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British defence policy since 1997

British defence policy has altered significantly since the Labour Government came to power in 1997. Those changes have been prompted largely by the shifting nature of the strategic environment over that period, and in particular the events of 11 September 2001. However, the strategic foreign policy objectives of former Prime Minister Tony Blair have also helped to shape the direction of British defence policy and have had a fundamental impact on the role, structure and welfare of the Armed Forces.

This paper is not intended to be a comprehensive assessment of all aspects of defence policy since 1997, but an introduction to some of the main issues that have shaped the defence agenda in that time. It also examines the prospects for defence since Gordon Brown became Prime Minister in June 2007.

Background to some of the themes in this paper is available in Library Research Paper RP08/58, *British Defence policy since 1997: background issues*. This paper should also be read in conjunction with Library Research Paper RP08/56, *British foreign policy since 1997*.

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Summary of main points

Since the Labour Government came to power in 1997 the UK has seen profound and far-reaching changes in the realm of defence policy and in the character of modern warfare more generally. Those changes have been largely defined by the shifting nature of the strategic environment since the end of the Cold War and in particular the events of 11 September 2001.

Yet, the shape of UK defence policy during this period has not been influenced by these events alone. The inclination of Prime Minister Tony Blair toward a more multilateral and interventionist foreign policy has had a fundamental impact on both the direction of defence policy and on the role and nature of the British Armed Forces. At the centre of that approach was a commitment to strengthening the “special relationship” between the UK and the US which Blair saw as the key to enhancing the UK’s role on the world stage. However, he also believed that Britain could shape the exercise of American power and act as a bridge between the US and Europe. To that end, he actively encouraged the development of a European military capability, albeit as a means to strengthening the European pillar of the NATO alliance. In part because of British encouragement, ESDP has subsequently gained significant momentum over the last decade.

In line with the Prime Minister’s general approach, the Labour government came to power with a manifesto commitment to conduct a comprehensive review of defence policy. That process culminated in the publication of the *Strategic Defence Review* in 1998. In keeping with the broad theme of the UK’s foreign policy priorities that review identified the need to establish rapidly deployable expeditionary forces capable of conducting multiple, concurrent operations. It also made the reform of procurement policy a major objective.

Subsequent white papers were, in large part augmentations to, and refinements of, the SDR’s conclusions, although they did introduce new or updated policies in specific areas, mainly as a result of 9/11. Both the *Strategic Defence Review New Chapter* in 2002 and the Defence White Paper of 2003 continued to support the idea of an expeditionary strategy but also for the first time articulated the concept of ‘Effects Based Operations’, whereby forces would be structured and deployed in order to deliver certain strategic effects. Network-centric capabilities were identified as central to achieving those aims. The 2003 White Paper also made widespread recommendations regarding changes to the defence planning assumptions and the restructuring of the Armed Forces in terms of both personnel and assets. Concerns were expressed at the time over the ability of the MOD to afford such an ambitious programme of technological change.

Despite the level of operational commitments envisaged in the SDR and subsequent papers, the military operations undertaken during Blair’s tenure resulted in the Armed Forces being deployed on contingent operations overseas more times under one Prime Minister than at any point since the end of the Second World War, reflecting Blair’s interventionist approach to foreign policy and his belief in the utility of force when required. However, combined with persistent problems in recruitment and retention and manning during this period, this high tempo of operations led to a consistent breach of harmony guidelines for Service personnel and a breach of the defence planning assumptions in every year since 2002. In light of such commitments, doubts have been expressed over the extent of the UK’s reserve capacity should other contingencies arise.

In the last year of the Blair Government the nature of the terms and conditions of Service personnel also rose in the political and public consciousness and prompted allegations that the Government was breaching its duty of care to Service personnel and undermining the Military Covenant between the Armed Forces and society more generally. At issue has been the standard of equipment issued to operationally deployed personnel, the medical care of Service personnel, the standard of Service accommodation, the level of pay and allowances and the welfare support provided to Service families. This increase in public awareness has, in part, been the result of the willingness by both ex-Service and current Service Chiefs to speak out on these issues.

Defence spending as a proportion of GDP remained fairly stable between 1997-2007, averaging 2.5% of GDP, but having declined markedly from some 5% of GDP in the mid-1980s. Over the same period, there was an average annual 2.1% real terms increase in the defence budget. However, it has been argued that the UK's military aspirations and commitments under the Labour government have not been matched by sufficient funding, leaving a hole in the defence budget and resulting in significant cutbacks and shortfalls in capability.

Gordon Brown came to office in June 2007 with significant legacy issues which have dominated his first year in government. The deployment of the Armed Forces has remained high with ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan dominating the agenda. The biggest questions for Gordon Brown now are whether the Armed Forces can sustain this operational tempo in the future without causing severe damage to the effectiveness, capabilities and morale of the military, and whether the Government's future foreign policy ambitions can or will be met with adequate military capability. The overriding conclusion thus far among analysts, politicians, the media and even the Ministry of Defence, has been that it cannot.

Public awareness of the terms and conditions of Service personnel has also taken on a whole new dimension, in part because of the Royal British Legion's 'Honour the Covenant' campaign which became the theme of the 2007 poppy appeal. Those concerns have been reflected during the last year in the importance that the Brown Government has attached to welfare issues. The MOD announced in November 2007 that it would publish a Service personnel command paper in 2008 which would make recommendations for enhancing the future level of welfare support offered to service personnel, their families and veterans. Efforts to address the social gap between the military and the society that it serves have also been evident, most prominently with the announcement in December 2007 of the intention to conduct an independent study into the national recognition of the Armed Forces

In the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) Chancellor Alistair Darling also announced that the defence budget would rise to £36.9bn by 2010-11, representing 1.5% average annual real growth over the three year CSR period. While the increase has been welcomed, it has been widely considered insufficient to meet the future funding requirements of the Department. Criticisms of the Government's approach to defence spending reached new heights during a debate in the House of Lords in November 2007, which many analysts regarded as an unprecedented attack on the Government's defence policies. As a result of these significant cost pressures and budget restrictions, further delays and cuts in the MOD forward equipment programme are considered inevitable.

Despite expectations that a new defence white paper would emerge in the first six months of Brown taking office, that re-evaluation of defence policy has not materialised. Therefore it is difficult to have a meaningful discussion as to whether the overall direction of the UK's defence policies is likely to shift under a Brown government in the longer term. The question of whether the conduct of defence policy under Gordon Brown will be naturally prudent or whether it will be artificially constrained by this situation and the prevailing trend in public perception of the Armed Forces is a vital one. Going forward, these converging dynamics could potentially, and unusually, make defence policy, and the Government's attitude toward the Armed Forces, an issue in any future general election.

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I Defence Policy during the Blair Era

Since the Labour government came to power in 1997 the UK has seen profound and far-reaching changes in the realm of defence policy and in the character of modern warfare more generally. Those changes have largely been defined by the shifting nature of the strategic environment since the end of the Cold War and in particular the events of 11 September 2001. In the last ten years the international system has witnessed a dramatic shift in US foreign policy under the leadership of George W. Bush; major Western military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq; the expansion of NATO beyond its traditional operational sphere; and moves within the EU to develop its own independent crisis management capability. Non-traditional threats to security have also risen up the political and security agenda, leaving defence planners to contemplate the strategic implications of competition for energy and water resources, climate change, food scarcity and rapid population growth. Confrontations with Iraq, Iran and North Korea over their Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) programmes have also continued to test the international community's resolve.

Yet, the shape of UK defence policy since 1997 has not been influenced by these events alone. The inclination of Prime Minister Tony Blair toward a more interventionist set of foreign policies has had a fundamental impact on both the direction of defence policy and on the role and nature of the British Armed Forces. This has also been a period of significant organisational and structural change within the defence establishment as a whole, with the Ministry of Defence having to become acquainted with new operating practices and procedures, reformulated doctrine, and complex modern technologies and equipment.

The result has been a military that has been operationally deployed more times under the tenure of one Prime Minister than at any point since the end of the Second World War;¹ amid claims by many of overstretch, strategic drift, insufficient funding and resources, inefficient and wasteful procurement practices, occasional strained relationships with allies, and the highly publicised issue of an alleged breakdown of the relationship between the military and society. All of these factors have led many commentators to question whether the military is at 'breaking point', as some retired generals have claimed.

A. Strategic Context

The nature of the strategic environment, both in terms of present concerns and likely future scenarios, is the basis upon which political choices and objectives are defined by a government and subsequently the context within which informed decisions on the structure, size and capabilities of the Armed Forces are made. Yet, as Colin Gray has made clear, identifying trends in strategic affairs is a notoriously dangerous enterprise.² Steven Haines has commented:

¹ This was referred to in a House of Lords debate on 22 November 2007, c947

² Colin Gray, *Another Bloody Century*, 2005, p37-45

It is a truism that the basis for long term defence planning is a potentially unsound assessment of the nature of future security, the threats to it and what will be required in the way of equipment and trained personnel to combat those threats. There can be no certainty in this respect. History has demonstrated that if decisions are correct, it is probably down to a good dose of luck supported by what can at best be described as good judgement.

