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DEFENCE

Outline of Future Policy

*Presented by the Minister of Defence to Parliament
by Command of Her Majesty
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Defence: Outline of Future Policy

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Defence : Outline of Future Policy

Need for New Approach

As previous Statements on Defence have emphasised, Britain's defence policy is determined by her obligation to make her contribution to NATO and other alliances for collective defence, as well as to discharge her own special responsibilities in many parts of the world.

2. The present shape of Britain's defence forces was largely settled by the rearmament programme launched in 1950 at the time of the Korean War. However, the ending of hostilities in Korea radically altered the position. The immediate danger of major war receded and was replaced by the prospect of a prolonged period of acute international tension. It was clear that the plan for a short intensive rearmament spurt no longer fitted the needs of the situation, and that for it must be substituted the conception of the "long haul." It also became evident that a military effort on the scale planned in 1950, which envisaged expenditure amounting to £4,700 million over three years, was beyond the country's capacity. In an endeavour to keep the cost within bounds, the programme was slowed down and spread out over a longer period. In addition, it has been examined each year and pruned back as far as possible.

3. However, the time has now come to revise not merely the size, but the whole character of the defence plan. The Communist threat remains, but its nature has changed; and it is now evident that, on both military and economic grounds, it is necessary to make a fresh appreciation of the problem and to adopt a new approach towards it.

Scientific Advances

4. In recent years military technology has been making dramatic strides. New and ever more formidable weapons have been succeeding one another at an increasing rate. In less than a decade, the atom bomb dropped at Hiroshima has been overtaken by the far more powerful hydrogen or megaton bomb. Parallel with this, the evolution of rocket weapons of all kinds, both offensive and defensive, has been proceeding apace.

5. It has been clear for some time that these scientific advances must fundamentally alter the whole basis of military planning. But it is only now that the future picture is becoming sufficiently clear to enable a comprehensive reshaping of policy to be undertaken with any degree of confidence.

Demands on Economic Resources

6. Britain's influence in the world depends first and foremost on the health of her internal economy and the success of her export trade. Without these, military power cannot in the long run be supported. It is therefore in the true interests of defence that the claims of military expenditure should be considered in conjunction with the need to maintain the country's financial and economic strength.

7. Over the last five years, defence has on an average absorbed 10 per cent. of Britain's gross national product. Some 7 per cent. of the working population are either in the Services or supporting them. One-eighth of the output of the metal-using industries, upon which the export trade so largely depends, is devoted to defence. An undue proportion of qualified scientists and engineers are engaged on military work. In addition, the retention of such large forces abroad gives rise to heavy charges which place a severe strain upon the balance of payments.

Britain's Responsibilities

8. A defence plan, if it is to be effective and economical, must be based on a clear understanding of the military responsibilities to be discharged. Britain's armed forces must be capable of performing two main tasks:—

- (i) to play their part with the forces of Allied countries in deterring and resisting aggression;
- (ii) to defend British colonies and protected territories against local attack, and undertake limited operations in overseas emergencies.

The aim must be to provide well-equipped forces sufficient to carry out these duties, while making no greater demands than are absolutely necessary upon manpower, money and other national resources.

9. Frequent changes in defence policy are wasteful and disturbing. Experience has shown that the rapid progress of scientific development and fluctuations in the international situation make it difficult to foresee future military requirements with any certainty, and that consequently a good deal of flexibility must be maintained. Nevertheless, an attempt must be made to establish a broad framework within which long-term planning can proceed.

Collective Defence

10. The growth in the power of weapons of mass destruction has emphasised the fact that no country can any longer protect itself in isolation. The defence of Britain is possible only as part of the collective defence of the free world. This conception of collective defence is the basis of the North Atlantic, South-East Asia and Baghdad alliances.

11. The trend is towards the creation of integrated allied forces. Therefore, provided each member nation plays its fair part in the joint effort, it is not necessarily desirable that each should seek to contribute national forces which are by themselves self-sufficient and balanced in all respects. But whatever yardstick is taken, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that Britain has been bearing a disproportionately large share of the total burden of Western defence. Moreover, in assessing the value of her military effort, it must be remembered that, apart from the United States, Britain alone makes a contribution to the nuclear deterrent power upon which the peace of the world so largely rests.

Nuclear Deterrent

12. It must be frankly recognised that there is at present no means of providing adequate protection for the people of this country against the consequences of an attack with nuclear weapons. Though, in the event of war, the fighter aircraft of the Royal Air Force would unquestionably

be able to take a heavy toll of enemy bombers, a proportion would inevitably get through. Even if it were only a dozen, they could with megaton bombs inflict widespread devastation.

