in this regard:

⁷ HM Government, *Strategic Defence and Security Review*, Cm 7948, October 2010, p.59

⁸ Historically, multilateral procurement programmes have proven complex, costly and in some cases, have ultimately been abandoned in favour of a national approach. The Type 45 destroyer was developed as a UK only programme after the UK withdrew from the Horizon project in 1999.

- Priorities will be agreed annually by the NSC.
- An annual mandate for cross-Whitehall horizon scanning, based on the NSC priorities, will ensure focus on key areas of concern, while also allowing for consideration of emerging issues. The Cabinet Office horizon scanning unit, working in the strategy team of the National Security Secretariat, will be responsible for co-ordinating this work and producing reports for the NSC.
- Early warning will continue to be a key role for the Cabinet office and individual departments and a key function of advising the NSC of emerging issues with implications for UK interests. A biannual report on Countries at Risk of Instability will be established, along with reports from the Joint Intelligence organisation on other issues.
- Strategy Units within individual Government departments will co-ordinate their work programmes more effectively and improve collaboration through the creation of a more formal strategic thinking network that will be overseen by the National Security Adviser.
- A National Security Communications Strategy will be established in order to set out how the UK will use strategic communications in the delivery of its national security objectives.
- Existing centres of excellence within Government departments will be developed to meet the needs of the broader national security community. As a starting point, a virtual hub for counter proliferation technical assessment, based in the MOD, will join up proliferation expertise from across the community and wider Government.

An annual report of progress on implementation will be presented to Parliament for scrutiny by the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the National Security Strategy. A new National Security Risk Assessment will be undertaken every two years, along with a new NSS and SDSR which will be published every five years. The Government's intention in instituting regular reviews is to "ensure that the fundamental judgements remain right, that the changes its sets out are affordable and that it provides the right basis on which to deliver security for the UK, its interests and people".⁹

In order to utilise the expertise of the private sector, non-governmental organisations and international partners, regular forums led by the relevant Government departments will also be held.

2 Conclusions of the SDSR

Both the NSS and the SDSR acknowledge that there are competing demands that have helped to shape the conclusions of the review with respect to British defence policy and changes to the size and structure of the Armed Forces.

Operations in Afghanistan remain the priority until 2015 and therefore the resources and capabilities required to meet the demands of that campaign are protected within the SDSR.

⁹ HM Government, *A strong Britain in an age of uncertainty: the national security strategy*, Cm 7953, October 2010, p.70

However, the review also notes that the nature of warfare in 2020 and beyond is uncertain and therefore it is vital to maintain capabilities that would allow the UK to react to the demands of a changing strategic environment. Establishing a balance between these two competing demands is also inherently complicated by the need to address the budget deficit within defence, which has been estimated at £38bn over the next ten years, and bring the Armed Forces back into harmony after a sustained period of overstretch.

2.1 Defence Budget

With an unfunded liability of £38bn over ten years, one of the main objectives of the SDSR was to bring defence policy, plans, commitments and resources back into balance and establish an affordable defence programme going forward.

The Comprehensive Spending Review subsequently confirmed that over the period of the CSR, defence spending 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%. The total defence budget over the four years of the CSR has therefore been set at:

Table 2.13: Ministry of Defence

	£ billion				
	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
Resource DEL ¹	24.3	24.9	25.2	24.9	24.7
Capital DEL	8.6	8.9	9.1	9.2	8.7
Total DEL	32.9	33.8	34.4	34.1	33.5
Departmental AME	2.8	2.8	3.1	3.3	3.4

1 In this table, Resource DEL excludes depreciation and AME excludes non cash items

Source: HM Treasury, Spending Review 2010, Cm 7942

The defence budget will continue to meet the unofficial NATO spending target of 2% of GDP.¹⁰

On the basis of the conclusions and recommendations in the SDSR it is expected that at least £4.3bn of savings will be made in non-front line activities, of which approximately £3bn is planned from efficiency programmes; and that the MOD’s administration costs will reduce by 33% over the CSR period.

Net additional costs of military operations in Afghanistan will continue to be funded from the Treasury Reserve. For each year in the CSR period the Special Reserve has been forecast at £4bn, £3.8bn, £3.8bn and £3.5bn.¹¹

In his Statement to the House on 19 October, the Prime Minister also suggested:

The precise budgets beyond 2015 will be agreed in future spending reviews. My own strong view is that this structure [Future Force 2020] will require year-on-year real terms growth in the defence budget in the years beyond 2015.¹²

¹⁰ Information on comparative defence expenditure in NATO Member States is available from the [NATO website](#).
¹¹ HM Treasury, *Spending Review 2010*, Cm 7924, 20 October 2010, p.57
¹² HC Deb 19 October 2010, c799

2.2 Policy Priorities

In order to deliver on the strategic objectives of the NSS, while working within these constraints, the SDSR therefore makes a number of assumptions about the nature of the strategic environment up to 2020, the changing nature of warfare, and how the armed forces should be reconfigured accordingly to meet the 'Adaptable' posture. At the heart of the SDSR is an awareness that the UK cannot afford to do everything and therefore it is essential to prioritise what it does, where, when and with whom:

- Asymmetric tactics, such as cyber warfare, will not only define the actions of non-state actors but will increasingly shape state-on-state warfare as adversaries attempt to overcome conventional military superiority and level the technological playing field.
- The UK's relationships with key allies will be crucial in managing changes to the structure and capabilities of the Armed Forces, both in terms of collectively maintaining a full spectrum of capabilities, but also the ability to reconstitute or regenerate capabilities in the future.
- The UK will remain ready to use armed force where necessary to protect its national interests. Future forces will be smaller but they will retain their geographical reach and the ability to operate across the entire spectrum of military operations.
- 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.
- The UK will focus more on tackling risks before they escalate and on exerting UK influence as part of the overall national security architecture. There will, therefore, 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.
- Although it has been acknowledged that the UK will rarely act alone, it will maintain the ability to do so where others cannot be expected to help.
- The Government is prioritising tackling the deficit and success in Afghanistan and believes that these must, for the moment, take priority over defence's investment in some military capabilities needed for the longer term.
- Priority must be given over the next decade to recovering capabilities damaged or reduced as a result of overstretch.
- The UK will invest in programmes that provide flexibility and advanced capabilities and reduce legacy capabilities which are less likely to be utilised in a strategic environment that places great value on precision weaponry and the increasing use of unmanned and cyber capabilities.
- 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.