It is also a truism that, given the cost of the future defence programme, those charged with providing the substantial investment necessary to support it require a convincing argument that such investment is necessary. Treasury officials and the political leaders for whom they work need convincing arguments that the levels of investment required are fully justified relative to the other demands on the Exchequer. These two truisms present a fundamental dilemma. The Government needs to be reasonably confident that its investment will be sound and yet it has no way of knowing at the point of decision whether it is or not.³

For the UK a determination of threat assessment is also heavily influenced by its history, national interests, and the realities of global politics. Even though the UK's internationalist policies have been strongly associated with the personal outlook of Tony Blair, in fact there are longstanding strong structural pressures on the UK that have pushed successive governments to look beyond the UK mainland when considering potential threats and sources of insecurity. With its long history of deep involvement in global affairs,⁴ possession of a number of overseas territories, its global trading interests and a significant number of citizens living abroad, it has historically been difficult for the UK to turn its back on the world.

During most of the Cold War the strategic context was fairly clear: "there was only one known potential enemy; his location was clear; and his likely axes of advance discernible."⁵ Strategic imperatives were thus almost self-selecting with defence priorities centred on the threat from the Soviet Union. Changes of political leadership, shifting alliances, new technology or other important developments may have led to periodic reappraisals of strategy, yet for the most part there was a definite measure of underlying stability and continuity in defence planning. As such 'threats based planning' became the norm.

However, with the end of the Cold War and the absence of clearly definable threats emanating from one or two states, defence policy became subject to greater complexity and uncertainty which tended to favour a 'capability based' approach. Indeed, there were few precedents to guide those dealing with security issues. As David Shukman noted "from the moment the Berlin wall fell in November 1989, the first of the old certainties in planning was lost".⁶ Any direct conventional threat from a major power seemed a remote possibility and, instead, the West was faced with a diverse constellation of new and unpredictable threats. Indeed, the optimism generated by the end of the East-West confrontation and the potential of a rejuvenated United Nations soon declined. It became increasingly clear that the Cold War "had made way, not for the 'New World Order'

³ Steven Haines, "The real strategic environment", *RUSI Journal*, October 2007

⁴ The UK is for example one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

⁵ William Hopkinson, *The Making of British Defence Policy*, 2000, p.11

⁶ David Shukman, *Tomorrow's War: The Threat of High-Technology Weapons*, 1996, p3

promised by the first President Bush, but for an era of limitless uncertainty and incalculable dangers.”⁷ Once the Cold War structure was removed “established patterns vanished”⁸ and future conflicts were no longer contained or managed by superpower overseers. Wars of proxy were replaced with a new form of “nonstructured or destructured conflict”.⁹ It was this initial post Cold War period that shaped the nature of the international order that Tony Blair would inherit upon coming to power in 1997.

Indeed, by the mid-1990s it became clear to Western policy makers that more radical changes in defence policy would be essential.¹⁰ Writing in 1996, just before Labour came to power, Lawrence Freedman noted that “The sources of insecurity are not as fearful as they once were – even less than a decade ago”.¹¹ Rather, the threats were perceived to be “cumulatively worrisome and often irritatingly beyond the grasp of governments, even when working together, to manage and contain.”¹² Defence was therefore no longer seen as just a matter of ‘defending the realm’ in a narrow territorial sense, or at least the definition of what that meant had been radically altered. One of the principal drivers of these changes was the accelerated pace of globalisation during this period.¹³ Although globalisation as a concept is strategically ambiguous, being neither intrinsically good nor bad, it has led to a situation whereby unstable regions are invested with “strategic impact far beyond their local areas. Such ‘zones of war’ produce ‘leaking misery’ in the form of terrorism, crime and refugees (both political and economic) heading for ‘zones of peace’ [...] In sum globalisation produces an inherently complex security landscape.”¹⁴ This idea has been developed by Lawrence Freedman:

Weakness and failure in the non-Western world have consequences for Western states: sudden population movements; environmental disasters; local conflicts being exported through expatriate communities. Even before the emergence of jihadist terrorism as the top priority for Western security agencies in 2001, there were links between the degree of disorder in particular countries and the quality of Western life.¹⁵

In addition to the problem of weak states was the growing problem of so-called ‘rogue states’ which were deemed by the West to be acting outside the norms of the international community, specifically those set out in the UN Charter. Such rogue states, it was held, either sponsored terrorists, undermined global WMD non-proliferation regimes, or represented grave threats to the security and sovereignty of neighbours, and thus to regional and wider international security.

⁷ David Shukman, *Tomorrow's War: The Threat of High-Technology Weapons*, 1996, p.4

⁸ Shawcross, W. *Deliver Us From Evil: Warlords and Peacekeepers of Endless Conflict*, 2000, p13

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ William Hopkinson, *The Making of British Defence Policy*, 2000, p. x

¹¹ Lawrence Freedman, “Security and Diffusion of Power”, *Brassey's* 1997, p.8

¹² Ibid

¹³ Globalisation has been considered a loose concept but can be broadly defined as “the intensification of global interconnectedness – political, economic, military and cultural” (Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars, Organised Violence in a Global era*, 1999, p.3)

¹⁴ Paul T. Mitchell, *Network Centric Warfare*, Adelphi Paper 385, p.18

¹⁵ Lawrence Freedman, *Transformation of Strategic Affairs*, 2006, p.32

These factors led to a measure of uncertainty as to Britain's place in the world and also to what some termed a 'foreign policy vacuum' within which defence policy had to be developed. The central preoccupation of strategic planners became the effects of distant conflicts and crises around the globe (both in terms of national interest and humanitarian concern). Indeed, the most pressing threats to UK security appeared to derive from the inability of other countries and regions to manage their own problems.

However, an additional and significant development during the 1990s was the strengthened moral case for intervention. This was largely the result of the convergence of a number of factors: the triumph of Western liberal democratic states in the Cold War broadly committed to the spread of human rights; the gradual consolidation and strengthening of human rights law and international humanitarian law; the spread of conflicts around the world in which gross abuses of human rights regularly occurred; increased media coverage of such conflicts and the concomitant pressure from publics in the West for their leaders to act; combined with a reinvigorated and more proactive United Nations Security Council no longer paralysed by the superpower confrontation of the Cold War. This led to the development of the idea of 'humanitarian intervention' that would be enthusiastically taken up and encouraged by Tony Blair, and is partly reflected in the Ministry of Defence's mission statement to be a 'force for good' in the world.¹⁶ Wars fought by the West subsequently became wars of choice, rather than of survival or of necessity.

Analysis of the strategic environment has gradually become more sophisticated and nuanced in the last few years. This was partly a function of time and experience as, by then, analysts could look back to the record of the 1990s, which served as a fairly solid foundation on which to develop analyses and projections with regard to future threats and challenges. A fundamental re-assessment of the strategic environment was also prompted by the events of 9/11. One of the clearest articulations of the emerging context after that time was produced by the JDCC in March 2003 in its *Strategic Trends* document. The JDCC argued that the greatest risk to UK security would derive from the strategic environment changing faster than the UK could acquire and/or apply resources to meet that threat. In particular, it concluded that the following trends would have a direct bearing on the UK's defence and security policy up to 2030:

- Increased destructive power of the asymmetric threat from terrorists and/or hostile states to UK homeland and overseas interests;
- Greater requirement for UK Armed Forces to operate in complex terrain;
- Increasing turbulence worldwide with persistent low intensity threats;
- Likely new nuclear and WME [weapons of mass effect] powers;
- Proliferation of new technologies which could be used by future adversaries;
- Failing states becoming a greater threat to global security than resurgent ones;
- The US-declared 'global war on terrorism' and ongoing military transformation programme would significantly alter future US concepts, diplomacy and global military footprint;

¹⁶ These ideas of humanitarian intervention and what has been termed the "responsibility to protect" is examined in greater detail in Library Research Paper RP08/55, [Reinventing Humanitarian Intervention: Two Cheers for the Responsibility to Protect?](#), 17 June 2008

- Increasing mutual antagonism between Islamic and Western cultures;
- Increasing calls for humanitarian intervention and assistance overseas;
- New environments for conflict: space and cyberspace.¹⁷

The changing nature of the strategic threat over the last decade subsequently raised significant problems for defence planners who have had to carefully define and re-define the UK's role in a constantly shifting environment. As a result the role and purpose of the armed forces has also become "multiple, unclear and contested",¹⁸ with a distinct move away from the classic perception that they exist purely for the defence of the state and its interests abroad. As Professor Keith Hartley noted in evidence to the Defence Committee in March 2007, the Armed Forces:

are faced not just with usual changes...but adapting and equipping themselves for unknown and uncertain threats that will occur sometime in the future, bearing in mind that the starting point in the future is unknown. No one can forecast it accurately.¹⁹

