



Strategic Defence Review Green Paper: Preliminary Observations

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The Government published its defence Green Paper on 3 February 2010. The observations and recommendations in that paper will now inform the work of a Strategic Defence Review which the Government has committed to undertaking shortly after the General Election. The Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats have also stated that they will hold a defence review should they take office.

This note sets out some of the background to the Green Paper, its main conclusions and some initial reactions within Parliament, the media and the wider defence community. This briefing will eventually form part of a larger Library Research Paper on the forthcoming Strategic Defence Review.

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1 Background

1.1 Current Strategic Context

The Strategic Defence Review in 1998 set the general tone for the strategic direction of defence policy under the Labour government. The Defence White Paper in 2003/2004, *Delivering Security in a Changing World*, updated the assumptions made in the SDR and configured them to the post 9/11 world. In the absence of a new defence white paper in the last six years, the UK's long term strategic priorities, subsequent defence planning assumptions and the capability requirements of each of the Services established in both the SDR and that 2003 paper have therefore provided the current strategic context for defence policy planning.

A brief summary of the conclusions of the SDR and the 2003 defence white paper is available in Library Research Paper RP08/57, [British Defence Policy since 1997](#).¹

¹ Further detail on the conclusions and recommendations of the 2003/2004 review is set out in Library Research Papers [RP 04/71](#), *The Defence White Paper*, 17 September 2004 and [RP 04/72](#), *The Defence White paper: Future Capabilities*, 17 September 2004.

1.2 A New Defence White Paper?

At the beginning of Gordon Brown's tenure in June 2007 speculation was rife that a new defence white paper setting out a revised set of planning assumptions and required force structure would be a priority of the new administration and would emerge within the first six months of office. This was particularly pertinent given the debate over the scale of operational commitments at the time, accusations of a consistent breach of harmony guidelines for Service personnel, the wider discussion over the Comprehensive Spending Review and potential cuts to the three services in order to meet the Government's spending targets. Many analysts suggested that these converging pressures made a new white paper, which would establish a more realistic set of defence planning assumptions, almost inevitable.

An article in *Strategic Comments* in April 2007 suggested:

An option for the new Prime Minister would be to order a new defence review, which would have the politically expedient advantage of postponing difficult decisions. While Britain is unlikely to commit itself to the immense bureaucratic undertaking of the US Quadrennial Defense review, it could be argued that it is necessary to give a new direction to defence policy years after the SDR, especially in light of the fact that the original assumptions on the nature, location and tempo of operations are outdated.

A new review would, like the SDR, seek to match foreign policy with the future capabilities of the armed forces. It would consider whether the focus on expeditionary warfare, including combat, counterinsurgency and peacekeeping, remain valid, and in what way capabilities should be altered in light of experience.²

Max Hastings writing in *The Guardian* in August 2007 commented:

A coherent vision is needed, such as is lacking today, and that only a defence review can provide [...]

There is room for a good argument about how Britain's armed forces should be configured for the generation ahead. But it should be entirely unacceptable to continue making policy on the hoof, lurching from one budgetary crisis to the next. Only a properly conducted defence review can force the sort of hard choices which are needed. Anything less amounts to more fudge, a betrayal of those risking their lives in Iraq, Afghanistan, and who knows where next, not to mention the hapless taxpayer.³

In a December 2007 the Liberal Democrats also called for the conduct of a new defence review, making it one of the key themes of their report entitled *Our Nation's Duty*. That report stated:

We are concerned by the Government's refusal to look at the strategic picture. It is almost a decade since the 1998 Strategic comprehensive defence review. We believe that overstretch and its associated welfare problems are now so serious that they can only be answered by a new Defence Review.⁴

A number of analysts argued at the time that the lack of a new defence white paper was symptomatic of the more general feeling of malaise with respect to defence policy within the

² "British defence policy: a pivotal moment?", *Strategic Comments*, April 2007. See also "Uncertainty awaits the UK", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 16 May 2007

³ "Britain's armed forces are beset by bureaucracy and big willy syndrome", *The Guardian*, 2 August 2007

⁴ A copy of this report is available online at:
http://www.libdems.org.uk/media/documents/parliament/Our_Nations_Duty_Dec07.pdf

Government that it lacked a clear sense of purpose and direction in this area. Within that school of thought many pointed to the fact that affordability had been a huge constraint. Much of the emphasis of the 2003 White Paper on the development of expeditionary capability and an 'effects based' approach to transformation of the armed forces has arguably been undermined by an unwillingness to dedicate adequate resources. Others suggested the lack of clarity was the result of incoherence in the Government's overarching foreign policies more generally. During a House of Lords debate on 22 November 2007 Lord Bramall argued:

The trouble is that you do not have to look far to find out why it is that on occasions in the past – and, I fear, why it will be on more occasions in the future – support for the Armed Forces does not measure up to what is needed and deserved. First, over the past three years or so, there has been no coherently joined up foreign and defence policy in which military force could be deployed and operate with complete confidence about the real aim of the operation or about how the broad strategy and design for battle would develop in the future [...]

No military operation can be pursued with vigour, confidence and success over time without a clear-cut political aim, and it is up to the Government always to provide it [...] I hope that we can look forward to a properly joined-up foreign and defence policy with more dynamic diplomacy backed, supported and strengthened, as it always must be, by military force, although not invariably led by that force – a policy that means resources and commitments can more easily be matched.⁵

A number of commentators pointed to the Government's National Security Strategy (NSS) which was published in March 2008, and then updated in June 2009 as an alternative, and adequate, assessment of the Government's strategic priorities for the future. The NSS attempted to identify the security parameters which would define the UK's strategic objectives in both the immediate and longer term and the principles that would guide the UK's response. The underlying premise of the NSS was that the Government must adopt an overarching cross-departmental security framework if it is to adequately meet future security challenges.