- 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.

2.3 Planning Assumptions and Capabilities

On the basis of the new military tasks, the Defence Planning Assumptions have been revised accordingly to provide a policy framework for planning the future force structure and set a benchmark against which overstretch can be measured. The new DPA 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).¹³

In comparison the previous DPA, which were revised in 2004, suggested that as a norm, and without causing overstretch, the Armed Forces must be capable of conducting three simultaneous, enduring operations of small to medium-scale. Given time to prepare, the UK should be capable of undertaking a demanding large-scale intervention operation while still maintaining a commitment to a small-scale peace support operation.¹⁴

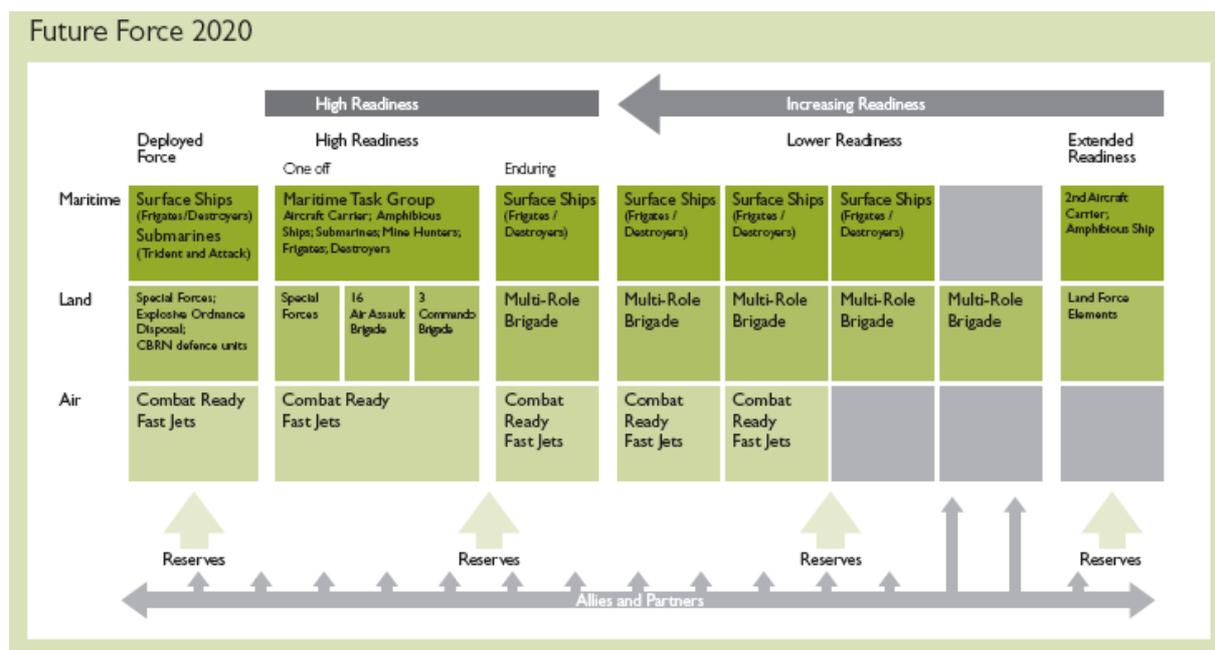
The intention for Future Force 2020, therefore, is to reconfigure military capability to be flexible, adaptable and expeditionary. The future force structure will provide the ability to deploy highly capable assets quickly, but also prepare a greater scale and range of capability if required. Therefore 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; and greater operational co-operation will be sought with allies.

¹³ An intervention operation is considered a short term, high impact military deployment (eg. Sierra Leone in 2000). Stabilisation operations are longer term, mainly land-based operations, to stabilise and resolve conflict situations, normally in partnership with others (eg. Afghanistan). Non-enduring operations are those which last less than six months and typically require a force to be deployed and then withdrawn without replacement (eg. Lebanon in 2006, or a counter-strike terrorist operation). Enduring operations are defined as lasting for more than six months and normally involve the rotation of forces.

¹⁴ Further detail is available in Library Research Paper RP04/71, *The Defence White Paper*, September 2004

In general Future Force 2020 will comprise three broad elements:

- The Deployed Force – which consists of forces engaged on operations and those forces which conduct permanent operations essential to national security, including the nuclear deterrent, the maritime presence in the South Atlantic and UK air defence.
- The High Readiness Force – which allow the UK to react rapidly to crises and constitute a balance of highly capable land, air and maritime capabilities.
- The Lower Readiness Force – including those personnel recently returned from operations and those preparing to enter a period of high readiness. These forces will support enduring operations and provide additional flexibility.



Source: HM Government, *Strategic Defence and Security Review*, Cm 7948, October 2010

In order to meet the aspirations and objectives of Future Force 2020, the following changes to the configuration of each of the Services will be made. In many cases further decisions have yet to be taken and therefore the full implications of these changes are unclear.

Royal Navy

With the exception of a 10-year gap in current Carrier Strike capability, core maritime capabilities are largely preserved in the SDSR, albeit on a smaller scale.

- **Manpower Strength** – 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. It is not anticipated that personnel reductions will begin before April 2011.
- **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 reliance on overseas basing and overflight rights remains. Therefore it is necessary to retain an operational carrier.

HMS *Ark Royal* will be decommissioned immediately.¹⁵ Either the remaining aircraft carrier HMS *Illustrious* or the helicopter carrier HMS *Ocean* will be decommissioned¹⁶ following a short study of which provides the most effective operational helicopter platform capability. The Harrier fleet will be retired by April 2011. It is the Government's view that the Tornado fleet represents a more versatile platform for the UK's security needs in the near term. The MOD has estimated that retiring Harrier in 2011 will save approximately £450m over the next four years and around £900m in total.¹⁷

The MOD will continue to procure the Queen Elizabeth-class of aircraft carrier to provide a Carrier Strike capability from 2020. One vessel will be held in extended readiness (or potentially sold),¹⁸ while the operational carrier will be fitted with catapults and arrestor gear to enable it to routinely fly 12 of the carrier variant of the Joint Strike Fighter aircraft (the F35C), alongside a mix of Chinook and Merlin transport helicopters and Apache attack helicopters.¹⁹ The carrier would retain the capacity to deploy up to 36 aircraft as previously planned. The change to the carrier flight deck will also allow the carrier to be interoperable with American and French aircraft, should that prove necessary. 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, although the SDSR does not provide any figures on the potential size of the final fleet.