B. The Development of Government Policy

1. The Conservative Legacy

In order to consider Blair's record on defence policy it is necessary to briefly examine the legacy handed down by the previous Conservative government, as many of the defence policy changes instituted during that period continued to have an impact well into Blair's premiership and arguably continue to do so.²⁰

Even though the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact and the emergence of conflicts in Bosnia, Somalia and elsewhere in the early 1990s seemed to presage the need for a serious rethink of Britain's defence posture, there appeared to be a marked reluctance for any radical change in strategic defence policy. Politically this was largely a result of the implications of the Nott Review in 1981²¹ which Lawrence Freedman argued had led to a "morbid fear of such exercises among Conservative politicians".²² As a number of commentators have pointed out, this caution was justified to the extent that the dust was still settling on the post-Cold War world and there was a reluctance to finally accept that the Russian threat had entirely disappeared. More generally, the potential of President Bush's proclaimed 'New World Order' was far from clear.²³

¹⁷ Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre, *Strategic Trends*, March 2003, p.1-9

¹⁸ Timothy Edmonds and Anthony Forster, *Out of Step: The Case for Change in the British Armed Forces*, DEMOS, November 2007

¹⁹ Defence Select Committee, *UK Defence: Commitments and Resources*, Uncorrected Oral Evidence, HC 381-ii, Session 2006-07, Q241

²⁰ The current debate over the terms and conditions of Service personnel and issues such as accommodation and healthcare have been considered by some to partly be the result of decisions taken by the Conservative government in the early 1990s including the sell-off of the married estate to Annington Homes and the closure of the military hospitals.

²¹ The Review had called for substantial naval cuts just prior to the 1982 Falklands Conflict.

²² Lawrence Freedman, *The Politics of British Defence Policy 1979-98*, 1999, p.95

²³ See for example Air Marshal Sir Tim Garden and General sir David Ramsbotham, "About face – the British Armed Forces which way to turn?", *RUSI Journal*, May 2004

However, the need to respond to the changing strategic environment and also exploit the cost-saving opportunities of the so-called 'peace dividend' subsequently prompted the *Options for Change* review in July 1990, less than a year after the Berlin wall came down. Its basic message was a plan for 'smaller but better' Armed Forces. Manpower was cut by 18% across the board, with the most significant cuts falling on the Army which was reduced from 160,000 to 120,000 personnel. Given its focus on reducing defence spending it was derided by some as "options for cuts".²⁴ However, it did retain an element of caution as the Armed Forces were left with the same basic composition, only considerably smaller in size. That caution was justified by the experience of the 1991 Gulf War which reaffirmed the need for the types of forces designed for dealing with the Warsaw Pact.²⁵

Frontline First: The Defence Costs Study in 1994 was a further assessment of spending and was essentially intended to produce more cost savings without impacting front line effectiveness. It proposed cutting support costs by outsourcing many functions to the private sector through the recently introduced Private Finance Initiative.²⁶ The study also introduced measures to streamline MOD management and command structures, with military and civilian manpower in the Armed Forces to be reduced by 18,700 by the year 2000.

Given the proposed cuts, *Frontline First* led to concerns about the impact on the military's logistical capabilities given the expeditionary role that was increasingly expected of the Armed Forces. Some commentators voiced fears that a 'hollow force' would result from the proposed changes. Additionally, it largely failed to produce sufficient savings to match the substantial defence budget cuts and consequently left Britain's supposedly global role constrained by limited resources and capabilities. Reviewing the study, Andrew Dorman noted that:

While these cuts did not look as though they would have an effect on the frontline the reality was somewhat different. They raised a number of questions about the ability of Britain's armed forces to sustain the number of different types of operations that British forces became involved in.²⁷

Neither *Options for Change* nor *Frontline First* were considered comprehensive reviews, but rather *ad hoc* 'rolling reviews.' Consequently analysts such as Colin McInnes considered the period from 1990 through to 1997 to be largely characterised by flux and uncertainty.²⁸ The Conservatives were very sceptical of an EU defence role and placed a much greater emphasis on NATO. There was a focus on the idea of 'balanced forces', but which in essence retained the ability to conduct high-intensity war in Europe.²⁹

²⁴ Lawrence Freedman, *The Politics of British Defence Policy 1979-98*, 1999, p.96

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ PFI was introduced in 1992 to increase private involvement in the provision of public services across government.

²⁷ Andrew Dorman in Croft et al, *Britain and Defence 1945-2000*, 2001, p.22

²⁸ Colin McInnes, "Labour's Strategic Defence Review", *International Affairs*, 1998, p.825

²⁹ A concept that Labour would abandon in the Strategic Defence Review.

The weak economy in the 1990s had also made defence especially prone to budget cuts. Indeed, at that time the defence budget as a percentage of GDP was the lowest it had ever been in the twentieth century, and the Armed Forces were the smallest they had been since the 1930s.³⁰ Colin McInnes noted that, by the end of the Major Government, the Armed Forces were “clearly stretched and probably overstretched, with gaps between operational tours too short. Morale and recruitment were low”.³¹ There was also a high incidence of equipment programmes which were both late and over budget. In 2006 General Sir Mike Jackson commented that,

History may well judge that the so-called peace dividend after the Cold War was too sharply taken in the euphoria and relief that followed. It was rather like removing the lid off a pressure cooker, a lid screwed down by bilateral superpower rivalry. Once that lid was off, then the pressure erupted.³²

Another distinguishing feature of Major’s foreign policy was the increasingly strained relationship with the US, principally due to disagreements over Bosnia, nuclear testing, and Northern Ireland.³³

It was in this context that Labour fought its election campaign with the manifesto commitment to undertake a fundamental review of defence policy, thus challenging traditional Conservative ground. Indeed, defence had traditionally been a sensitive area for Labour. As Hew Strachan has pointed out, in the 1997 election not a single Labour candidate had a service background.³⁴ When previously in Government Labour had also been considered more prone to reappropriate money away from defence into other areas. Yet, the weakness of the Conservatives on defence in the mid-1990s opened a window of opportunity which Labour was able to exploit. The Labour opposition started to criticise the Conservatives for its Treasury-driven rolling reviews and, more fundamentally, its “lack of strategic focus”.³⁵ This was part of a more general move away from traditional Labour anti-militarism and set the Party on a course that ultimately “resulted in Labour resorting to force with a remarkable degree of frequency”.³⁶

2. Strategic Defence Review 1998

Following a 14-month process, the commitment of the Labour government to conduct a comprehensive review of defence policy ultimately materialised in the form of the *Strategic Defence Review* of 8 July 1998.³⁷

In what had been regarded as an original approach, Labour announced that the Review would be foreign policy-led, as opposed to what it saw as Conservative Treasury-led cuts. To this end the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) was closely involved – particularly at the early stages of the process – and was tasked with producing a foreign

³⁰ Colin McInnes, “Labour’s Strategic Defence Review”, *International Affairs*, 1998, p.825

³¹ Ibid, p.827

³² General Sir Mike Jackson, ‘The Richard Dimbleby Lecture’, 6 December 2006

³³ William Walker in Gittings and Davis, *Rethinking Defence and Foreign Policy*, p.12

³⁴ Hew Strachan, *The Civil-Military Gap in Britain*, p.47

³⁵ Colin McInnes, “Labour’s Strategic Defence Review”, *International Affairs*, 1998, p.828

³⁶ Paul Williams, *British Foreign Policy Under New Labour 1997-2005*, 2005, p.25

³⁷ Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999, Session 1997-98

policy baseline from which defence decisions could be derived. Echoing the message coming from the FCO, the new Defence Secretary, George Robertson, declared British forces would act as a 'force for good' in the world. Questions immediately arose over how defence would have to change in accord with a foreign policy supposedly framed by human rights and an 'ethical dimension.' As Freedman noted, "Doing good is demanding both militarily and diplomatically",³⁸ while Colin Gray warned that the "scale of moral affront inherently is utterly disconnected from probability of strategic effectiveness".³⁹ As a result the Review was considerably more about "the use of armed force as much as the more traditional questions of budgets, procurement and the distribution of resources".⁴⁰

The SDR was intended to be "radical"⁴¹ and reflect Labour's commitment to greater openness in defence.⁴² Yet there were also elements of continuity in many of its conclusions.⁴³ The flexibility required to support an activist foreign policy in the new strategic environment was manifested in the articulation of eight 'defence missions': peacetime security, security of the overseas territories, defence diplomacy, support of wider British interests, peace and humanitarian support operations, regional conflict outside the NATO area, regional conflict inside the NATO area, and a strategic attack on NATO.⁴⁴ The defence missions represented only a marginal change on the 'mission types' which had been recently articulated under the Conservatives, and which had already pointed to a growing emphasis on expeditionary capabilities. However, the Review gave them greater prominence, to the extent that they underpinned a comprehensive strategic framework and served as the basis for a further twenty eight military tasks. In a move away from previous practice, decisions on capability would proceed on the requirements generated by those missions and subsidiary tasks, rather than being based primarily on numbers and mass.