From a future defence planning perspective the NSS arguably had limited utility, however. Very little in the NSS assessment of the future strategic environment could be regarded as new. The emphasis that the paper gave to non-proliferation, terrorism and failed states, in addition to 'non-traditional' threats to security such as environmental⁶ and societal issues,⁷ had already been acknowledged in the 2003 Defence White Paper and had been a consistent theme of the work of the MOD's Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre in its *Strategic Trends* publication⁸ The same was true of the commitment in the NSS to a multilateral approach and the recognition of the need for early conflict prevention measures. As such the NSS evaluation was considered by many to be merely a reiteration of an existing assessment.

More importantly, the NSS did not link strategic threat assessment and subsequent objectives to credible defence planning assumptions or requisite capabilities or force structures. Chapter four of the NSS which examined the Government's intended response to the security challenges facing the UK took a broad brush approach, focusing purely on the

⁵ HL Deb 22 November 2007, c955

⁶ Such as climate change, flooding and competition for energy and resources

⁷ Such as pandemics, trans-national crime, poverty and poor governance

⁸ The DCDC was originally the Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre.

overarching principles for delivery.⁹ It did not however make specific recommendations on the sustainability of the current defence planning assumptions; whether the 18 defence missions as set out in the 2003 defence White Paper adequately met the diversity of the security challenges set out in the NSS; or indeed whether the Armed Forces were configured appropriately in terms of their size and structure.

In the last few years pressure on the Armed Forces and the MOD's spending plans has dramatically increased as a result of the global economic crisis and the subsequent constraints that it has imposed on government spending. Calls for a new strategic defence review and a re-evaluation of the MOD's spending plans have therefore remained high on the political agenda. In 2008 the Conservative opposition joined those calls emanating from within the British media and the political establishment and subsequently stated that it would hold a defence review after the General Election, should the party take office.¹⁰

In July 2009 the Government subsequently announced to Parliament its intention to conduct a new Strategic Defence Review early in the next Parliament. Set within the context of the National Security Strategy, the Government announced that the review would "be designed to ensure that we develop and maintain armed forces appropriate to the challenges we face and the aims we set ourselves as a nation". Among the issues to be considered in a preliminary Green Paper to be published in early 2010, were:

- The strategic context for defence, including the lessons learnt from recent operations and the changing nature of conflict.
- The experience of working in partnership with other arms of Government.
- The contribution defence can make to the projection of soft power, including conflict prevention.
- The technological changes in defence.
- The scope for more effective processes in defence, in particular procurement.
- The modern day requirements on, and aspirations of, the UK's armed forces personnel.¹¹

The government announced that a Defence Advisory Forum, which would also include opposition politicians, academics and former military personnel, would subsequently be established to address those issues and inform the resulting Green Paper.

1.3 Defence Re-balancing – December 2009

Prior to the publication of the Green Paper, however, the MOD announced in December 2009 its intention to re-balance the future defence programme in order to support personnel on operations in Afghanistan, a priority consistently stated by the Government. In his Statement to the House on 15 December the Secretary of State for Defence, Bob Ainsworth, stated:

⁹ For example the need to strengthen international conventions on non-proliferation or the promotion of security sector reform

¹⁰ The recommendation for a strategic defence review to be conducted upon entering office, and for future reviews to be conducted every five years was set out in Military Covenant Commission's report to the Leader of the Conservative Party in September 2008:

http://www.conservatives.com/Policy/Where_we_stand/Defence.aspx.

¹¹ HC Deb 7 July 2009, c39-40WS

I am announcing today changes to the defence programme, which will enhance the support to our personnel on operations in Afghanistan, worth £900 million over the next three years, and reductions elsewhere to make these enhancements affordable and to match our expenditure against available resources. In doing so, I have made every effort to ensure that we balance the priority of supporting our forces in Afghanistan with our commitment to maintaining the capabilities necessary for the future, and that we do not take decisions on major changes that should properly be made in next year's defence review.¹²

As part of that re-balancing equipment enhancements to be funded out of the MOD's core budget, as opposed to the Treasury reserve, include an improved dismounted close combat equipment package; more Bowman tactical radios and patrol satellite systems; additional funding for communications facilities for special forces; increased funding for intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance capabilities and a doubling of Reaper (UAV) capability. There will also be improvements in counter-IED capabilities, and an additional C-17 aircraft to strengthen the airbridge, improvements to the defensive aids suites and support programmes for the C-130J in order to maximise its deployability, and a further 22 new Chinook helicopters which will start to enter service in 2012-2013.¹³

In order to fund those enhancements reductions will subsequently be made in lower priority areas. In his statement the Secretary of State outlined the intention to further reduce the civilian workforce within the MOD; reduce the size of the Harrier fast jet force by one squadron; close RAF Cottesmore and consolidate the Harrier force at RAF Wittering and withdraw the Nimrod MR2 from service 12 months early in March 2010, while slowing the introduction of the Nimrod MR4A. In line with the MOD's current aspirations to reduce to two fast jet platforms in the future: the Typhoon and the Joint Strike Fighter, the MOD also intends to pursue phase 2 of the Typhoon future capability programme which is fundamental to the development of the aircraft's multi-role capability and its integration with the latest weapons systems. One survey ship and one Minehunter will also be withdrawn from Royal Navy service early; the current competition for unprotected utility vehicles will be deferred for two years; while the planned reduction of some of the older maritime Lynx and Merlin Mk1 aircraft will be brought forward. Some aspects of Army training that are not required for current operations will also be temporarily reduced.¹⁴ The number of Service personnel who are not critical to current operations will be reduced by 2,500 through the slowing down of recruitment and preventing extensions to service, rather than through redundancies.¹⁵