13. This makes it more than ever clear that the overriding consideration in all military planning must be to prevent war rather than to prepare for it.

14. While comprehensive disarmament remains among the foremost objectives of British foreign policy, it is unhappily true that, pending international agreement, the only existing safeguard against major aggression is the power to threaten retaliation with nuclear weapons.

15. The free world is to-day mainly dependent for its protection upon the nuclear capacity of the United States. While Britain cannot by comparison make more than a modest contribution, there is a wide measure of agreement that she must possess an appreciable element of nuclear deterrent power of her own. British atomic bombs are already in steady production and the Royal Air Force holds a substantial number of them. A British megaton weapon has now been developed. This will shortly be tested and thereafter a stock will be manufactured.

16. The means of delivering these weapons is provided at present by medium bombers of the V-class, whose performance in speed and altitude is comparable to that of any bomber aircraft now in service in any other country. It is the intention that these should be supplemented by ballistic rockets. Agreement in principle has recently been reached with the United States Government for the supply of some medium-range missiles of this type.

Defence of the Deterrent

17. Since peace so largely depends upon the deterrent fear of nuclear retaliation, it is essential that a would-be aggressor should not be allowed to think he could readily knock out the bomber bases in Britain before their aircraft could take off from them. The defence of the bomber airfields is therefore an essential part of the deterrent and is a feasible task. A manned fighter force, smaller than at present but adequate for this limited purpose, will be maintained and will progressively be equipped with air-to-air guided missiles. Fighter aircraft will in due course be replaced by a ground-to-air guided missile system.

Civil Defence

18. While available resources should as far as possible be concentrated on building up an active deterrent power, it would be wrong not to take some precautions to minimise the effects of nuclear attack, should the deterrent fail to prevent war. Civil Defence must accordingly play an essential part in the defence plan.

19. As in other fields, the country's economic capacity limits the effort which can be devoted to this purpose. In 1957/58 the main task will be to keep the existing local organisation in being, so as to provide a basis on which realistic planning can continue. The necessary training equipment will be provided. Essential research will proceed; and work on emergency communications and on setting up the fall-out warning and monitoring system will go on. These preparations will provide a framework for expansion, should that later be necessary.

Europe and Atlantic

20. The possession of nuclear air power is not by itself a complete deterrent. The frontiers of the free world, particularly in Europe, must be firmly defended on the ground. For only in this way can it be made clear that aggression will be resisted.

21. Britain must provide her fair share of the armed forces needed for this purpose. However, she cannot any longer continue to make a disproportionately large contribution.

22. Accordingly, Her Majesty's Government, after consultation with the Allied Governments in the North Atlantic Council and in the Council of the Western European Union, have felt it necessary to make reductions in the British land and air forces on the Continent. The strength of the British Army of the Rhine will be reduced from about 77,000 to about 64,000 during the next twelve months; and, subject to consultation with the Allied Governments in the autumn, further reductions will be made thereafter. The force will be reorganised in such a way as to increase the proportion of fighting units; and atomic rocket artillery will be introduced which will greatly augment their fire-power.

23. The aircraft of the Second Tactical Air Force in Germany will be reduced to about half their present number by the end of March, 1958. This reduction will be offset by the fact that some of the squadrons will be provided with atomic bombs. A similar reduction will be made in the light bomber force in England, which is assigned to NATO.

24. The rôle of naval forces in total war is somewhat uncertain. It may well be that the initial nuclear bombardment and counter-bombardment by aircraft or rockets would be so crippling as to bring the war to an end within a few weeks or even days, in which case naval operations would not play any significant part. On the other hand, there is the possibility that the nuclear battle might not prove immediately decisive; and in that event it would be of great importance to defend Atlantic communications against submarine attack. It is therefore necessary for NATO to maintain substantial naval forces and maritime air units. Britain must make her contribution, though, for the reasons explained earlier, it will have to be on a somewhat reduced scale.

Middle East

25. Outside the area covered by the North Atlantic Alliance, Britain has military responsibilities in other parts of the world, in particular in the Middle East and South-East Asia.

26. Apart from its own importance, the Middle East guards the right flank of NATO and is the gateway to the African continent. In the Arabian Peninsula, Britain must at all times be ready to defend Aden Colony and Protectorates and the territories on the Persian Gulf for whose defence she is responsible. For this task, land, air and sea forces have to be maintained in that area and in East Africa.