In a world of uncertain multi-centric threats, there was a clear focus therefore on the need to create deployable expeditionary forces capable of full-spectrum operations and at considerable distances from the UK. One of the SDR's main decisions in support of this emphasis was the plan to acquire two new aircraft carriers to function primarily as mobile airbases and key enablers of force projection, and enhance strategic sea and airlift capabilities. It also assumed that "undertaking smaller but frequent, often simultaneous and sometimes prolonged operations can be more difficult than preparing for a single-worst-case conflict".⁴⁵ A direct implication of this was the need to better co-ordinate the activities of the three services and pool expertise to achieve maximum operational effectiveness. This meant expediting and consolidating the tri-service 'joint' approach, which was designed to create rapidly deployable force packages that could be

³⁸ Lawrence Freedman, *The Politics of British Defence Policy 1979-98*, 1999, p.101

³⁹ Colin Gray, "The RMA and Intervention: A Sceptical View", in *Dimensions of Western Military Intervention* 2002, p.61

⁴⁰ Lawrence Freedman, 'Defence' in Anthony Seldon, *Blair's Britain 1997-2007*, 2007, p.618

⁴¹ Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999, Session 1997-98, p.1

⁴² Revealed in the unprecedented idea of the Review's supporting essays

⁴³ For instance with respect to playing a leading role in the world, NATO policy, retaining conventional forces, and Trident

⁴⁴ Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999, Session 1997-98, p.13

⁴⁵ Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999, Session 1997-98, p.16

assembled at short notice and would be capable of operating effectively.⁴⁶ Specifically the SDR acknowledged that:

While single-Service skills and ethos will remain the essential foundation of all our military capability, most future operations will be conducted by joint forces composed of fighting units from individual Services. These will be under joint (tri-Service) command and control, drawing on joint intelligence capabilities and with joint logistics. We must therefore also build the joint approach into our doctrine and our preparation and training for operations.⁴⁷

The SDR therefore established a Joint Rapid Reaction Force which would provide a pool of readily available, rapidly deployable, high capability forces from all three Services, designed to have enhanced firepower, mobility and protection.⁴⁸ Amongst other joint initiatives, the SDR created a Joint Helicopter Command, a Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre⁴⁹ and a Joint Nuclear Biological and Chemical Defence Regiment. There was also a recognised need for greater joint integration of command and control,⁵⁰ logistics⁵¹ and transport⁵² to reflect the operational demands of expeditionary warfare. In response to the proposals set out in the SDR, the Defence Committee noted that ‘jointery’ is:

generally an inevitable, as well as a welcome development...it must not however, be allowed to damage the single service ethos. Nor should it be allowed to become a mechanism by which the Services conduct their traditional horse trading on capabilities away from public scrutiny.⁵³

Other changes were relatively modest given the downsizing of the early 1990s, but the disappearance of the Soviet threat meant combat aircraft, frigates and nuclear warheads could be further reduced.⁵⁴ There was little change to the composition of the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, but a restructuring and ‘re-rolling’ of the Army at brigade and regimental levels was introduced. This was accompanied by a radical restructuring and down-sizing of the Territorial Army, which would be integrated with the Regular forces and be expected to engage in the full spectrum of military tasks. It also retained the UK’s commitment to maintaining an independent nuclear deterrent. Essentially, the Review proposed to create a balanced force to the extent that it combined light forces with the capability for a Gulf War-type operation.⁵⁵

⁴⁶ The creation of Joint Rapid Reaction Forces that were not too light, yet also capable of prompt deployment were a reflection of this.

⁴⁷ Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999, Session 1997-98, p.21

⁴⁸ The SDR planned for the JRRFs to be operational in 2001.

⁴⁹ This was set up on 1 September 1999 and is tasked with developing joint doctrine and the future joint vision.

⁵⁰ To this end the responsibilities of the Chief of Joint Operations were increased (placing him on a similar budgetary level as the Service Chiefs) and a new post of Chief of Joint Operations and Training was established.

⁵¹ To this end the SDR planned for a new Joint Force Logistics Component Headquarters to be established and the separate Service logistics brought together under a new Chief of Defence Logistics.

⁵² To this end a new Joint Defence Transport and Movements organisation was created.

⁵³ Defence Select Committee, *The Strategic Defence Review*, HC 138, Session 1997-98

⁵⁴ The number of assets held by each of the Services and the trained strengths and requirements of each Service for each year between 1997 and 2008 is available in the accompanying background paper RP08/58.

⁵⁵ Also reflecting the lesson from Bosnia that peace-keeping operations would probably require heavy force components

The Review also placed considerable emphasis on the need to ensure adequate support for troops, such as logistics and medical services, particularly after what it considered were dangerous cuts in these areas under the Conservatives. The expeditionary strategy at the heart of the Review clearly necessitated improvements in this area given the requirement to sustain troops for long periods in far away places. In other areas, the Review also outlined the necessity of exploiting new technologies, outlined a commitment to streamline procurement through a Smart Procurement Initiative and re-affirmed the Government's commitment to maintaining the UK's strategic nuclear deterrent.

The inclusion of defence diplomacy⁵⁶ was also a novel feature of the Review and an indication of the broader roles the Armed Forces would be expected to undertake under Labour. Designating defence diplomacy a central mission in its own right tied in with Labour's internationalist outlook and was derived from the belief that Britain should be a force for good in the world and that the Armed Forces "could do much to avoid crises developing and escalating into military confrontations".⁵⁷ As the SDR put it, "We require armed forces which can operate in support of diplomacy alongside economic, trade and development levers, to strengthen security and avert conflict".⁵⁸

In sum, rather than instituting any far-reaching structural change, the SDR was regarded as evolutionary rather than revolutionary,⁵⁹ its greatest attribute being that it provided "an unusually clear statement on the purposes for which forces needed to be maintained in the modern world and how they can be most effective".⁶⁰ Colin McInnes noted:

The underlying theme of all of these changes is that forces are likely to be used regularly, that they must be moved to where they are needed, that they need modern and adequate equipment to do the job effectively, that they must be supported in the field and that they are likely to be operating on both a joint and multinational basis. This reflects very powerfully the internationalist outlook and the awareness of new risks outlined in the foreign policy baseline.⁶¹

Nevertheless a number of important criticisms surfaced. Several analysts wondered just how radical it was, believing it was stronger on rhetoric than substance and in essence constituted a 'dressed-up' continuation of Conservative policy. This was linked to criticisms of its perceived timidity and that it did not go far enough, in terms of

⁵⁶ Defence diplomacy incorporates a variety of non-operational activities in support of conflict prevention and peacetime diplomacy, including defence education and training, arms control initiatives, joint exercises, confidence and security building measures, promoting good governance, building local operational capacity, and supporting UK defence exports. Importantly, defence diplomacy is also seen as an important contribution to future operations in helping to secure regional access, promoting interoperability and gaining support from capable regional forces.

⁵⁷ Colin McInnes, "Labour's Strategic Defence Review", *International Affairs*, 1998, p.828

⁵⁸ Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999, Session 1997-98, p.12

⁵⁹ See "Robertson's blueprint is more sensible than truly radical", *The Times*, 8 July 1998 and "The Strategic Defence Review A good job", *RUSI Newsbrief*, August 1998.

⁶⁰ Lawrence Freedman, *The Politics of British Defence Policy 1979-98*, 1999, p.98

⁶¹ Colin McInnes, "Labour's Strategic Defence Review", *International Affairs*, 1998, p.828

asymmetric challenges, for example.⁶² Others bemoaned the lack of detail regarding the foreign policy baseline, with some commentators, such as Paul Rogers, expressing the view that it should have expanded its scope to consider other forms of threat associated with longer-term problems such as climate change and the world's growing poverty gap.⁶³ In a memorandum to the Defence Committee at the time he stated that the Review "barely gets to grips with the likely international security problems of the next 30 years".⁶⁴ Also, some doubted whether the commitments made in the Review, in particular with respect to expeditionary and force projection capabilities, were sustainable given the demands on the forces and the resources available to them.⁶⁵

The SDR and its findings serve as the foundation for many of the defence issues that are discussed in this paper. In large part, subsequent white papers were developments on, augmentations to, and refinements of its conclusions, although they did introduce new or updated policies in specific areas.