Procurement of the conventional carrier variant instead of the STOVL variant of JSF will provide longer range, greater payload and will be cheaper,²⁰ reducing through-life costs by approximately 25%. The plan remains for JSF to be manned by both Royal Navy and RAF personnel.

- **Amphibious Capability** – The Royal Marines will be retained²¹ and provide one of the two very high readiness battle groups within the future force structure, although a reduction in Corps manpower of approximately 600 personnel is expected.²² There will, however, be a reduction in the scale of amphibious capability, retaining at high readiness the ability to land and sustain a Commando group of up to 1,800 personnel as opposed to the ability to undertake amphibious operations at brigade level,²³ approximately a two-thirds reduction in the size of the force that could be landed ashore. One Bay-class amphibious support ship will be decommissioned and one Albion-class landing and command ship will be placed at extended readiness in 2011.

¹⁵ The planned out of service date for Ark Royal was autumn 2014.

¹⁶ The Royal Navy document *Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010: Supporting Question and Answer Pack* suggests that the vessel which is decommissioned will be placed in extended readiness until the Queen-Elizabeth class enters service (p.20)

¹⁷ *SDSR Briefing Pack: RAF*

¹⁸ This will be reviewed in the next SDSR in 2015. In the event that the second carrier was sold, continuous carrier strike capability would rely on co-operation with a close ally such as France. Retaining this flexibility of approach is considered to be at the core of the Government's Adaptable approach.

¹⁹ The exact force mix would depend on the mission.

²⁰ The US Government Accountability Office estimated in a report in March 2010 that the STOVL engine alone would be approximately \$16m more expensive than the conventional engine (GAO report 10-382, *Joint Strike Fighter: additional costs and delays risks not meeting warfighter requirements on time*, 19 March 2010)

²¹ Speculation prior to the publication of the SDSR had suggested that the Royal Marines could be merged with the Parachute Regiment and subsumed into the Army structure.

²² Royal Navy, *Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010: Supporting Question and Answer Pack*, p.22

²³ This is also consistent with the changes proposed for 16 Air Assault brigade.

The full range of specialist amphibious shipping will, however, continue to operate in order to maintain the ability to grow this capability in the future.

- **Surface Fleet** –The fleet of frigates and destroyers will be reduced from 23 to 19 vessels. The four remaining Type 22 frigates will be decommissioned during 2011: HMS *Cornwall*, HMS *Cumberland*, HMS *Chatham* and HMS *Campbeltown*.²⁴ With a reduction in the fleet, the Royal Navy has acknowledged that “fewer ships will mean fewer activities. We have not yet undertaken the detailed design work to establish how this will affect the Fleet Programme but this work is now underway”.²⁵ Despite the proposed cut in the surface fleet, the Royal Navy has sought to reiterate that “the Navy will still be able to deploy a Task Group worldwide in support of our national interests. With 19 destroyers and frigates we will continue to sustain a maritime presence in the Gulf, the Indian Ocean and the south Atlantic, as well as contributing to counter piracy, counter narcotics and the security of the UK and home waters”.²⁶

The full fleet of seven Astute-class submarines will be procured,²⁷ along with the six Type 45 destroyers. The MOD is committed to procuring the Type 26 Global Combat ship to replace the Type 23 frigate from 2021 onwards. The Sandown and Hunt-class mine countermeasures vessels will remain in service and start the transition to a future capability from 2018 as part of the Mine countermeasures, Hydrographic, Patrol Craft (MHPC) project.

- **Rotary Wing** – In line with the reduction in the destroyer/frigate fleet further work on the requirement for the Lynx Mk3 will be required. The Sea King Mk7 will continue to support operations in Afghanistan, after which it is expected that they will be gradually withdrawn from service by 2016. The Merlin helicopter force will be upgraded to enhance its ability to support amphibious operations. Decisions on the search and rescue programme (SAR H) have yet to be made.²⁸
- **Trident** – The UK’s strategic nuclear deterrent will be retained. The Trident Value for Money review concluded, however, that minimum effective deterrence could be achieved with a smaller nuclear weapons capability. Therefore the number of operational launch tubes on the Vanguard-class submarine will be reduced over the next few years 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 by the mid 2020s. Continuous-at-sea deterrence (CASD) will be maintained.

Initial gate of the Trident programme will be at the end of 2010 and Main Gate will be delayed until 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 final number of submarines will be taken at Main Gate.

²⁴ These vessels had out-of-service dates of 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2020 respectively (HC Deb 3 July 2009, c463-4W)

²⁵ Royal Navy, *Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010: Supporting Question and Answer Pack*

²⁶ *ibid*

²⁷ Of the planned class of seven, only six had been ordered thus far.

²⁸ In June 2010 the decision was taken to suspend the programme over concerns that the privatisation project as it stood did not offer best value for money.

These decisions are expected to reduce costs by £750m over the spending review period and £3.2bn over the next ten years. The £750m savings over the period of the CSR will largely come from the decision to reduce the number of missiles and warheads deployed aboard the Vanguard class. Overall savings and savings from deferred spending over the next ten years will also be the result of:

- Deferring a decision on the replacement warhead until at least 2019 which will defer **£500m** of spending from the next 10 years.
- Reducing the cost of the successor submarine missile compartment by reducing its size and configuring the platform with only eight operational missile tubes, instead of the planned 12, thereby making an outright saving of up to **£250m**.²⁹
- **£1bn** of spending will also be deferred, and potentially removed, over the next ten years from the submarine infrastructure and support network.
- Under the Submarine Enterprise Performance Programme [SEPP] the MOD also expects to deliver up to **£900m** of savings over the next ten years by improving commercial arrangements with industrial suppliers.