27. In addition, Britain has undertaken in the Baghdad Pact to co-operate with the other signatory States for security and defence, and for the prevention of Communist encroachment and infiltration. In the event of emergency, British forces in the Middle East area would be made available to support the Alliance. These would include bomber squadrons based in Cyprus capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

28. As a result of the termination of the treaty with Jordan, Britain has been relieved of the responsibility for defending that country in the event of attack; and British forces are being withdrawn. The British troops in Libya will also be progressively reduced.

Far East

29. In South-East Asia, apart from defending her colonies and protectorates, Britain has agreed to assist in the external defence of Malaya after she attains independence. Britain also has an international commitment, as a member of the SEATO and ANZAM defence systems, to help preserve stability and resist the extension of Communist power in that area.

30. It is proposed to maintain in this theatre a mixed British-Gurkha force and certain air force elements, together with a substantial garrison in Hong Kong and a small naval force based on Singapore.

31. In addition, there is a Commonwealth Strategic Reserve. This includes a brigade to which Britain contributes two battalions. Australia and New Zealand jointly provide the remainder of the brigade and some naval and air forces.

32. After consultation with the United States and with the other Commonwealth countries concerned, the Government have decided to withdraw the remaining United Kingdom troops, approximately a battalion, from Korea. A liaison mission will be retained at the Headquarters of the United Nations Command.

Overseas Garrisons

33. Garrisons for British colonies and protectorates make substantial demands upon military manpower. In view of the increasing strength and efficiency of Colonial forces and the growing capacity to send reinforcements rapidly from Britain, the Government propose to make considerable reductions in these garrisons wherever practicable.

Central Reserve

34. With the reduction in the size of garrisons and other British forces overseas, it is more than ever essential to be able to despatch reinforcements at short notice. With this object, a Central Reserve will be maintained in the British Isles.

35. To be effective, the Central Reserve must possess the means of rapid mobility. For this purpose, a substantial fleet of transport aircraft is being built up in R.A.F. Transport Command. This is at present mainly composed of Comet II's, Beverley freighters and Hastings aircraft, to which a number of Britannias will later be added. These transport resources of the R.A.F. would be supplemented, when necessary, by suitable civil aircraft and by naval and other vessels.

36. Besides the land forces of the Central Reserve, additional military power can rapidly be provided by the Bomber, Fighter and Coastal Commands of the Royal Air Force.

Sea Power

37. On account of its mobility, the Royal Navy, together with the Royal Marines, provides another effective means of bringing power rapidly to bear in peacetime emergencies or limited hostilities. In modern conditions the role of the aircraft carrier, which is in effect a mobile air station, becomes increasingly significant.

38. With this consideration in mind, it is proposed to base the main elements of the Royal Navy upon a small number of carrier groups, each composed of one aircraft carrier and a number of supporting ships. Apart from carriers, the number of large ships will be restricted to the minimum. The cruisers in the active fleet will be reduced and, in due course, replaced by the new ships of the Tiger Class, now under construction. Similarly, in the various categories of smaller vessels, the policy will be to rely on a reduced number of more modern ships, some of which will be equipped with guided missiles. A considerable number of ships now in reserve, including battleships, will be disposed of or scrapped.

39. It is the Government's intention to maintain British naval strength East of Suez at about its present level. One carrier group will normally be stationed in the Indian Ocean.

Manpower Requirements

40. Provided that the Services are reshaped and redistributed on the lines indicated above and that commitments are curtailed in the manner proposed, the Government are satisfied that Britain could discharge her overseas responsibilities and make an effective contribution to the defence of the free world with armed forces much smaller than at present.

41. Britain has a long and honourable tradition of voluntary military service. Regular professional forces have secured the nation's defence in peace and have formed the core of its expanded forces in war. Owing to exceptional circumstances in the last decade, voluntary recruitment has had to be supplemented by the continuance of National Service. But it has been the declared aim of successive Governments to bring National Service to an end and to return to traditional methods of recruitment, as soon as this can be done consistently with the needs of defence. The present Government have repeatedly reaffirmed this aim; and they believe it to accord with the general desire of the nation.

42. The revised defence plan, with its greatly reduced demands on manpower and its emphasis on highly trained mobile forces, now makes it possible to contemplate putting the Services on to an all-regular basis; and the Government will endeavour to bring about this change as soon as practicable.

43. National Service inevitably involves an uneconomic use of manpower, especially in the training organisation. There are at present no less than 150,000 men training or being trained in the establishments of the three Services. This high figure is due, in large measure, to the continuous turnover inseparable from National Service, the abolition of which would make possible substantial savings in manpower.