3. New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review 2002

In critically assessing the SDR, Lawrence Freedman had stated that it would be "premature to suggest that Britain has identified the optimum force structure required for the emerging strategic environment".⁶⁶ Indeed, as noted in the Defence Committee's report into the SDR in September 1998, the then Defence Secretary also stated "We will...keep open the option of undertaking further reviews if there are major changes in the strategic environment or other circumstances affecting the security and defence of the United Kingdom".⁶⁷ The terrorist attacks on 9/11 prompted such a reappraisal of the Government's defence policy.

Less than a month later the new Defence Secretary, Geoff Hoon, announced that the MOD would be evaluating whether the SDR was still adequate "to cope with the threats we face".⁶⁸ The basic premise of the New Chapter, published in July 2002, was that the SDR had been broadly correct in its decisions on the trajectory of defence policy, but that given developments since 9/11 – as well as the lessons learned from Kosovo and Afghanistan – there was a need to update and revise key areas, particularly with regard to the threat of international terrorism and the relationship between defence and homeland security.

The New Chapter set out three key aims in relation to dealing with terrorism and asymmetric warfare: prevention/stabilisation, deterrence/coercion, and military force. The White Paper emphasised the need to project force to defeat enemies overseas, and deter regimes that harboured terrorists. In this respect it underlined and strengthened the

⁶² Lilleker, "Labour's Defence Policy" in Little and Wickham-Jones, *New Labour's Foreign Policy: A New Moral Crusade?*, 2000, p.232

⁶³ Defence Select Committee, *The Strategic Defence Review*, HC 138, Session 1997-98

⁶⁴ Defence Select Committee, *The Strategic Defence Review*, HC 138-III, Session 1997-98, p.537

⁶⁵ Lilleker, "Labour's Defence Policy" in Little and Wickham-Jones, *New Labour's Foreign Policy: A New Moral Crusade?*, 2000, p.229

⁶⁶ Lawrence Freedman, *The Politics of British Defence Policy*, 1999 p.102

⁶⁷ Defence Select Committee, *The Strategic Defence Review*, HC 138-I, Session 1997-98, para.436

⁶⁸ Speech by the then Defence Secretary Geoffrey Hoon to the Labour Party Conference, Brighton, 2 October 2001

expeditionary posture of the Armed Forces and acknowledged the need for a wider geographical scope than that which the SDR had originally envisaged. It also considered in greater detail the role of the Armed Forces in homeland defence and security and concluded that there was a need for the Reserves to play a greater role in military assistance to the civil authorities. Therefore a Civil Contingency Reaction Force was established.

The New Chapter was also the first serious articulation of Effects Based Operations (EBO), which would serve as the conceptual basis for identifying the requisite force structure and capabilities. As a key element of EBO, the New Chapter noted the importance of 'network-centric capabilities' designed to exploit information superiority and military dominance to decisive effect. As the New Chapter explained, this would entail considerable investment in new technologies such as airborne surveillance, communication systems and precision munitions. The UK's limited resources meant the focus would be on key enablers rather than on wholesale transformation along American lines⁶⁹ or as the MOD put it, "evolving the concept pragmatically".⁷⁰ While the SDR had already acknowledged the potential of new technologies on military strategy, capability and operational effectiveness,⁷¹ the idea of the systematic integration of new technologies into the Armed Forces and the development of a doctrinal framework for their use was first comprehensively laid down in the New Chapter.

In its response to the New Chapter's recommendations the Defence Select Committee concluded that there needed to be greater clarity over the concept of asymmetry and its doctrinal implications; that the White Paper could have thought more innovatively about the balance between home defence and operations abroad; that there was a lack of urgency about acquiring and embracing new technologies because "ambition continues to run ahead of delivery", and that the level of commitments envisaged by the White Paper would lead to overstretch, particularly in the area of 'key enablers' and support functions.⁷²

4. Defence White Paper 2003 and Future Capabilities Chapter 2004

The SDR New Chapter had been an initial attempt to respond to the new imperatives demanded by the threat of international terrorism brought home by the 9/11 attacks. However, it became clear that more time was required before a more informed response could be developed which was more firmly integrated with wider defence and security concerns. As the Defence Committee noted, because the New Chapter had focused primarily on the specific threat from international terrorism, the outcome was somewhat "untidy and unbalanced".⁷³

⁶⁹ An examination of the Revolution in Military Affairs and the development of US concepts such as network centric warfare are set out in the accompanying background paper, Library Research Paper RP08/58.

⁷⁰ Defence Select Committee, A New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review, HC 93-II, Session 2002-03, Ev.2

⁷¹ See Library Research Paper RP04/71, [The Defence White Paper](#), p.10

⁷² Defence Select Committee, A New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review, HC 93-II, Session 2002-03

⁷³ Defence Select Committee, A New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review, HC 93-II, Session 2002-03

The 2003 White Paper was seen as a further development on both the SDR and its New Chapter, rather than constituting a radical departure of defence policy. In essence it was a clearer and more up-to-date articulation of what it expected of the Armed Forces and the new capabilities and structures required to meet those expectations. It was also shaped by the lessons emerging from operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The White Paper began with a reassessment of the strategic environment, which brought its planning basis up to date to reflect the changes that had taken place since Labour came to power. Immediate threats to the UK were identified as international terrorism, WMD proliferation and the impact of failing states. However, the paper also considered the future implications of worldwide social and environmental pressures and suggested that population growth, religious and ethnic tensions and competition over scarce resources could result in either intra-state or inter-state conflict at some point in the future. The consequential threat to the UK would derive from the internationalisation of any regional conflict, and the impact of these issues on the global economy, energy security and the UK's allies and partners.

Based on this analysis the White Paper recognised the UK's response to these strategic priorities as two-fold. Given the fact that the UK would not have the capability to respond militarily to every crisis, national interest, proximity and responsibility would be key determinants in any response. European security would remain central to the UK's national interest, followed by regions on Europe's periphery. However, given the global nature of terrorism and WMD proliferation, working within the international community to address the UK's national security and economic interests would remain important.

In a shift away from the eight defence missions of the SDR, the new White Paper shifted to the concept of eighteen military tasks grouped under four main conceptual areas.⁷⁴ The White Paper also acknowledged that the tempo of operations over the previous five years had left the Armed Forces dealing with continual concurrent operations that were beyond the planning assumptions of the SDR. There was thus an emphasis on the need to be structured and organised to support a higher level of operational activity. As an amplification of the ideas expressed in the SDR, planning structures and capabilities would be principally geared towards flexible, expeditionary warfare rather than conventional territorial defence. It did not expect UK forces to be capable of contributing to every crisis and that participation would generally be in coalition with other nations. Embracing lessons from recent experience in Afghanistan and Iraq, it placed a priority on developing interoperability with the US and NATO, yet also planned for the retention of capability that would allow the UK to act as a 'framework nation' in a coalition operation of medium scale, where the US was not involved. The Defence Planning Assumptions in the White Paper were therefore revised and envisaged the armed forces being able to undertake, without creating overstretch, three multiple concurrent small to medium scale operations, two of which would be enduring peace support operations and one a small

⁷⁴ These were: standing strategic commitments (nuclear deterrent, intelligence gathering, and provision of specialised contracting services); standing home commitments (protect territorial sovereignty and military aid to the civil community); standing overseas commitments (provide security for the overseas territories and Sovereign Base Areas); and contingent operations overseas (humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, evacuation of British citizens, peacekeeping, peace enforcement, power projection, focused intervention, and deliberate intervention)

scale intervention operation. Indeed, the requirement to handle concurrency of operations was one of the most important aspects of the White Paper. The planning assumptions also recognised the need to retain the potential for a demanding large-scale operation.

In addition to revising the defence planning assumptions the White Paper advanced the integration of effects-based operations and planning into the Armed Forces. This built on ideas first articulated in the New Chapter, which had been primarily geared towards combating terrorism, and gave them wider applicability. Flexible long term force planning as opposed to a fixed force approach was prioritised to reflect the fact that structures and capabilities required to achieve certain effects may change over time as threats, technologies, and coalitions evolve. Consequently, the earlier emphasis on the quantity of platforms and personnel as a measure of capability was largely abandoned.