The MOD has also suggested that some of the deferred £2bn spend could be translated into real savings in later years. The MOD has suggested that savings achieved from the SEPP will be used to offset the additional costs of delaying the successor programme:

The deferral does add cost to the successor programme but we are embarking on a programme to improve the efficiency of the submarine enterprise. The savings we expect this efficiency programme to generate will more than offset any additional costs resulting from the deferral of the submarines in service date.³⁰

Indeed, the MOD suggests that only extending the lives of the Vanguard-class beyond 2028 would incur disproportionate costs:

The value for money review showed that 2028 was a more realistic estimate and that it was possible to extend the lives of the Vanguard class boats to match. This involves extending them by 9 years beyond their original design life of 25 years. Any further would require a disproportionate level of spend to keep them in service and would jeopardise British industry's ability to design and construct nuclear submarines – a critical sovereign capability.³¹

On the issue of where funding for the replacement programme will come from, the Royal Navy has stated:

The defence budget is funding the Trident replacement as it is a defence capability which contributes to the security of the UK. The Government is committed to ensuring that the future budget will be sufficient to deliver the 2020 Force Structure and the Trident renewal programme.³²

²⁹ It has been suggested that the change in the number of missile tubes could point toward a possible re-designed Astute-class submarine for the successor platform.

³⁰ [SDSR Briefing Pack: Trident V4M Q&A](#)

³¹ [SDSR Briefing Pack: Trident V4M Q&A](#)

³² Royal Navy, *Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010: Supporting Question and Answer Pack*

As part of the SDSR, the UK's declaratory policy was also reviewed. The SDSR confirmed that the "UK would not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapon states parties to the NPT". This assurance would not apply, however, to any state in material breach of the NPT.

- **Royal Fleet Auxiliary** – The future of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary is subject to a separate review that has yet to report. However, as outlined above, the SDSR sets out the intention to decommission one Bay-class amphibious support ship. Plans to withdraw a further auxiliary oiler and one auxiliary oiler replenishment vessel have also been set out.³³

British Army

The priority afforded to operations in Afghanistan until 2015 has largely defined much of the Army's short term force structure.

- **Manpower** – 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.
- **Headquarters** – 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.

The UK will retain the ability to command multi-national operations through the UK-led Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC), its capacity to deliver a fully deployable, divisional HQ and the ability to regenerate a second deployable divisional HQ. The second of the UK's operational divisional HQ will be converted to a force preparation role. Communications and logistics support to headquarters ARRC will be reduced.

- **Brigades** – The Army will reduce by one the number of deployable brigades and reconfigure into five multi-role brigades, each including reconnaissance, armoured, mechanised and light infantry forces, which will be self-supporting. One brigade will be maintained at high readiness, available for an intervention operation, with four in support to ensure the ability to sustain an enduring stabilisation operation. 16 Air Assault brigade will remain as a high readiness intervention brigade.
- **Equipment** – The FRES reconnaissance and utility vehicle programmes will be retained. To reflect the assessment of likely adversaries and conflict scenarios in the future, 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%.
- **Military Stabilisation and Support Teams** – the capacity to deploy joint civilian-military Stabilisation Response Teams will be enhanced. These teams will be bespoke, flexible and able to conduct a range of tasks from assessing or monitoring an emergent crisis, to providing expert advice and training through to post conflict reconstruction.

³³ Royal Navy, *Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010: Supporting Question and Answer Pack*

Royal Air Force

According to the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Dalton, the future vision for the RAF in 2020 is for a force built around the concept of deployable 'combat ISTAR'.³⁴

- **Manpower** – The RAF will be reduced by 5,000 personnel to 33,000 by 2015.³⁵ The expectation is that the RAF will require 31,500 personnel by 2020.
- **Combat Air Fleet** – By 2020 the fleet will be based around two platforms: the Typhoon and the Joint Strike Fighter, with one third of aircraft retained at high readiness. The Harrier GR9 fleet will be retired by April 2011; while the Tornado fleet will be maintained, albeit reduced to a size based on a minimum of five operational squadrons and an operational conversion unit.³⁶ The Tornado fleet will retire progressively once the Typhoon force has the capability and force size to take on the offensive support task. A decision on the force balance between the Typhoon and the JSF is expected to be assessed as part of the next defence review.
- **Airlift/Tankers** – The future transport fleet will be based on 22 A400M transport aircraft, and seven C17 transport aircraft. 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 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 MOD has estimated that rationalising the strategic airlift fleet more quickly will save approximately £800m over the next 10 years.³⁷
- **ISTAR** – In addition to the combat ISTAR capabilities of the fast jet fleet, capabilities will focus on the E3D Sentry AWACS to provide airborne command, control and surveillance; the Rivet Joint signals intelligence aircraft;³⁸ and an expanded fleet of unmanned air vehicles.

The Nimrod MRA4 maritime patrol aircraft programme will be cancelled, a decision which is expected to save over £2bn over the next ten years.³⁹ In response to concerns that the cancellation of Nimrod, and thereby an element of the UK's maritime patrol capability, would place the strategic nuclear deterrent at risk, the Navy commented:

The NSC judge that there is sufficient balance of capabilities within the SSBN, SSN [attack submarine], frigate, RW [rotary wing] and MCM [mine countermeasures] fleets to maintain the required level of assurance for CASD [continuous at sea deterrence]. The decision to delete MRA4 was made after carefully considering the risks associated with this.⁴⁰

³⁴ Intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance.

³⁵ This is in addition to the reduction of 2,000 personnel made during the 2010 planning round. See Library briefing SN/SG/2621, [Defence Employment](#)

³⁶ At present the RAF operates seven Tornado squadrons and one operational conversion squadron.

³⁷ [SDSR Briefing Pack: RAF](#), October 2010

³⁸ This platform is replacing the Nimrod R1.