Responding to that announcement the Shadow Secretary of State, Dr Liam Fox commented:

By their own definition, they [the Government] are trying to fight wars on a peacetime budget. Our defences are being cut not as a response to a diminished threat – if anything, the threat is going up out there – or a reassessment of our strategic needs, or in order to reshape our armed forces. A Government who have had four Defence Secretaries in four years, one of whom was part-time, and no defence review for 11

¹² HC Deb 15 December 2009, c801

¹³ The MOD also announced its future rotary wing strategy on 15 December 2009 which will deliver, by 2016, an increase of 40% in the number of available helicopters for use in extreme conditions such as Afghanistan. Beyond the procurement of 22 additional Chinooks, the focus of the strategy is to simplify the delivery of helicopter capability by reducing the number of helicopter platforms across the services and eventually focusing on four core fleet types: Chinook, Apache, Lynx Wildcat and Merlin. The Sea King fleet will be taken out of service by 2016 and the Puma in 2022. The MOD will not proceed with the Future Medium Helicopter competition.

¹⁴ Ibid, c802-804

¹⁵ Ministry of Defence, *Defence in the Media*, 16 December 2009

years are now cutting the capability because of their own catastrophic economic management.¹⁶

Liberal Democrat Defence Spokesman, Nick Harvey, also argued:

We will all feel sorry for the Secretary of State because the Treasury has made him come here today, raiding core defence budgets to pay for these additional orders. What sense does it make for these decisions to be taken outwith the strategic context of the strategic defence review, which everybody is signed up to after the election? [...]

In 2001 we entered Afghanistan, and in 2003 we entered Iraq. The fact of the matter is that the fighting has been done on the cheap ever since. It is true that the Treasury has supplied UORs, but the fact of the matter is that the core defence budget has been creaking under the strain of these engagements ever since they began. The Secretary of State and the Ministry have tried to put off painful decisions until after the general election, but today harsh reality has caught up with them.¹⁷

An editorial in the *Financial Times* also noted that “UK defence policy is at a watershed. Given the state of public finances there will be major cuts in military spending in the next few years. But it is essential that Britain first decides what kind of defence posture it wants – and with what allies – before it makes long-term spending decisions”.¹⁸

The cuts to the RAF’s fast jet fleet in particular have raised questions over the risks that could pose to the UK’s ability to conduct state-on-state operations at any point in the future. The Chief Executive of UK National Defence Association, Cdr John Muxworthy RN, called the cuts “hasty and ill conceived” and taken “at the expense of the wider and longer-term security of the country”. He went on to comment:

Even if operations in Afghanistan were to be completed tomorrow, the threats in the rest of the world have not gone away, and the counter-insurgency posture specific to Afghanistan is of little use if we have to confront a peer competitor. At present, whole capabilities of conventional war-fighting have been lost or reduced to token strength and the expertise that played such a crucial role in both Gulf Wars is now slipping away.¹⁹

Andrew Brookes of the International Institute for Strategic Studies also raised this point, arguing that:

If you cut back the premier league capability of the UK forces in order to just win a counter insurgency campaign against the Taliban, which has no air force and has no tanks and has no warships, when you finally pitch up against a state that has those capabilities you could seriously end up losing a conflict that really matters to the UK in future in order to win one in Afghanistan today.²⁰

A number of commentators have also expressed concern over the intention of the MOD to fund operations in Afghanistan out of the MOD’s core budget rather than the Treasury Reserve. Professor Michael Clarke called this decision a “watershed moment”; while Sir Malcolm Rifkind labelled the move as “deeply dangerous”. During the short debate in the House on 15 December Mr Rifkind asked:

¹⁶ HC Deb 15 December 2009, c805

¹⁷ Ibid, c806

¹⁸ “UK defence policy”, *The Financial Times*, 15 December 2009

¹⁹ “Cutting the military budget is a defence review by the back door”, *UK National Defence Association*, 15 December 2009

²⁰ “Raid on MOD cash to pay for conflict in Afghanistan”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 December 2009

Does the Secretary begin to understand the very dangerous precedent that he has created by giving in to the Treasury demand that Afghan expenditure should be funded from the core budget and not from the contingency fund? Does he not understand that there is hardly an example in living memory of that being done? How will he resist future demands from the Treasury – and they will come – that Afghan expenditure should be at the expense of the core defence budget itself?²¹

In response Mr Ainsworth argued:

It is right and proper – and the principle remains in place – that the additional costs of our operations in Afghanistan will be paid for out of the reserve and not the core budget. Everything, from the bullets and bombs that are used through to the additional allowances paid to your troops, comes from that source, and will continue to do so. Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman seriously suggesting that we should not be interested in using the core defence budget on major upgrades, such as a whole new fleet of helicopters? Is he saying that we should not buy anything that is relevant to our current operations out of that budget, but that we should expect the Treasury to buy anything and everything that is usable in theatre in Afghanistan? That really is unsustainable and I think that he knows it.²²

The decisions on re-balancing also coincided with the publication of the National Audit Office's report, *Major Projects Report 2009* which stated that a shortfall in the MOD's budget of between £6bn and £36bn remains.²³

2 Green Paper Conclusions

The Government published its Green Paper entitled *Adaptability and Partnership: Issues for the Strategic Defence Review* on 3 February 2010.