44. Parallel with this, economies in administrative overheads are being sought. The Service Departments and Ministry of Supply are already engaged in a further effort to cut down the numbers of Headquarters and the size of staffs, to eliminate duplication on common tasks, such as signal communications, and to reduce the number of men serving in depots and base installations, by concentrating work in fewer places and curtailing the holdings

of stores. Every endeavour will also be made to extend the practice of employing civilians or civilian contractors on tasks where it is not essential for military reasons to employ Service personnel, such as storekeeping, accounting, maintenance of equipment, policing and catering.

45. The process of contracting the size of the armed forces and of building up regular recruitment to the required level is bound to take a number of years. The combined strength of the three Services is now about 690,000*. During the next twelve months, it is proposed to reduce it to about 625,000. This includes the reductions recently agreed in the Council of Western European Union. In planning the rate of the further run-down in subsequent years, account will have to be taken of the current state of the international situation and of its effect upon the military requirements of NATO and other regional alliances, on which there will be close consultation with Allied Governments.

46. In the light of the need to maintain a balanced distribution of the national resources, the Government have made a comprehensive review of the demands of defence upon the economy and of the country's military responsibilities. They have concluded that it would be right to aim at stabilising the armed forces on an all-regular footing at a strength of about 375,000 by the end of 1962. This does not take account of Colonial troops and other forces enlisted overseas, which at present amount to about 60,000.

National Service

47. The Government have accordingly decided to plan on the basis that there will be no further call-up under the National Service Acts after the end of 1960.

48. It must nevertheless be understood that, if voluntary recruiting fails to produce the numbers required, the country will have to face the need for some limited form of compulsory service to bridge the gap.

49. While the regular element is building up and the total strength of the forces is being run down, the size of the National Service intake will have to be progressively reduced. The result will be that the number of men becoming available for National Service will, to a growing extent, exceed requirements. The Government have prepared plans to effect the call-up of the reduced numbers needed and will shortly announce these to Parliament.

Regular Recruitment

50. The task of increasing regular recruitment to the required level will not be easy; nor is the problem the same in all three Services. The Royal Navy is already, in the main, a regular force on long-service engagements and it should not have much difficulty in attracting enough recruits to meet its needs. In the Royal Air Force, 127,000 other ranks, or about two-thirds of the present strength, are regulars. But some 31,000 of these are serving on three-year engagements; and many of them would not have enlisted but for their liability for National Service. Nevertheless, the recent improvement in its recruiting makes it reasonable to hope that the R.A.F. will be able to enlist enough regulars to meet the smaller numbers required under the revised plan.

51. It is in the Army that the greatest difficulty arises. There are about 164,000 regulars; but of these, less than 80,000 are serving on engagements of over three years. A marked improvement in recruiting will therefore be needed to make the Army independent of National Service.

* This figure relates only to adult male uniformed United Kingdom personnel.

52. Moreover, it is not enough simply to reach the total strengths required. A proper balance must be maintained in the composition of the forces. The replacement of the professional and skilled men who are now called up after deferment will constitute a special problem. With the continuous development of modern equipment, skilled tradesmen are increasingly important. Unless, therefore, an adequate proportion of these can be recruited, the Services will be in danger of becoming unbalanced and losing in efficiency. There is also the problem of obtaining sufficient recruits to man the branches which perform the less popular duties.

53. In order to encourage recruiting, the Government will seek to make life in the Services more attractive. As already announced, the scales of rations are being increased. It is also proposed to press ahead with the modernisation of barrack accommodation, the construction of further married quarters, and the provision of better recreational facilities. Methods of improving the serviceman's prospect of good employment on his return to civilian life are being examined. In these and other ways plans are being prepared for the different ranks and branches of each Service with the object of offering good long-term careers.

54. In order to waste no time in building up the Regular element, the recruiting campaign will be intensified, and more money will be provided in the coming year for this purpose.

Reserve Forces

55. The reserve forces of all three Services will continue to have an essential part to play.

N.B. 56. Individual reservists and certain reserve units will be needed to make good deficiencies in the Regular Army in emergencies. The Territorial Army will, as at present, be trained and equipped as a fighting force primarily assigned to the task of home defence. Under present plans Britain is due to provide two Territorial Army divisions as reinforcements for NATO. Since these certainly would not be ready for action on the Continent in less than three months, which in nuclear war would be of little value, the Government consider that it would be more appropriate to assign them to home defence duties like the rest of the Territorial Army. This question is being discussed with NATO.