³⁹ [SDSR Briefing Pack: RAF](#), October 2010

⁴⁰ Royal Navy, [Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010: Supporting Question and Answer Pack](#)

The Sentinel airborne ground surveillance aircraft will be withdrawn from service once it is no longer required to support operations in Afghanistan. Its capability will be delivered by an element of the Scavenger programme.⁴¹

- **Helicopters** – The MOD will purchase 12 additional heavy lift Chinook helicopters⁴² to give a fleet total of 60, and extend the life of the 24 Puma helicopters, which along with the 25-strong Merlin fleet will ensure that there is sufficient helicopter capability for UK forces both in Afghanistan and in the future.
- **RAF Regiment** – The reduction in the overall size of the deployable air force will lead to a corresponding reduction in the size of the regiment by one or two field squadrons post-2015 and the intended withdrawal of UK combat forces from Afghanistan.⁴³

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. The size of the UK's regular Special Forces front line units will be maintained and support capabilities will be enhanced.
- A UK Defence Cyber Operations Group will be established as part of the wider cyber security agenda. It is anticipated that future conflict will see cyber operations conducted in parallel with conventional operations across the land, sea and air environment.

2.4 Personnel and Welfare Issues

Prior to the General Election in May 2010 both the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats set out in their respective manifestos the intention to rebuild the Military Covenant should they form the next Government. That intent has shaped many of the Armed Forces welfare policies that have subsequently been announced since the Coalition Government was established,⁴⁴ and formed a fundamental part of the work of the Strategic Defence and Security Review.

In June 2010 the Prime Minister also announced that the Military Covenant would be enshrined in law for the first time. The independent Armed Forces Covenant Task Force, which was established in early 2010, and is led by Professor Hew Strachan, is seeking to identify innovative solutions to rebuilding the Covenant, and is expected to report in mid-late November 2010. It has been suggested that proposals to put the Military Covenant on a statutory basis could be introduced in the later stages of the forthcoming *Armed Forces Bill*.

⁴¹ The Sentinel airborne stand-off radar came into service in December 2008. The Scavenger programme is a requirement for a medium-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle, and forms part of the MOD's wider ISTAR programme, Solomon.

⁴² As opposed to the 22 additional helicopters announced in December 2009 as part of a package of force enhancements for Afghanistan. The number has been reduced on the basis that the additional aircraft would not have been available before 2015 and therefore changes can be made without affecting overall operations in Afghanistan.

⁴³ [SDSR: Message from the Chief of the Air Staff](#), 19 October 2010

⁴⁴ In June 2010 the Government announced that the Operational Service Allowance would be doubled for a six month operational tour; in July 2010 changes to the policy governing rest and recuperation for Service personnel deployed on operations were announced; while in October the MOD announced measures for university scholarships for children of Service personnel killed on active operations since 1990 and the publication of a report on mental health services for personnel and veterans, the recommendations of which are currently under review.

On the whole, however, many of the proposals or recommendations that have been announced do not have an accompanying timeframe and are therefore likely to progress as part of wider SDSR implementation over the course of 2011. Many of these proposals also do not have associated costs. In an accompanying document to the SDSR, the MOD has stated:

Honouring the Covenant doesn't necessarily have to mean spending large amounts of money. Ensuring that Service personnel, their families and veterans are treated fairly can often be about adapting existing policies where the particular needs of the Service community had not previously been taken account of. Many of the commitments in the Programme for Government will be led by other Government departments and will not be reliant on defence funding being made available.⁴⁵

As part of the SDSR, further personnel and welfare-related measures were announced:

- **New Employment Model** - The current package of terms and conditions of Service personnel will be updated in order to make the overall package simpler to administer, more cost effective and one which offers greater choice and encourages greater personal responsibility. This review will be wide ranging and will include a review into the provision of accommodation, pay, career structure, and allowances.

On the issue of allowances the MOD has indicated its intention to cut approximately £300m per year, over the period of the CSR, from Service and civilian personal allowances (£50m from civilian allowances and £250m from military allowances). The MOD has suggested that continuing with the current package of allowances is unsustainable and inappropriate as many of them are not consistent with the demands of modern life or the lifestyle choices of military personnel.⁴⁶ The housing model, for example, is considered to be outdated and does not take sufficient account of the desire of more people to own homes with their partners. Which allowances will be affected by cuts are not yet known, although it is widely expected that existing medical and dental benefits will remain.⁴⁷ Any new package is also expected to reflect the priority that the Government has attached to renewing the Military Covenant and to supporting deployed forces.

This study will take place over the next 12-18 months and timelines for implementation are expected to be devised following the concept phase. It is not intended for the review to be undertaken as part of the work of the defence reform unit, although the MOD has indicated that it could be linked in the future depending on possible outcomes.

- **Healthcare** – The provision of healthcare to Service personnel will be enhanced by an extra £20m per year.
- **Civilians** – The MOD civil service will be reduced by 25,000 by 2015 to 60,000 personnel.
- **Training** – The contract for the Defence Training Review was terminated on 19 October due to the inability of the preferred supplier to deliver a value for money solution. Further options for improving training across all three services will now be

⁴⁵ SDSR Briefing Pack, October 2010

⁴⁶ HM Government, *The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, Cm 7948, October 2010

⁴⁷ Royal Navy, *Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010: Supporting Question and Answer Pack*

examined, including how best to make use of the investment already made at St Athan where training under the DTR was to be concentrated.

- **Force Generation and Sustainability** – A review of how the Armed Forces undertakes the tasks of force generation and sustainability will be undertaken by the three Service Chiefs and is expected to consider issues such as tour lengths and intervals and harmony guidelines. That work will be completed by spring 2011.

2.5 Defence Estate

Due to the number of changes in force levels and structures set out in the SDSR, requisite rationalisation of the defence estate is expected to be achieved:

- **Army** – Half of the remaining forces in Germany (approximately 20,000 Service personnel in total)⁴⁸ will return to the UK by 2015, with the aim of withdrawing all forces by 2020. The Government has asserted that “there is no longer any operational requirement for UK forces to be based there, and the current arrangements impose financial costs on the UK, disruption on personnel and their families and opportunity costs in terms of wider Army coherence”.⁴⁹ Under the NATO status of Forces Supplementary Agreement the UK is obliged to pay reinstatement costs to the German Federal government, although the exact nature of those residual costs has yet to be determined.⁵⁰

The rationalisation of Army command structures and the reductions in equipment may also eliminate the requirement for some locations and reduce the infrastructure required at others.