While acknowledging that Afghanistan remains the priority for the Armed Forces at present, the Green Paper makes it clear at the outset that in planning for the future the UK must anticipate a wide range of threats and subsequent requirements. As such, any Strategic Defence Review “must contribute to decisions about the role we want the United Kingdom to play in the world and how much the nation is prepared to pay for security and defence”.²⁴ While the Green Paper does not attempt to answer those fundamental questions it does identify areas for discussion and sets out the Government's emerging thinking on these issues. The paper makes the following main points.

Strategic Context

- The review must be able to drive radical change. The MOD cannot proceed with all the activities and programmes it currently aspires to, while simultaneously supporting current operations and investing in new capabilities.
- In determining the global role that the UK wishes to play, the Government believes that the UK's interests are best served by continuing to play an active global role, including through the use of armed force when required. The UK cannot simply take a narrow territorial-based view of security. The UK economy relies on international

²¹ HC Deb 15 December 2009, c807-808

²² Ibid, c808

²³ National Audit Office, *Major Projects Report 2009*, HC 85-I, Session 2009-2010

²⁴ Ministry of Defence, *Adaptability and Partnership: Issues for the Strategic Defence Review*, Cm7794, Session 2009-2010

trade and the free passage of goods, services and information and a stable international order is essential if those interests are to prosper.

- There is currently no direct external threat to the UK and in the medium term success in Afghanistan is critical to UK security. However, the future will be characterised by a wider range of potential threats to stability than the UK has previously faced, leading to a future international context characterised by uncertainty. The five major trends identified by the paper which will impact on international security and potentially challenge the UK's interests in the coming decades are: the economic/political rise of the Asia-Pacific region, continuing globalisation, climate change, growing inequality and proliferation.²⁵
- There are three categories of threat to which the UK's Armed Forces may have to respond: terrorism, hostile states and fragile and failing states. The Armed Forces may also be required to support other Government departments in dealing with threats from international crime and natural disasters or emergencies.
- A particular concern is the ability of threats and trends to combine, such as the use of terrorist groups by hostile states to undertake non-attributable attacks or the exploitation of fragile states by terrorist groups as has been witnessed in Afghanistan, Yemen and Somalia. The UK must therefore be realistic about its ability to identify future challenges or foresee the types of military operations that it will be expected to undertake in the future.

Affordability

- The paper makes clear that in considering any future defence review, ongoing financial pressures will undoubtedly constrain government resources.
- The UK will therefore have to prioritise its responses to the threats/challenges that have been identified, as the more the UK is prepared to do, the higher the cost. The SDR must therefore set those priorities for the longer term while establishing a defence programme which is affordable.
- The rising cost of equipment and personnel will be enduring trends. Historically rising units costs have been offset by increases in capability and changes in the nature of the threat which has allowed the UK to reduce the number of both personnel and platforms. However, there are limits to how far capability improvements or efficiency can compensate for numbers.

Use of Force

- The use of force as an option is becoming more complicated and it is likely to become more difficult to use force in the future in the way that the UK has employed it in the last twenty years. Experience has shown that operations have developed in more complex ways than originally envisaged or planned for and the intricacy of working on multinational operations and with non-military actors has often been underestimated.
- Technological change, particularly in space and cyberspace, may change the understanding of conflict and the UK's ability to maintain its technological edge over some adversaries. While cyber capabilities create opportunities they also expose

²⁵ More details on those trends is available in [Global Strategic Trends: Out to 2040](#) published on 3 February 2010

serious vulnerabilities. In cyberspace geographical distance is eliminated, it is low cost and it is anonymous in nature making it an important domain for hostile states, terrorists and criminals alike. The UK must be able to defend against attack and take steps against adversaries when necessary and the Cyber Security Strategy published in 2009 set out how the Government is responding. The dependence of the Armed Forces on space has also grown rapidly over recent years and access to space-derived information is now critical to the conduct of operations. The UK's relationship with the US underpins UK access to space capabilities but it remains important that the UK look closely at how it contributes to allied programme or develops national capabilities.

- Many of the assumptions made in the 1998 SDR, the 2002 SDR new chapter and the 2003 White Paper on joint operations, the utility of expeditionary capabilities and network enabled capabilities have been validated.
- In many future operations the UK is likely to face a range of simultaneous threats and adversaries in an anarchic and extended theatre of operation. Access and freedom of manoeuvre will be constrained; forces are likely to be drawn into urban areas, the littoral and lower airspace; it will be difficult to discriminate in theatre between a mass of targets including friendly forces, non-governmental international actors, the media, local civilians and adversaries; key lines of communications, including critical military infrastructure and computer networks will be vulnerable to attack and disruption; while legal and social pressures will place additional limits on operations.²⁶
- Adversaries will adapt rapidly to exploit the vulnerabilities of our forces, concealing themselves among civilians and drawing the fight into built-up areas; while extending the conflict into areas for which we are less prepared or protected, such as targeting logistical supply routes.
- In future conflict the Armed Forces are likely to be pursuing numerous complex objectives: defeating the adversary, protecting civilians, supporting local authorities and promoting long-term security and governance; while working alongside numerous civilian agencies and organisations and effectively communicating the goals and objectives of the operation to both the British public and the local population and authorities of the country concerned.
- The UK's preferred way of warfare – concentrating force, bringing technology to bear and seeking rapid defeat of our adversaries – may not be as effective as it has been in the past.

Adaptability

- Against the combined challenges of uncertainty, complexity and affordability, the UK will not be able to develop capabilities to respond to every eventuality. The MOD will have to do things differently to rapidly respond to changing circumstances if defence is to continue to offer an appropriate range of options to policy makers.
- The long lead times associated with the procurement of military equipment and developing fully trained high quality military personnel limits the ability to adapt force

²⁶ A battlefield the MOD has referred to as characterised by the five C's: contested, congested, cluttered, connected and constrained. These are examined in more detail in the MOD's paper [Future Character of Conflict](#), published in tandem with the Green Paper.

structures and capabilities quickly. Departmental cultures, and the interests of the single Services and other stakeholders, may not effectively balance the incentives for change against those of continuity.