Achievement of the desired effects was based on three premises: rapid configuration and deployment of forces, the capacity for rapid decision-making, and the precise delivery of force. Thus, a major feature of the White Paper was the emphasis it gave to enhancing key 'enablers' such as NEC and ISTAR capabilities.⁷⁵ The White Paper stated that:

We will need to continue to modernise our armed forces to concentrate on the characteristics of speed, precision, agility, deployability, reach and sustainability. Key to this process will be our ability to derive the full benefit of advancing technology, particularly in the collection, management and use of information through NEC.⁷⁶

A major consideration behind these modernisations was the importance of ensuring the UK maintained a force with political weight in coalitions:

Where the UK chooses to be engaged, we will wish to be able to influence political and military decisions making... The significant military contribution the UK is able to make to such operations means that we secure an effective place in the political and military decision-making processes.⁷⁷

The White Paper also set out the future roles of each of the Services. In the maritime sphere, the White Paper placed an emphasis on land attack capability, amphibious capability provided by assault ships, and projection of force. In terms of land forces, it established the requirement for a graduated and balanced structure of light medium and heavy capability. The future requirement for heavy armoured fighting vehicles and artillery was reduced, and the formation of a new light brigade proposed. In terms of air assets it focused on the projection of air power from both land and sea, with an emphasis on offensive effect, as well as the continued imperative of strategic lift capability to support expeditionary operations. A joint, integrated and interoperable logistics capacity was recognised as being central to an expeditionary capability based upon multiple concurrent operations. In this respect, logistics was elevated to a capability

⁷⁵ ISTAR relates to intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance assets.

⁷⁶ Ministry of Defence, *Delivering Security in a Changing World*, Cm 6041-I, December 2003 p.8

⁷⁷ Ministry of Defence, *Delivering Security in a Changing World*, Cm 6041-I, December 2003 p.9

in its own right. In practical terms this entailed, among other things, efforts to improve the reliability and serviceability of equipment and, given the lessons of Iraq, robust systems for the tracking of equipment and stock once in theatre.

In July 2004 an additional chapter to the White Paper was published in which the Government set out in greater detail the changes to force structure and the role of the Armed Forces. It also identified where cuts would be made. In line with the perceived roles of each of the Services, the chapter recommended restructuring the infantry and phasing out the Infantry Arms Plot⁷⁸ and reducing the number of Regular battalions from 40 to 36. Divisions would be restructured into large single-cap badge regiments of two or more battalions. The manpower requirement of the Army would be reduced by 1,200 to 102,000 personnel. In order to create a more flexible maritime expeditionary capability and based on the assumption that with new and more technologically capable equipment, fewer platforms would be required to deliver intended effects, the paper recommended that the Royal Navy lose twelve vessels from its surface fleet⁷⁹ and three nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs). The requirement for the Type 45 air defence destroyer was reduced from 12 to 8 vessels, while the manpower requirement of the Navy was reduced by 1,500 to 36,000. The White Paper reiterated that the future carrier (CVF) and the Joint Strike Fighter which would operate from the carriers would eventually be the key elements in projecting air power from the sea. Within the RAF, an air expeditionary task group capable of deploying up to 64 offensive fast jets would enable the full range of small, medium, and large-scale contingent operations to be conducted. Therefore, one Tornado F3 squadron would be disbanded in October 2005, three Jaguar squadrons would be disbanded two years earlier than planned and RAF Coltishall would close. By/from 2010 the number of RAF aircrews would be reduced to 170. Overall the manpower requirement of the RAF would reduce by 7,500 to 41,000 by April 2008 and a review of the RAF's future airfield requirements would be conducted.⁸⁰

In terms of NEC, the White Paper outlined the projected, interconnected phases along which the capability would develop, comprising an 'initial' period by 2007, a 'transitional state' by 2015, and culminating in a 'mature' yet constantly evolving state in 2020-2030. Some of the main assets the MOD planned to achieve NEC included the Watchkeeper unmanned aerial vehicle, the ASTOR airborne stand-off surveillance aircraft and the enhanced Skynet 5 satellite system.

While there was broad support for the assumptions laid out in the White Paper particularly with regard to its analysis of the strategic environment and the main conclusions, the main concern over its content related to how the MOD expected to afford the technological modernisations it outlined. As the *Financial Times* noted at the time "matching resources to new threats is the biggest challenge" and that "Intelligent networks to link fewer, more sophisticated military platforms are supposed to enable the

⁷⁸ The IAP system involved moving battalions between locations and roles every few years. This reduced the number of battalions available to deploy at any one time given that those battalions being moved or training were taken out of the Order of Battle.

⁷⁹ Three Type 42 destroyers, three Type 23 frigates, and six mine countermeasure vessels.

⁸⁰ The number of assets held by each of the Services and the trained strengths and requirements of each Service for each year between 1997 and 2008 is available in the accompanying background paper RP08/58.

new system to operate. But to think that can be done within a defence budget that is frozen in real terms is fanciful⁸¹.

These financial concerns were particularly acute given that the main NEC enabling technologies are due to enter service at a time of peak expenditure in the defence equipment plan, with the introduction of some major platforms expected in that period.⁸² The Defence Select Committee also feared that, given the increased operational demands that served as the basis of the changes outlined in *Future Capabilities*:

It may take another decade before the capabilities to deliver those requirements are in place. In the meantime equipment withdrawals and personnel reductions may leave gaps in capability. Those gaps, in turn, may create risks. Some of those risks, in our view, need not have been taken.⁸³

C. Relations with Allies

Malcolm Chalmers has observed that “With the formation of the wartime [WWII] alliance with the US, followed by the institutionalisation of collective defence through NATO, Britain’s security became inextricably linked with that of others”.⁸⁴ In its report on the SDR in 1998 the Defence Select Committee also noted that, “the main means by which the United Kingdom has traditionally sought to guarantee its security since 1945 has been through a collective approach, and it has invested a great deal of political and financial capital in maintaining the various instruments of collective security”.⁸⁵ The UK’s active participation in a number of prominent institutions, bringing together nations with shared security and other interests, has underpinned this policy. In addition to involvement in international institutions, the UK has also sought to establish strong bilateral links with other nations. Most important in this respect has been the UK’s relationship with the United States.

Tony Blair embraced this perspective and followed a foreign and security policy that was noticeably internationalist. His approach emphasised the fact that UK interests were bound up with the maintenance of international peace and security, and best preserved through a wide variety of regional and global organisations. In a speech in 1997 Blair stated that:

The goal of our foreign policy is clear. We cannot in these post-Empire days be a superpower in the military sense. But we can make the British presence in the

⁸¹ “Wanting it all – new military thinking means more cash or fewer options”, *The Financial Times*, 12 December 2003.

⁸² Such as the A400M strategic transport aircraft, the Joint Strike Fighter aircraft, the two new aircraft carriers for the Royal Navy and the Future Rapid Effects System family of armoured vehicles.

⁸³ Ministry of Defence, *Delivering Security in a Changing World: Future Capabilities*, Cm 6269, Session 2003-04

⁸⁴ Malcolm Chalmers, “The Defence Review – British Policy Options”, *RUSI Journal*, 1 August 1997, p.37

⁸⁵ Defence Select Committee, *The Strategic Defence Review*, HC 138-I, Session 1997-98, para.130

world felt. With historic alliances, we can be pivotal. We can be powerful in our influence – a nation to whom others listen.⁸⁶

The need for collective and strategic responses to challenges in an increasingly globalised and integrated world was also emphasised under Blair's tenure and these convictions were firmly expressed in the SDR:

Our security is indivisible from that of our European partners and Allies. We therefore have a fundamental interest in the security and stability of the continent as a whole and the effectiveness of NATO as a collective political and military instrument to underpin these interests.⁸⁷

The SDR therefore committed the UK to a firmly internationalist policy, with planning for operations strongly based on their expected multinational character. Although independent operations, for example in the Falklands, were not entirely dismissed from the planning assumptions, the prospect of scenarios demanding an independent British response was considered remote. In the later years of the Blair government this policy became somewhat more *ad hoc* and flexible following disagreements with allies and institutions over a number of issues (noticeably in NATO with respect to Kosovo and in both the UN and NATO over the conflict in Iraq). Subsequently, the emphasis in UK policy was on 'effective' multilateralism and looser, less institutionalised forms of partnerships such as the US-led concept of coalitions of the willing.⁸⁸

1. United States

There is a long history of close cooperation between the UK and US in defence, which reflects the strong political ties between the two countries. This is embodied in the notion of the 'special relationship,' which, despite ups and downs since the Second World War, has persisted as an enduring political partnership.⁸⁹ Often, even when relations have been strained, cooperation in defence has been little affected.

As Wyn Rees has noted:

Regular liaisons between the Pentagon and the Ministry of Defence, joint exercises and shared procurement of equipment have ensured links at all levels within the respective military establishments and have cultivated the closest ties of any NATO allies.⁹⁰

Indeed, as a RUSI Whitehall Paper in 2000 observed "For much of the past sixty years British security policy has been geared to encouraging the US in its international role and influencing its conduct".⁹¹

⁸⁶ Prime Minister Tony Blair, "The Principles of Modern British Foreign Policy", Speech at the Lord Mayor's Banquet, 10 November 1997

⁸⁷ Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999, Session 1997-98

⁸⁸ Paul Williams, *British Foreign Policy Under New Labour 1997-2005*, 2005, p.29

⁸⁹ The US-UK "special relationship" is examined in greater detail in Library Research Paper RP08/56, [British foreign policy since 1997](#), 23 June 2008.