- **RAF** – Due to the cancellation of the Nimrod MRA4 programme, the withdrawal of Harrier fleet, and the reduction in the size of the Tornado fleet, RAF Kinloss and two other bases will no longer be required by the RAF.⁵¹ No decisions have yet been taken on their future, however, as some bases may be retained for forces returning from Germany or for other military purposes. Final decisions on the defence estate will be taken on the basis of detailed investment appraisals and wider impact assessments.

In the short debate on the SDSR on 19 October 2010, James Gray MP made the suggestion that RAF Lyneham, which is due to close in 2012, should also be considered for the potential re-housing of Army personnel returning from Germany, given its close proximity to Salisbury Plain.⁵²

- **Naval Estate** – The Royal Navy estate will be rationalised, although exact decisions have yet to be taken. Both the naval bases at Portsmouth and Devonport will be retained. Portsmouth will continue to be the home port for the Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carrier.

⁴⁸ A total footprint of approximately 43,000 personnel including dependents and civilian staff

⁴⁹ HM Government, *The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, Cm 7948, October 2010, p.28. The additional costs of military activity in Germany were estimated in 2009-2010 to be £340m (HL Deb 5 January 2010, c4-6WA)

⁵⁰ HC Deb 28 October 2010, c444W

⁵¹ These two additional bases have yet to be identified. RAF Lossiemouth has been touted as one possibility given the planned reductions in the Tornado fleet and the fact that an extensive maintenance facility for the Tornado already exists at RAF Marham.

⁵² HC Deb 19 October 2010, c814

Overall, the rationalisation of the defence estate including the sale of surplus land and buildings is expected to generate running cost savings of up to £350m per year by 2014-15.

The sale of the defence stake in the telecommunications spectrum and assets such as the Defence Support Group and the Marchwood Sea Mounting Centre is also likely to raise in excess of £500m.

2.6 Defence Reform and the Defence Industrial Strategy

Alongside the SDSR the government also announced in summer 2010 that it would conduct a full organisational review of the Ministry of Defence. There would be two themes to this review: structural reform which will see the MOD reorganised into three pillars: Strategy and Policy, Armed Forces and Procurement and Estates; and a cultural shift towards a leaner and less centralised organisation combined with devolved processes which carry greater accountability and transparency. The scope of the Defence Reform review is expected to be wide ranging and will examine in detail all major areas of defence: policy, strategy and finance; non-front line elements of the Armed Forces; defence acquisition, commercial, estates and corporate services. The Defence Reform Unit will also examine options for devolving greater responsibility for the running of the Services themselves, including an assessment of whether the current Senior Rank structure across the Services is appropriate for a post-SDSR world.

To oversee implementation, a Defence Reform Unit has been established within the MOD to help plan and execute any structural/organisational changes. That work will proceed on a separate track with a view to completion of a blueprint for reform by the end of July 2011, although early high-level findings may be woven into the SDSR implementation process. Lord Levene is chairing the Steering Group, comprised of internal and external experts, which will be supported by a civil service implementation team. The inaugural meeting of the Steering Group was held on 6 September 2010.⁵³

In addition, the government remains committed to pushing ahead with the process of acquisition reform, including the implementation of a 10-year planning horizon agreed with the Treasury, and audited by the NAO every year, to provide more clarity and predicatability. The Government has already made clear its support for the UK defence industry as a strategic asset and its intention to support the drive for exports. Both of these commitments were outlined in the SDSR, although the Government has committed to publishing an updated and improved version of the Defence Industrial Strategy. That strategy will define the UK's sovereign requirements and how associated industrial capabilities will be protected; and provide more detail on helping small and medium enterprises and supporting exports, both of which have been identified as two of the Government's highest priorities. A Green Paper will be published before the end of 2010 which will then lead into a consultation period before culminating in the publication of a White Paper on Defence Industrial and Technology Policy in spring 2011. That White Paper will set out the Government's approach to industry and technology until the next SDSR in 2015.

As part of the SDSR implementation process the government has also made clear that it intends to engage in an extensive programme of commercial re-negotiations with its industry suppliers in order to try and achieve cost savings.

⁵³ See: <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/DefenceReformUnitStartsWork.htm>

3 Initial Reactions

Prior to the publication of the SDSR, debate and speculation over the possible outcome was wide ranging. The main focus of commentary was on potential capability and manpower cuts and whether the review, despite any best intentions, would be budget driven as opposed to policy driven. Indeed, many analysts pointed to the intention to publish the SDSR in parallel with the Comprehensive Spending Review as evidence of its budgetary focus; an argument that was confounded by the publication of a leaked letter to the Prime Minister in September, in which the Secretary of State for Defence suggested: “Frankly this process is looking less and less defensible as a proper SDSR and more like a “super CSR”.⁵⁴ Questions over the replacement of Trident also dominated, in particular those arguments calling for the MOD to scrap Trident, and which government department should fund the capital costs of the replacement programme. The inherent dilemma of planning, and funding, ‘the’ war (Afghanistan), as opposed to ‘a’ war in the longer term also arose, with much of the focus on where equipment and basing cuts should subsequently fall. The speed at which the defence review was being conducted also led to criticism across the board. Many academics expressed concern that the pace of the review had precluded any wide ranging discussion of strategy and that the debate had inevitably focused on capability cuts as opposed to bigger strategic questions.⁵⁵ In a preliminary report on the SDSR in September 2010 the Defence Select Committee expressed its concern over the timetable:

The rapidity with which the SDSR process is being undertaken is quite startling. A process which was not tried and tested is being expected to deliver radical outcomes within a highly concentrated time-frame. We conclude that mistakes will be made and some of them may be serious [...]

We can understand that there is an urgency to the SDSR process, both in terms of alignment with a CSR intended seriously to address the budget deficit, and in terms of the pressing need for a defence review a decade since the last was undertaken. However, the Department could end up with only short-term priorities, misaligned resources, a barely reformed acquisition process and a structure short of manpower to deliver good performance and improperly configured for its tasks.