57. Apart from the units of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force and the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve which it has regretfully been found necessary to disband, the Naval and Air Force Reserves will be retained in their present rôles, though they will have to be reduced, and, to some extent, reorganised to accord with the new plan.

Research and Development

58. If the weapons and equipment of the armed forces are to be kept up to date, an adequate effort on research and development must be continuously maintained. However, in view of the shortage of scientists and technicians in civil industry, it is important to restrict the military programme to those projects which are absolutely essential.

59. A central feature of the defence plan is the maintenance of an effective deterrent. High priority will therefore continue to be given to the

development of British nuclear weapons suitable for delivery by manned bombers and ballistic rockets. Nuclear warheads are also being evolved for defensive guided missiles.

60. The close co-operation with the United States over research on guided missiles and ballistic rockets, initiated under the agreement of 1953, has proved of mutual benefit to both countries and will be maintained and further developed. The agreement in principle for the supply of American rockets should result in savings of time and money, and will enable work to be concentrated upon more advanced types.

61. Having regard to the high performance and potentialities of the Vulcan and Victor medium bombers and the likely progress of ballistic rockets and missile defence, the Government have decided not to go on with the development of a supersonic manned bomber, which could not be brought into service in much under ten years.

62. Work will proceed on the development of a ground-to-air missile defence system, which will in due course replace the manned aircraft of Fighter Command. In view of the good progress already made, the Government have come to the conclusion that the R.A.F. are unlikely to have a requirement for fighter aircraft of types more advanced than the supersonic P 1, and work on such projects will stop.

63. Increased emphasis will be placed on the development of nuclear propulsion for maritime purposes, which has great civil as well as naval importance.

64. The Government have in recent months been exploring with the French Government and other member States, the possibility of closer co-operation on research and development within the framework of the Western European Union.

Commonwealth Co-operation

65. With the advance of military technology, Commonwealth co-operation on research and development is assuming increasing importance. An outstanding example is the development of guided missiles at Woomera, which is being undertaken jointly by the United Kingdom and Australia.

66. The Government will seek to maintain and foster close co-operation in defence matters generally with members of the Commonwealth. This will continue to be effected by normal intergovernmental consultations, frequent meetings of Chiefs of Staff, the exchange and secondment of officers, the supply of training facilities, and regular conferences of the Commonwealth Advisory Committee for Defence Science.

Switch of Resources

67. The new defence plan set out in this paper involves the biggest change in military policy ever made in normal times. In carrying it through a certain amount of disturbance is unavoidable. N.B.

68. The large reduction in the size of the forces will inevitably create some surplus of officers and N.C.Os. The proportion will differ for each Service and for the various ranks and branches. Those whose careers have to be prematurely terminated will be given fair compensation and will be helped in every way possible to find suitable employment in civilian life.

69. The volume of defence work of many kinds will be curtailed and some establishments will have to be closed. The manpower and industrial resources released must be absorbed into productive use as quickly as possible; and the Government Departments concerned will do all they can to secure that this switch is effected smoothly.

Expenditure

70. The Defence Estimates for the year 1956/57 amounted to about £1,600 million, before deducting receipts from Germany and the United States. Had the programme as planned a year ago been allowed to continue unchanged, the figure for 1957/58 would have risen to about £1,700 million.

71. However, as a result of strenuous efforts to effect economy, it has been found possible to keep the defence estimates for the coming year down to a total of £1,483 million. From this must be deducted receipts from Germany and the United States, which are expected to be about £50 million and £13 million respectively. Thus the net estimate of total defence expenditure for the year 1957/58 will amount to about £1,420 million. This large saving has been secured by various measures, including in particular a substantial reduction in the overall strength of the forces, the cutting down of production orders and purchases of stores and some curtailment of the research and development programme.

N.S. 72. It is not yet possible to forecast the level of expenditure in later years. It should not however be expected that it will show a decline in any way comparable with that in the manpower strengths of the forces. This is primarily due to the ever-increasing complication of modern weapons and equipment, the higher cost per man of regular forces and the fact that proportionately more civilians will be employed. Nevertheless, it can safely be assumed that the new plan, when it is fully implemented, will further appreciably reduce the burden on the economy. Above all, it will release skilled men, including many badly needed scientists and technicians, for employment in civilian industry. Both exports and capital investment will gain.

73. The Government are confident that this defence plan, while helping to relieve the strain upon the economy, will produce compact all-regular forces of the highest quality, armed and organised on the most up-to-date lines.

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