⁹⁰ Wyn Rees, "Preserving the security of Europe" in Dorman et al, *Britain and Defence 1945-2000*, 2001, p.56

⁹¹ "Coalitions and the Future of UK Security Policy", *RUSI Whitehall Paper 50*, 2000, p.3

Tony Blair came to power committed to strengthening the special relationship with the US, which was a significant shift from Major's strained relationship with the US during the early 1990s. A major feature of Blair's foreign policy outlook was his desire for Britain to be a major player on the world stage, or as some have put it, to 'punch above its weight.' Blair saw the key route to such a global role in the strengthening of the UK's relationship with the US. Perhaps the clearest indication of this commitment to the special relationship was reflected in defence policy.

The most notable reflection of Blair's staunch Atlanticism was his decision to stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with Bush in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. The decision was based on his belief that the threat of modern international terrorism required a resolute and united response, and that it would be better to be 'on-board' with the US and influencing it as it reacted to the new threats. He believed Britain could shape the exercise of American power, act as a bridge between the US and Europe, and keep the US multilaterally engaged. As Lawrence Freedman noted:

the constant criterion for judging British defence policy over the post-war period has been what is the price we have to pay to get access to and influence American decision-making.⁹²

Michael Codner has also acknowledged this need for the UK to be 'strategically significant' as a major theme in British defence policy.⁹³ This need was reflected in the SDR, which sought to entrench the special relationship between the UK and the US. The SDR asked, 'How do we and our allies retain interoperability with US forces given the radical changes they envisage?' Subsequent white papers did not radically alter this line and in fact, the growing emphasis on network enabled capability only served to emphasise the extent to which the UK felt it vitally important to keep pace technologically with the US. In a memorandum to the Defence Select Committee in March 2007 Michael Codner also commented:

Arguably a fundamental proposition of Britain's present defence policy is that British military expeditionary capability should be sufficient in scale and quality to allow British forces to conduct largely autonomous operations at the operational level that are important enough to the overall outcome that the UK government has influence at the strategic level over the US in planning and execution of the operations.⁹⁴

Nevertheless, as Jeremy Black has argued, recent crises, in particular the conflict in Iraq, "served to flag up the extent to which the UK could not set the terms of the intervention".⁹⁵ Air Marshal Tim Garden also questioned whether this Atlanticist policy was appropriate and expressed concerns that attempts to emulate the US through

⁹² Lawrence Freedman, "The defence review – international policy options", *RUSI Journal*, August 1997, p.41

⁹³ Michael Codner, "The United Kingdom's Strategic Defence Review: Strategic Options", *RUSI Journal*, August 1997, p.19

⁹⁴ Defence Select Committee, *UK Defence: Commitments and Resources: Uncorrected Oral Evidence*, HC 381-ii, Session 2006-07

⁹⁵ Jeremy Black, *The Dotted Red Line: Britain's defence Policy in the Modern World*, 2006, p.75

development of NEC was diverting attention away from the area that the UK should be concentrating on: people. He remarked that: “The US has the resources for high-tech offensive operations – but do we need to emulate them in miniature? We can buy equipment off the shelf if the need arises; we cannot buy experienced trained troops”.⁹⁶ Similarly, Jeremy Black suggests the overall effect of the desire to keep up with the Americans will be “to distort British procurement, force profile and doctrine”.⁹⁷ Lawrence Freedman has observed: “often it has seemed that British forces have been geared towards creating the right image and political impressions in Washington than ensuring they are actually fighting-fit”.⁹⁸

Indeed, there is a long history of scepticism regarding the close defence links between the US and UK, often focusing on the political ramifications of the policy. In 1998 Liberal Democrat Peer Lord Wallace remarked that:

Following the Americans up and down the Gulf, grappling with the confusions and domestic lobbies which shape American foreign policy, is scarcely a firm basis for British strategy.⁹⁹

Such criticisms have been generally premised on the view that Washington simply sees British involvement in operations as a convenient political cover to provide greater legitimacy to its campaigns, rather than viewing British forces as serious enhancements of military capability. The Iraq conflict in 2003 amplified many of these concerns. If, as many commentators have claimed, a central aspect of the special relationship was the close military cooperation between the US and UK and their unrivalled ability to conduct joint operations, then the conventional phase of the conflict seemed to confirm such assertions. Yet, as the post-conflict situation deteriorated, the insurgency intensified and the justification for the war was increasingly discredited by the failure to find Iraqi WMD, and serious questions emerged over the desirability of such close links with the US. For many commentators, the problems faced in Iraq were believed to be the outcome of a relationship where one side was committed to take all it could, while the other was determined to give all it could. Blair however, remained adamant that by removing Saddam the conflict had enhanced international peace and security, and was therefore in the British interest. He denied the argument that the conflict had exacerbated the threat from international terrorism claiming instead that the threat existed prior to the Iraq conflict.

As a result of the fall-out from Iraq many politicians, commentators and the wider public questioned whether the relationship remained a dependable vehicle for securing British interests or dealing with global threats. This led some to argue for a renewed and more balanced relationship with the US, and was accompanied by the argument that defence may be an area that could contribute to this rebalancing. For instance, in a paper for the UK Defence Academy, Julian Lindley-French recognised the continued necessity of

⁹⁶ Tim Garden's Weblog, “The UK Defence White Paper” (available online at: <http://homepage.mac.com/tgarden/iblog/B2067696994/C1978092609/E541765127/index.html>)

⁹⁷ Jeremy Black, *The Dotted Red Line: Britain's Defence Policy in the Modern World*, 2006, p.75

⁹⁸ Lawrence Freedman, *The Politics of British Defence Policy*, 1999, p.95

⁹⁹ “Spent Force: Following the Americans up and down the Gulf scarcely justifies us spending billions on new aircraft carriers”, *The Guardian*, 9 July 1998

influence over the US, but expressed concern that “the special relationship has become dangerously one-sided with a British Government too willing to sacrifice British interests to maintain access to American policy-makers”.¹⁰⁰ He argued that in the current strategic environment, with an emphasis on the need for skills in stabilisation and reconstruction, the UK possessed the unique military expertise to offer Western strategic leadership. This, he held, would require a distinct distancing from the US, given its one-dimensional focus on high-end operations. However, criticism of the special relationship in defence matters has appeared to focus largely on the precise terms, nature and potentially damaging ramifications of the relationship, rather than any serious argument that it should be wholly abandoned.

2. NATO

A major imperative of British defence policy for much of the second half of the twentieth century has been the continued engagement of the US in the defence of Europe and NATO has been viewed as the pre-eminent means of achieving this. Despite the end of the Cold War in 1990 successive British governments have continued to emphasise the importance of ensuring American engagement in European security, adapting the argument to the demands of the new strategic environment. As Wyn Rees states, “A central objective of post-Cold War British policy has been to ensure that NATO retained its position as the continent’s principal defence organisation”.¹⁰¹ Not only were arguments on the need for continued insurance against uncertain threats propounded in favour of this stance, but that NATO had come to be seen in a more ideological light as a club of like-minded liberal democracies and a means of spreading stability further east.

Although a new Strategic Concept for NATO was adopted in 1991 in an attempt to define a role for the Alliance in the post-Cold War era, after 1997 the US began to increase pressure on NATO allies to start looking at developing a broader role for the Alliance and potentially one which would take it outside its traditional sphere of influence. When Labour came to power in 1997 Blair reiterated the notion that NATO should remain the cornerstone of the UK’s defence and security policy. Consequently, a major priority of the Blair government was a determined effort to push for the reform of NATO to make it a more modern, relevant and capable organisation that would be compatible with the types and range of challenges in the modern era. As such Blair became a major advocate of US proposals for an expanded role for the Alliance.