- Therefore the paper sets out:
 - A proposal to legislate for a defence review early in every Parliament to ensure strategic policy can be adapted quickly to reflect change in the external security environment, internal pressures within the Department or an enhanced understanding of the requirements of the Armed Forces.
 - The intention to examine how senior planning and decision making processes could be restructured to ensure they fully reflect operational demands, including enhancing the authority of the Chief of Joint Operations.
 - A review that is currently being undertaken to review strategic planning processes in order to simplify the link between high-level policy and the force structures it drives and increase the ability of Ministers to direct change.
- Options are currently being studied for the generation of more adaptable forces; prioritising investment in capabilities with wide utility; creating greater flexibility between Regular and Reserve forces; developing a better understanding of the appropriate balance between technological edge and platform numbers; and the ability to reconstitute military capabilities if necessary to enable access to a full range of capabilities with appropriate lead time without having to maintain those assets at all times.
- With respect to the equipment programme, the [Strategy for Acquisition Reform](#) sets out proposals to create greater agility in the MOD's equipment programme. That paper recommends:
 - Creating a more affordable long term programme, although it does not make recommendations on which programmes should be cut from the forward equipment plan.
 - Increasing the use of mature technologies when setting requirements.
 - Increasing the use of modular development in which a capability that meets current requirements has the capacity to be upgraded as new technologies mature or new threats emerge.

The conclusions of the *Strategy for Acquisition Reform* are examined in greater detail below.

- Work is also underway to examine how the ratio of personnel available for deployment against overall numbers can be improved; how the ratio of deployable equipment against overall assets can be improved and how greater flexibility in deployment patterns to create increased operational effect can be introduced.
- The ability to anticipate threats will help the MOD adapt for future crises. In order to be more effective in providing genuine insight as the strategic, operational and tactical level, the paper recommends the development of:

- More effective long-term horizon scanning processes, fully integrated across Whitehall, which feeds more effectively into strategic planning within the MOD.
 - Deeper understanding of the countries and regions in which the UK has significant interests, including through enhanced engagement with partners in those regions.
 - A better understanding of the dynamics that underlie conflicts the UK is engaged in.
- Given the range of potential threats that the UK may face, the MOD must also expand the options available to achieve objectives, without the use of force, ie. the MOD's contribution to 'soft power'. Specifically in the areas of deterrence and reassurance (including possibly coercion and containment. This also implies the need to retain the strategic nuclear deterrent); and defence diplomacy and security co-operation.

Partnerships

- The UK cannot be unilaterally secure. Therefore it must increase co-operation with its international partners to deliver defence more efficiently and effectively in light of the range and scale of domestic and international challenges.
- International partnerships will remain essential to the UK's security, both membership of multilateral organisations such as NATO, the EU and UN, and bilateral relationships, especially with the United States. The return of France to NATO's integrated military command structures offers an opportunity for even greater co-operation with a key partner across a range of defence activity; while stronger European defence co-operation offers many opportunities. In his statement to the House the Secretary of State sought to reiterate however that "this is not about Europe taking precedence over the US or vice versa. The two are mutually reinforcing relationships. We strengthen our alliance with the US if we strengthen our position in Europe".²⁷
- The SDR will need to determine where there is scope for increasing the effectiveness of existing relationships or to rebalance the UK's investments across the organisations. Specific areas of focus need to be on strengthening the European contribution including through more effectively aligning resources and priorities; improving co-operation between NATO and the EU; increasing equitable burden sharing within NATO and the EU; whether there is scope for increased role specialisation or capability pooling within NATO and the EU; whether investment in UN peacekeeping and in particular the UK's contribution to operations should be increased; where the UK could offer further assistance in strengthening the strategy and planning functions for UN operations at HQ level; how the cost effectiveness of each organisation could be improved and streamlined and how UK influence within coalitions and with key partners is generated.
- Beyond Europe and the US, the SDR should consider the merits of formalising the UK's long-standing bilateral relationships and where new and expanded partnerships, with organisations such as the African Union or the Association of Southeast Asian

²⁷ HC Deb 3 February 2010, c304

Nations, could bring mutual advantage and reinforce global security. A number of commentators have also argued that the UK must similarly expand the international security architecture to better include emerging powers.

- Stronger and more effective partnership across Government will be increasingly important in achieving national security objectives. The MOD must examine how improvements in the early planning and delivery of the 'Comprehensive Approach' can be delivered, including the integration of the authorities and citizens of the countries in which the UK is operating.

Capabilities and Personnel

The paper makes no recommendations on personnel numbers, equipment or basing arrangements. It does however point to further work that is designed to inform the review.

- Options are being studied for the creation of a more flexible approach to defence manning as part of a Whole Force concept, including the greater integration of the Reserves into the Armed Forces.
- The Department is reviewing the overall employment and remuneration package of Armed Forces personnel, including analysing the possible benefits of simplifying military terms and conditions of service, and alternative models for accommodation.
- The Strategy for Acquisition Reform (see below) has three main elements: ensuring equipment plans are, and remain, strategically aligned, affordable and achievable; improving skills, management and decision making in acquisition; and strengthening the MOD's relationship with industry. The 2005 Defence Industrial strategy will subsequently be updated as part of the SDR in light of future military capability requirements. The review must also revalidate the MOD's overall approach to operational sovereignty, international collaboration and the benefits to UK plc.
- Detailed studies are being undertaken to determine whether there is a case for significant adjustment to the model for managing the Department. The senior structure and the relationships within and between Head Office, the three Services and the other major areas of defence, including the scope for strengthening the joint approach, will be re-examined.
- There is scope for further efficiencies within the Department over the medium to long term. Work is underway to identify the potential for greater flexibility and efficiency in a range of areas including the use of civilians in defence, including possibly outsourcing;²⁸ further reforms in equipment support, HR, training and IT and procuring goods and services in collaboration with other government departments; whether the number of senior civilian and military personnel is justified and the scope for further rationalisation of the defence estate.