We welcome the Secretary of State’s determination that this should be a real review rather than just a cost-cutting exercise. However, we are not convinced that the combination of a budgetary strait-jacket (*sic*), the short timescale, and the apparent unwillingness by the Ministry to think outside existing structures, will deliver that end.⁵⁶

In announcing the SDSR in the House the Prime Minister, David Cameron, sought to fend off criticism at the outset on the motivations behind the review. He stated:

First, this is not simply a cost-saving exercise to get to grips with the biggest budget deficit in post-war history. It is about taking the right decisions to protect our national security in the years ahead, but let me say this: the two are not separate. Our national security depends on our economic strength, and vice versa.⁵⁷

The Leader of the Opposition, Ed Miliband, refuted that argument, however, commenting:

Many people will believe that this review is a profound missed opportunity. It is a spending review dressed up as a defence review; it has been chaotically conducted

⁵⁴ “Defence cuts: Liam Fox’s leaked letter in full”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 September 2010

⁵⁵ See for example, Dr Paul Cornish, *Strategy in Austerity*, Chatham House Report, October 2010

⁵⁶ Defence Select Committee, *The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, HC 345, Session 2010-11, p.4-6

⁵⁷ HC Deb 19 October 2010, c797

and hastily prepared; and it is simply not credible as a strategic blueprint for our future defence needs.⁵⁸

The speed of the review and the costs versus policy priorities debate has inevitably opened up a much broader discussion, after the review's publication, on whether the conclusions of the SDSR can indeed be considered strategic and whether they leave the Armed Forces capable of meeting the national security objectives set down in the NSS. In a short debate in the House of Lords, Lord Robertson, a former Secretary of State for Defence and NATO Secretary General commented:

I can say to the leader of the House that I know a strategic review, I have done a strategic review, and this is not a strategic review.

Instead, will it not be seen by the country as a cobbled-together exercise on the back of a letter from the Treasury calling for deep and random cuts in the defence budget? As such, it is unworthy of those who serve in Her Majesty's forces today.⁵⁹

Lord Boyce also called the SDSR a "cash-driven defence review", going on to comment "I certainly cannot possibly dignify it with the word 'strategic'".⁶⁰

As outlined above, the two core objectives of the NSS are a secure and resilient UK and the maintenance of a full and active role for the UK on the world stage; what David Cameron has referred to as 'no strategic shrinkage'. The subsequent National Security Risk Assessment also identified international military crises as a Tier One threat to the UK. Despite the emphasis in both the NSS and SDSR on 'soft power', diplomacy and conflict prevention, taken together these assessments imply the need to maintain conventional military capability across the whole spectrum of operations. As Colonel Richard Williams observed:

In the "Tier 1" basket is the more nebulous need for the UK to counter an "international military crisis between states that draws in Britain, its allies and other state and non-state actors". This catch-all phrase positions the UK for participating in costly military quagmires of questionable worth, other people's wars and working to objectives set by foreign nations. But far more damaging, it provides the MOD, the Civil Service and the Service Chiefs almost unlimited freedom to choose their own course of travel...⁶¹

Yet the reconfiguration of the Armed Forces envisaged in the SDSR has led many analysts to question whether there is a mismatch between strategy and the means to implement it. The loss of carrier strike capability for the next decade, the reduction in amphibious capability and the revision of the planning assumptions to reflect a much reduced intervention capability and a smaller stabilisation capability have raised questions over the UK's capacity for effective force projection in the future or its ability to conduct operations on the level of the Falklands Conflict, the Gulf War in 1990 or indeed to make a meaningful contribution to the types of coalition operations seen more recently in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁶² A future intervention operation envisages a force size of approximately two thirds of that which was originally deployed into Iraq in 2003;⁶³ while the stabilisation capability envisaged in the new

⁵⁸ HC Deb 19 October 2010, c803

⁵⁹ HL Deb 19 October 2010, c784

⁶⁰ Ibid, c785

⁶¹ Colonel Richard Williams, "After the review, can Britain still defend itself?", *The Times*, 20 October 2010

⁶² See for example, Con Coughlin, "Defence review: these cuts leave us vulnerable to our enemies around the world", *The Guardian*, 21 October 2010

⁶³ 46,000 personnel during the combat phase

DPA is again, approximately two thirds the size of the stabilisation force which is currently deployed in Afghanistan.⁶⁴

Professor Michael Clarke of RUSI has observed this apparent divide between strategy and resources. While he argues that there is “some clear grand strategy” behind the NSS and the SDSR he concludes that the “Government has salami sliced the Forces, making savings where it can, and runs the risk of creating an eccentric force structure to back up a pretty ambitious national strategy”. He argues that:

Here is the mis-match. If we are to take the National Security Strategy really seriously, we might logically be looking at a much greater shift of resources from military ‘hard power’ towards diplomatic, economic or cultural ‘soft power’ – playing our role in the world in more subtle ways.

But the Government feels instinctively that this would be too much of a risk, so the strategy has been to interpret ‘punching above our weight’ essentially in conventional military terms; and terms that we think matter to the United States. Agree with it or not, that part at least is consistent with the Prime Minister’s grand strategic view of what we should be doing in the world. This is why the two parts of the strategy do not match very well. The review has really struggled to get over the short-term pressures and has gone for the cuts that are possible, as opposed to those that might make a real difference to Britain’s long-term strategy.⁶⁵

Philip Stephens, writing in the *Financial Times*, agrees with this idea of a division between ambition and resources:

Mr Cameron’s administration is unwilling to surrender Britain’s global aspirations, but it is also unwilling to pay for them. The outcome is a defence posture that pretends every circle can be squared. Britain can meet all the threats to its security – old and new – and simultaneously slice an effective 15 per cent from the £38bn defence budget. The result? Aircraft carriers without jets.⁶⁶

An assessment by the International Institute for Strategic Studies suggests that this mismatch “leaves the UK still able to ‘punch above its weight’ but with the power of its punch reduced, and more dependent on partnerships with other countries”.⁶⁷ Indeed, the emphasis within the SDSR on alliances and partnerships as a means of overcoming potential capability gaps has led *Jane’s Defence Weekly* to argue:

Although there is a commitment to maintain a ‘broad spectrum’ of defence capability, there is considerably more space given over to the UK’s mutual dependence upon its allies and ensuring greater effect by combining its defence capability with development, diplomatic and intelligence capacity [...]