One of the key tasks of the defence review will also be to determine whether the current defence planning assumptions continue to reflect the UK's interests and the likely demands on the Armed Forces.

Although the paper does not discuss individual defence programmes, in his statement to the House on 3 February, the Secretary of State did indicate, however, that unless there is a

²⁸ This is an independent review being carried out by Gerry Grimstone

radical change in strategic thinking the nuclear deterrent would remain critical to the UK's force structure; while at the same time appearing to ring-fence the future carrier project. He stated:

I can say that we do not plan to re-visit the conclusions of the 2006 White Paper on the nuclear deterrent. We have committed to a wide range of major capability improvements over the past few years, including most recently signing contracts for two new aircraft carriers. And recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have demonstrated the importance of being able to deploy and sustain significant numbers of highly trained and equipped troops in a variety of roles, including providing the air and aviation support they require.

Unless the Defence review takes us in a very radical new direction, it's the Government's position that these capabilities are likely to remain critical elements of our force structure. But we need to know first what the roles and the missions are that we will expect our forces to undertake in the future, before we can take final decisions about the capabilities that they will need.²⁹

Questions for the SDR

Going forward on the basis of these observations, the Green Paper suggests that there are six key questions that the SDR must address when determining the global role that the UK wishes to play, the role of the Armed Forces within that and how those aspirations are resourced:

1. Where should the balance be set between focusing on domestic defence and engaging threats at a distance/source? The paper notes that many countries, including some of the UK's partners and allies, have prioritised their efforts nationally, while making smaller contributions to overseas operations.
2. What approach should be taken when engaging threats at a distance? Should the focus be on addressing the drivers of insecurity and conflict or should more focus be given to deterring, containing or disrupting threats?
3. What contribution should the Armed Forces make to ensure security and contribute to resilience in the UK, such as counter terrorism and military aid to the civil community?
4. How could the Armed Forces be more effectively deployed in support of conflict prevention and other measures aimed at strengthening international stability, such as non-proliferation?
5. Do the UK's current international relationships require rebalancing in the longer term?
6. Should the UK further integrate its forces with those of key allies and partners? All operations, other than defence of the UK's overseas territories and evacuation operations, are likely to be undertaken alongside allies and partners. The further integration of capabilities would limit the UK's ability to act nationally but it could deliver a more effective contribution to international security.

The review must also decide to what extent the UK should continue to refocus its current efforts and priorities on Afghanistan. This is the perennial question of whether the MOD should plan for *the war* or *a war*.

²⁹ HC Deb 3 February 2010, c305

2.1 Strategy for Acquisition Reform

In October 2009 Bernard Gray published an independent report into defence acquisition that reached one overarching conclusion:

the Ministry of Defence has a substantially overheated equipment programme, with too many types of equipment being ordered for too large a range of tasks at too high a specification. This programme is unaffordable on any likely projection of future budgets.³⁰

The sentiments of the Gray report were also echoed in the December 2009 report from the National Audit Office which highlighted the potential shortfall in the MOD's budget of £36bn over the next ten years.³¹

While the MOD in its initial response to the Gray report disagreed with some of its conclusions and recommendations (including the argument that acquisition should be undertaken at arm's length from the MOD and possibly by a government owned, contractor operated entity), the MOD did however support the overall analysis of that report: that the fundamental problem with defence acquisition has been deep-seated cost pressures in the MOD's equipment programme.

In order to address that issue, the affordability of the equipment programme and the major reform of the acquisition framework will be a key part of the forthcoming Strategic Defence Review. In line with the publication of the Green Paper, the MOD has set out its initial thoughts and recommendations in a complementary document, *The Defence Strategy for Acquisition Reform*. That document makes the following main points:

- Despite improvements that have come about as a result of the introduction of smart acquisition, the Defence Industrial Strategy and the Defence Acquisition Change Programme over the last ten years, the challenges are constantly evolving and there is a need for further improvement, particularly in delivering large projects to cost and time.
- In order to achieve change the document proposes a six strand approach:
 - Creating and maintaining equipment and support plans that are firmly based in the overall strategy for defence; are affordable within likely resources; are agile and responsive to changing priorities and are realistic about the costs and risks of procurement plans.
 - Improving internal acquisition skills and capabilities, including the investment of £45m over four years. Focus will be given to increasing the capacity of cost estimators who will work with private sector partners to produce more reliable cost and risk estimates for all large projects and increasing the skills of financial and commercial staff. More generally, the paper also recommends evaluating those skills that need to be retained in-house and explore the scope for outsourcing those that do not.
 - Establishing clearer internal business arrangements.
 - Embedding the 'through-life' approach to managing capability.