Nowhere in the SDSR is there any real acknowledgement that the risks of such sweeping cuts means that we may well identify a threat that we no longer have the ability to address.⁶⁸

That assessment goes on to conclude:

⁶⁴ Currently 9,500 personnel

⁶⁵ Professor Michael Clarke, “Has the defence review secured Britain’s place in the world?”, *RUSI Commentary*, 19 October 2010

⁶⁶ Philip Stephens, “How the carriers sank a defence strategy”, *The Financial Times*, 19 October 2010

⁶⁷ “Britain lowers its military sights”, IISS Briefing, 19 October 2010

⁶⁸ “Arm’s length approach sees the UK doing less”, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 27 October 2010

A hurried review, driven largely by the Treasury, may have made assumptions about the last wars on the ability of allies to agree – and the efficacy of an ‘arm’s length’ security strategy – that will tightly constrain our flexibility in the coming decade. Such constraints may potentially preclude, as examples, a second Falklands operation or even a similar action to that seen in Sierra Leone.

The UK military may have lost its ability to respond to these without recourse to its allies: fine and good, as long as the threats the country faces remain as they are, do not do anything unexpected and we march in step with all our friends abroad.⁶⁹

Dr Paul Cornish at Chatham House suggests, however, that while the review is indeed characterised by indecision or ‘muddling through’ this approach is not entirely unwelcome. He argues:

There is indecision, but deliberately and knowingly so; the government seems to be saying that some decisions cannot and need not be made today, or that it would be imprudent to do so. In other words, we have the beginnings of a risk-based approach to national strategy. This is to be welcomed: national strategy must be concerned with a vast array of challenges and it is inconceivable that preparations could be made to meet every one of them. Priorities must be reassessed as circumstances change. This is merely the beginning of a long and difficult process, one that will require frequent reconfiguration of strategic resources. But a start has been made in the right direction.⁷⁰

The Economist also concludes that “the government has made a goodish fist of a rotten hand” and that “Britain may not be quite so willing to throw itself into every fight going as it has been in the recent past, but this SDSR should be seen more as a tactical retreat than a surrender”.⁷¹

The decision to cut the UK’s carrier strike capability for the next decade, has epitomised this debate over grand strategy and whether the UK will be willing, or indeed able, to match the ambitions of the National Security Strategy. For many analysts the decision represents “a deliberate reduction of the UK’s capacity to act unilaterally far from home in the immediate years to come”,⁷² “explicitly lowers Britain’s level of ambition for expeditionary operations”,⁷³ and “questions the navy’s global reach”.⁷⁴ The ability of the UK to adequately defend the Falklands has been frequently raised as a concern in this regard.⁷⁵

Others have questioned the utility of the decision to procure the Queen Elizabeth-class if carrier strike is to be gapped for the next ten years. An article in *The Daily Telegraph* observed that “the decision to decommission Ark Royal, the Royal Navy’s flagship is troubling. If Britain can do without the strike capability provided by its aircraft carriers for the next decade, then why is it proceeding with the construction of two new carriers at a cost of £5bn”.⁷⁶ At a more technical level, concerns have also been expressed over the ability to regenerate a carrier strike capability ten years from now due to a loss in the skills set of pilots

⁶⁹ *ibid*

⁷⁰ *Evaluating the 2010 Strategy Review*, Chatham House, October 2010

⁷¹ “Painful, but not fatal”, *The Economist*, 19 October 2010

⁷² “Arm’s length approach sees the UK doing less”, *Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 27 October 2010

⁷³ “Britain lowers its military sights”, *IJSS Commentary*, 19 October 2010

⁷⁴ Christian Le Miere, “Cuts cast doubts over UK navy’s global reach”, *IJSS Commentary*, 19 October 2010

⁷⁵ In response to this criticism, the MOD has argued that the presence of the UK garrison on the Falkland Islands and the UK’s ability to rapidly reinforce by air, has a sufficient deterrent effect on any would-be adversaries (*SDSR Briefing*, October 2010)

⁷⁶ “Our armed forces pay for Labour’s neglect”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 October 2010

and carrier-based personnel. Indeed, the First Sea Lord has acknowledged that the “decline of skills and experience in maritime air operations may complicate the transition to JSF operations on the future carrier” but that “transition planning will seek to mitigate this risk”.⁷⁷ Specifically, it is envisaged that:

The successful recreation of the UK’s ability to operate aircraft from carriers will rest upon the leadership and support of everyone in defence, and the contribution of our international partners.⁷⁸

Several analysts have, on the other hand, considered the decision to maintain the Queen Elizabeth-class visionary in strategic terms and the epitome of a strategy/posture that seeks to be Adaptable. As *The Economist* noted “building a second carrier when the navy desperately needs smaller surface ships to patrol the sea lanes looks lopsided. But frigates can be easily built at a later date if they are needed, whereas the carriers are a once in 50 years decision”.⁷⁹ Admiral Lord West commented in the short debate in the Lords on 19 October:

I am delighted by the decision that we will go ahead with the two new aircraft carriers. That fits in exactly with the view that I think all of us have of the United Kingdom; namely, that we need global reach and that we are still a great power. A lot of people might deny that, but I argue that we are. We are one of the six richest nations in the world. We have commitments all around the world; we have huge investments around the world; we run global shipping; we are an important and great power. There is no doubt that, when it comes to flexibility and capability for global reach, aircraft carriers have it in spades.⁸⁰

This view is also shared by Air Chief Marshal Sir Brian Burridge who concludes that “the review makes a reasonably pragmatic match between strategy and force structure”.⁸¹

However, as an article in *The Daily Telegraph* observes: “the big test of whether the 2010 SDSR has been a success will come when the next strategic shock arrives. The Falklands War, the first Iraq War, the Balkan crisis, 9/11, the Afghanistan War, were all entirely unpredicted. No one knows that form the next strategic shock will take, only that it will come”.⁸²

⁷⁷ [SDSR Briefing](#), October 2010

⁷⁸ Message from the First Sea Lord, [Outcome of the Strategic Defence and Security Review](#), 19 October 2010

⁷⁹ “Painful, but not fatal”, *The Economist*, 19 October 2010

⁸⁰ HL Deb 19 October 2010, c788

⁸¹ Brian Burridge, 1 November 2010 “At last we have put better intelligence capability ahead of the nuclear deterrent”, *The Times*, 20 October 2010

⁸² “National security strategy’s real test will come when the next shock arrives”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 October 2010