³⁰ *Review of Acquisition for the Secretary of State for Defence*, October 2009

³¹ National Audit Office, *Major Projects Report 2009*, HC 85-I, Session 2009-2010

- Building a more active and transparent relationship with industry, including updating the Defence Industrial Strategy as part of the forthcoming SDR and establishing a robust long-term equipment plan that will enable industry to make future investment decisions that also support UK interests. The paper also recommends examining the relationship between industry and the MOD with respect to contractor support on operations.
- Making sure the MOD's acquisition effort supports wider defence priorities, including sustainable development and the Government's carbon reduction targets and indentifying very early in a projects life other factors to consider besides time and cost, such as information assurance, security and potential exports. The impact of collaborative procurement has important implications for international defence relationships and should also be properly considered at the outset.
- In order to achieve these objectives the paper commits, among other things, to legislate for an SDR early in every Parliament to ensure that the MOD's equipment plans remain relevant;³² publish an annual assessment to Parliament of the costs and affordability of the equipment and support plan against a 10-year planning horizon agreed with the Treasury; strengthen top-level oversight of acquisition and support; and remove as much cost as feasibly possible from the equipment support plan.³³

All of the work strands identified in the report will be co-ordinated and managed centrally under a Defence Acquisition Reform programme, overseen by the 2nd Permanent Secretary of State within the MOD. Annex A of the *Strategy for Acquisition Reform* report sets out the major areas of work that have been identified, including potential timelines.

3 Initial Reactions

It has been widely acknowledged that a strategic defence review is overdue, that the MOD's assumptions about the role and capabilities of the Armed Forces are outdated and that severe financial pressures require a radical re-think of the MOD's priorities and forward equipment plans. As such the initial work of the Green Paper has been welcomed. Professor Michael Clark, Director of RUSI, suggested that "the paper is a realistic take on the situation we are going to find ourselves. Partly this arises out of the exasperation in the MOD that everyone wants the Forces to keep making these commitments but won't pay for it. We haven't had these sort of big strategic choices since the early 1930s".³⁴ Indeed Michael Codner, Director of Military Sciences at RUSI, has argued that the green paper actually goes further than providing background and establishing a number of key questions that the review should address. Instead he argues that "it actually makes some big assertions and draws some conclusions. If the major political parties were to form a consensus that the Paper is a sound start for the review process, they will have agreed to a number of key premises for the Review". Specifically he suggests that the paper sets out a number of strategic premises, namely: that expeditionary capability is an essential element of the UK's force structure; that the UK must maintain global influence and be able to protect sea lines of supply; that France is a potential first partner of choice and that the UK will not be able to rely on partners in the future and that the state of burden sharing in Afghanistan and Iraq will

³² This would be introduced in the *Armed Forces Bill* of Session 2010-2011.

³³ This latter measure will be a key theme of the Defence Support Review which was launched in 2009 to examine what further improvements could be made to equipment and logistics support.

³⁴ "Armed Forces: fund defence or lose our ability to fight overseas", *The Times*, 3 February 2010

become the norm. However, he does go on to caveat that the operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq were not supported by obvious partners thereby implying that this premise may not actually be the case for all future scenarios.³⁵

Criticism of the direction of some of the MOD's thinking has also been proffered by a number of commentators. The majority of that comment, thus far, has focused on four key areas:

- **The global role of the UK**

A number of analysts have asserted that since the 1998 SDR the UK has been punching above its weight in international politics and that the Green Paper does nothing to suggest that will change, despite the financial pressures on the defence budget and the overstretch of the Armed Forces.

An editorial in *The Guardian* on 4 February commented:

The three options are to lower ambitions, spend more or spend better. There was no sign yesterday of ambitions being lowered in a green paper which committed Britain to play an active global role, and there will be little chance, under any government, of spending more in real terms – so that leaves the prospect of spending smaller budgets more shrewdly.³⁶

Robert Fox, writing in *The Guardian*, has also argued:

The main argument [of the defence review] must be on bigger questions; the relative decline of the West, the changing shape of the human and physical environment, and the efficacy of war in the modern world altogether [...]

It is time to move away from the mindset of the bush and Blair games of hubristic foreign adventures. Both seemed to break St Thomas Aquinas's first stricture for the just war – that war had to be the last resort and offer a decisive outcome for the betterment of all. Tony Blair's wars tended to be instruments of almost first resort, open-ended and inconclusive [...]

That should give us all pause for thought as we consider the tangled web of the politicians current churning and burning about defence and security. It should make us wary of any suggestion that might lurk in the new green paper and policy documents that Britain's global position should be predicated primarily on the projection of hard military power.³⁷

- **The assumption that the UK will always operate as part of a coalition/alliance**

In a speech to RUSI on 8 February 2010, the Shadow Secretary of State, Dr Liam Fox MP stated:

Let me be clear about two essential points at the outset.

First, we know from bitter historical experience the difficulty of predicting future conflict – either in its nature or its location. We cannot base our future security on the assumption that future wars will be like the current ones. That is why we must maintain generic capability able to adapt to any changing threats.

³⁵ Michael Codner, "The Green Paper – premises for a Strategic Defence Review?", RUSI Commentary: <http://www.rusi.org/analysis/commentary/ref:C4B6C4E6458A39/>

³⁶ "Defence green paper: hostile environment for the top brass", *The Guardian*, 4 February 2010

³⁷ Robert Fox, "no more war games", *The Guardian*, 2 February 2010

Second, we cannot accept the assumption in the Green Paper that Britain will always operate as part of an alliance. We have unique national interests and have to maintain the capability to act on our own if required.³⁸

He went on to conclude that “we are at a tipping point in Britain. We need to decide if we want to stay in the first division or slide into the second division. I choose the former”.³⁹

In his response to the Statement in the House on 3 February 2010, Dr Fox also commented:

We agree that France and the United States are likely to be our main strategic partners. For us there are two tests: do they invest in defence, and do they fight? Sadly, too few European allies pass both these tests.⁴⁰

Indeed an editorial in *The Daily Telegraph* on 3 February suggested that “while such co-operation [with France] is clearly desirable, France’s selfish refusal to pull its weight in Afghanistan suggests such a partnership may be rather one-sided”.⁴¹

- **The exclusion of the nuclear deterrent from any re-assessment of capabilities**

In the short debate in the House on 3 February, Liberal Democrat Defence Spokesman, Nick Harvey, raised the issue of Trident:

I thank the Defence Secretary for his statement and for the Green Paper, which is a well-judged attempt to frame the questions that the strategic defence review must answer. However, that agenda is unbalanced by the omission of one item: the replacement of Trident. A few minutes ago, the Prime Minister responded to a question about it by looking at the issue from a strategic security point of view, and I agree that that is the starting point, but surely the scale and the timing of any replacement of the Trident deterrent has profound opportunity cost implications for the entirety of the rest of the defence budget. A strategic defence review cannot be genuinely comprehensive if the biggest single strategic and spending decision is parked outwith its framework.⁴²

That concern has also been reiterated by other Members of Parliament including Jeremy Corbyn MP;⁴³ while campaign groups such as CND have argued:

The exclusion of Trident, one of the most costly defence programmes, makes this review a nonsense. Bob Ainsworth talked of the 'real financial pressure' facing future plans, yet is living in a fantasy world if he thinks spending £76bn on Trident replacement won't have major opportunity costs in both defence and other areas. Excluding the ruinously expensive Trident is like avoiding the huge white elephant in the room.

"When all major parties are proposing huge spending cuts, this is the time for ministers to realise that scrapping Trident replacement would be one very positive and popular cutback. Polls consistently show a clear majority against Trident whilst at the same time a growing number of senior military figures have described the system as 'militarily useless'. Presidents Obama and Medvedev are both working towards a nuclear-free world - scrapping Trident would move us towards this goal, improving our

³⁸ Dr Liam Fox MP, “The Strategic Defence and Security Review: a Conservative view of defence and future challenges”, RUSI, 8 February 2010: <http://www.rusi.org/events/ref:E4B62C2FEC5252>

³⁹ *ibid*

⁴⁰ HC Deb 3 February 2010, c306

⁴¹ “Adapting our defence to a dangerous new world”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 3 February 2010

⁴² HC Deb 3 February 2010, c307-308

⁴³ *ibid*

security as well as freeing-up resources for spending on real priorities, not Cold War relics".⁴⁴

An editorial in *The Guardian* also suggested that "it was disingenuous of Mr Ainsworth to warn of tough choices ahead, when the scope for future cuts has been further constrained by the refusal to take the decision to end Trident".⁴⁵

- **That the Green Paper will become budget driven by default rather than by design**

Concerns have been expressed that despite the best intentions of the Government for the Strategic Defence Review to be threat-driven, the prevailing economic climate will demand that budgetary considerations take precedence and that the review will not be completed in enough time to avoid this. The decision by the MOD in December 2009 to fund elements of operations in Afghanistan out of the core budget rather than the Treasury reserve has already been highlighted as a worrying trend in this regard.

Indeed Trevor Taylor, writing for RUSI, raises the question of whether "the Green Paper and the post-election defence review will come too late to shape British defence capability". He argues that "by the time the review is completed, some major cost-cutting measures may need to be taken [...] if the MOD is required to make significant cuts in the short term, the result is likely to be an incoherent defence effort that the eventual defence review will struggle to rectify".⁴⁶ Dr Paul Cornish, Carrington Professor of International Security at Chatham House has also observed:

The forthcoming SDR is already being approached with some military capabilities ruled out and others marginalised, that a cost-cutting mentality is already in evidence, and that the rivalry between the three Armed Services is set to deepen as a result.

The secretary of State's announcement hints that the SDR will be determined by the pernicious notion of 'affordability'. Any strategic assessment or military plan must of course take account of the availability of resources, and must be adjusted accordingly. But this is not to say that resource constraints should determine strategy. The forthcoming SDR should be as open-minded as possible in its analysis of strategic threats and challenges [...]

'Affordability' puts resources before analysis and is the worst possible basis for the SDR. It is also nothing more than political choice masquerading as a cast-iron rule of public spending.⁴⁷

The UK National Defence Association, in its latest report *UK defence needs*, has also raised this issue of strategic context versus budgets, arguing that "defence provision must be threat driven and not budget driven". Given that no party has committed to protecting the defence budget after an election, the UKNDA therefore raises the ultimate question for the post-general election period:

Will either or both of the two main parties genuinely commit to fund whatever an objective Strategic Defence Review shows to be necessary for Britain's long-term security?⁴⁸

⁴⁴ [Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament press release](#), 3 February 2010

⁴⁵ "Defence green paper: hostile environment for the top brass", *The Guardian*, 4 February 2010

⁴⁶ Trevor Taylor, "The Ministry of Defence Green Paper and top level defence policy", RUSI Commentary: <http://www.rusi.org/go.php?structureID=commentary&ref=C4B6C2E49D19B4>

⁴⁷ Dr Paul Cornish, "The Defence Review: affordability must be the cart, strategy the horse", Chatham House Expert Commentary, 28 January 2010: http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/media/comment/defence_review/

4 Suggested Reading

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- Robert Fox, [“No more war games”](#), *The Guardian*, 2 February 2010
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- [“The future of defence part one: Britain’s forces under review”](#), *The Times*, 1 February 2010
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- Antonia Cox, [More bang for the buck](#), Centre for Policy Studies, January 2010
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⁴⁸ *UK Defence Needs*, UK National Defence Association, February 2010, p.8

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