Where the UK had pushed for increased European investment in military capabilities, as witnessed at St Malo (see below), this had been with the explicit aim of strengthening the European pillar of NATO, deemed vital to the political integrity of the Alliance. The SDR, which involved wide consultation with the UK’s allies,¹⁰² thus emphasised the importance of NATO:

¹⁰⁰ Julian Lindley French, “British Strategic Leadership: Food for Thought”, *The Shrivenham Papers*, No. 2, October 2006, p.20

¹⁰¹ Wyn Rees in Dorman et al, *Britain and Defence 1945-2000*, 2001, p.61

¹⁰² In evidence to the Defence Committee the Secretary of State George Robertson noted, “At the political level we made it an absolute imperative that right at the very beginning of this process we told our allies in NATO...what it is we are about, what would be reviewed, what would not be reviewed, and the fact that old relationships were likely to be continued” (Defence select Committee, *The Strategic Defence Review*, HC 138-I, Session 1997-98. para.174)

NATO remains the foundation of Europe's and our own security. The Government will therefore seek to ensure the Alliance maintains its credibility and effectiveness by adapting to new strategic circumstances.¹⁰³

In a memorandum to the Defence Committee inquiry on the SDR in 1998 Michael Clarke noted that:

To capitalise on the relationship with the United States the UK will still have to take a leading role within the NATO alliance itself. This may involve British Forces in commitments they would not make on the grounds of direct British security interests, particularly as NATO expands and may become involved in security problems on the periphery of an enlarged NATO area.¹⁰⁴

During the tenure of the Blair government NATO continued to expand, modernise and redefine its role for the twenty-first century. Of particular importance was NATO's summit in Prague in 2002 which was seen as a defining moment for the Alliance as it attempted to define a new security role for itself in response to the events of 9/11. It outlined a new strategic concept to ensure NATO retained its relevance in the face of new threats and challenges and recognised the need for greater flexibility and the ability to undertake 'out of area' operations. To this end NATO leaders agreed to the creation of the NATO Response Force, which would comprise 21,000 personnel, ready to deploy in five days and sustainable in theatre for up to 30 days. The transformation agenda agreed in Prague was subsequently taken forward at the Istanbul Summit in June 2004 with its emphasis on 'projecting stability,' particularly in the light of NATO's commitment to Afghanistan.

NATO's assumption of command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan in August 2003 and its subsequent expansion of ISAF to cover the whole of Afghanistan was arguably the most important development for NATO during the Blair era. The Afghanistan commitment was confirmation of the Alliance's new direction as it extended its operations beyond the traditional European theatre. The UK's decision to deploy to Helmand Province in 2005 as part of ISAF was both a direct response to the unfolding security situation in Afghanistan, but also a clear reflection of the UK's commitment to ensuring NATO remained a viable security organisation capable of responding to new challenges. Despite injecting a new sense of purpose into the organisation, the ISAF operation raised some serious questions, however, over the effectiveness, structure and viability of the Alliance. From the outset serious difficulties emerged, particularly with respect to generating sufficient forces to expand the ISAF mission beyond Kabul. As the security situation deteriorated after 2005 with the resurgence of the Taliban, the operation began to expose serious underlying fissures and strains within NATO. The lack of a comprehensive strategic plan became increasingly apparent as different nations had their own expectations with regard to the nature and purpose of the NATO mission. However, perhaps the most damaging aspect

¹⁰³ Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999, Session 1997-98, p.53

¹⁰⁴ Michael Clarke, Memorandum submitted to the Defence Select Committee, *The Strategic Defence Review*, HC 138-I, Session 1997-98

of the operation was the inability or unwillingness of some allies to meet their force generation obligations and share the operational burden.¹⁰⁵

The problems encountered in Afghanistan certainly mirrored the wider problems faced by the Alliance as it sought to adapt itself to a radically transformed strategic environment. Important issues such as the pace and geographical extent of membership expansion, the capabilities it required, and the precise nature of its relationship with the EU dominated debate on the future of the Alliance in the latter years of the Blair era.

Yet despite the many underlying problems that continued to bedevil the Alliance, the importance of NATO to British security and defence was a fundamental strategic principle receiving broad cross-party support. The then Liberal Democrat Spokesman on Defence, Paul Keetch, commented during a Commons debate on 23 October 2003 that, "Hon. Members on both sides of the House are in agreement that the primacy of NATO must not be threatened".¹⁰⁶

3. European Union

Conflicts in the early 1990s, in particular in the Balkans, had suggested that there might be a greater need for a European capability in defence, particularly when US and European interests did not clearly coincide, and that this might actually serve to bolster the transatlantic relationship. In material terms, however, there were many practical impediments to its development. Europe's forces were unable to respond rapidly to modern contingencies and were primarily organised around plans for fighting Soviet armies and territorial defence. As the Kosovo conflict highlighted, they lacked deployability and flexibility, modern command and communications equipment, precision munitions, strategic lift capability, and expeditionary logistics capability. Europeans had some two million men and women in uniform but had very limited ability to actually field them.

However, the development of a European defence capability became one of the themes at the NATO Berlin summit in 1996, when the concept of a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) was launched. The idea of ESDI was to encourage European nations to make a more effective contribution to NATO through 'separable but not separate' European forces.

This idea of improving European military capabilities within the context of the NATO framework defined the UK's general approach towards European defence over the Blair period. As Wyn Rees explains, moving away from Labour's traditional scepticism towards European defence prior to taking power, the Blair government came "to envisage a more equitably balanced defence arrangement in which transatlantic structures are matched by more capable European ones".¹⁰⁷ Blair thus sought to

¹⁰⁵ Only a small number of countries have been operating in the southern provinces while other states have restricted themselves under "national caveats" to peacekeeping and reconstruction tasks in the relatively more peaceful north.

¹⁰⁶ HC Deb 23 October 2003, c52-55

¹⁰⁷ Wyn Rees, "Preserving the security of Europe", in Dorman et al, *Britain and Defence 1945-2000*, 2001, p.50

reconcile the strategic imperative of preserving the transatlantic relationship whilst simultaneously encouraging the development of a European military capability.

Although Labour displayed considerable activism on the issue of defence and in pushing forward CFSP whilst holding the EU presidency between January and June 1998, the first real signs of Blair's policy line emerged during the Franco-British summit at St Malo in December 1998. What has come to be considered the turning point for European defence, the summit sought to develop practical improvements in Europe's capacity to independently deploy forces as well as consider institutional arrangements.¹⁰⁸ It identified the need for the EU to have credible military capability, the means to use it, and the readiness to do so. This presaged an active role on the part of the UK in encouraging progress in the EU's strategy, capability and operations. Indeed, St Malo was seen as something of a U-turn by Blair despite his insistence that the ESDP was not an alternative to NATO.¹⁰⁹

Further progress on developing ESDP was achieved at the EU Summits in Cologne¹¹⁰ and Helsinki in 1999, when it was decided that the EU would be endowed with the capacity for autonomous military action. At Helsinki the 'Headline Goal' was agreed whereby the EU would take on the Petersberg tasks¹¹¹ and commit to developing readily deployable military capability through voluntary, but co-ordinated, national and multinational efforts. EU leaders planned for a Rapid Reaction Corps to be able to deploy within 60 days, sustain up to 60,000 personnel for one year, and have the capability to undertake the full spectrum of Petersberg tasks. Over the next few years a series of conferences were held which discussed the issue of the development of European military capabilities in greater detail. As a result a new Helsinki Headline Goal Catalogue was approved in November 2002. A major development also came with the agreement of the 'Berlin Plus' arrangements in December 2002. Under this arrangement the EU would be granted access to NATO assets and operational planning capabilities in order to mount ESDP operations.

As Wyn Rees noted "This initiative was of considerable significance for British attitudes towards Europe. It...demonstrated a willingness to begin to build a meaningful military capability within the framework of European integration".¹¹² However, as he also pointed out, "allowing the EU to develop a defence competence has unleashed a powerful new dynamic in the European security debate".¹¹³ In political terms, the battle-lines over European defence have been broadly drawn between pro-Atlanticist and pro-European nations. This has essentially been a political tussle between those who have wanted to ensure American engagement in Europe and ensure the primacy of NATO and those who want to give Europe a more independent military identity. The challenge for the Blair

¹⁰⁸ Wyn Rees, "Preserving the security of Europe", in Dorman et al, *Britain and Defence 1945-2000*, 2001, p.63

¹⁰⁹ Lawrence Freedman, 'Defence' in Anthony Seldon, *Blair's Britain 1997-2007*, 2007, p. 625

¹¹⁰ At the European Council in Cologne in June 1999 the St Malo text was formally adopted by the other members of the EU.

¹¹¹ The Petersberg tasks were agreed at a WEU ministerial meeting in June 1992. They define the remit of military operations that the EU could expect to engage in, including humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping and crisis management.

¹¹² Rees in Dorman et al, *Britain and Defence 1945-2000*, 2001, p.63

¹¹³ Rees, in Dorman et al, *Britain and Defence 1945-2000*, 2001, p.64

Government was thus to attempt to steer the process within acceptable boundaries, keeping the US content, whilst giving concrete support to the development of ESDP. The UK with its strong bilateral relationship with the US thus positioned itself as key mediator or, in Blair's terminology, a bridge, between America and Europe and at once sought to strengthen Europe's military capabilities whilst restraining its strategic ambitions.

Events in 2003 summed up the difficulty of maintaining this policy position given the independent momentum that the ESDP gathered, partly due to British encouragement. At a time when European tensions over the conflict in Iraq remained high, France, Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany came together in a "mini summit" – derisively termed the 'chocolate summit' by some observers – to discuss enhancing Europe's defence potential, primarily through the creation of an independent EU military planning cell based at Teuveren and outside the NATO framework. Such moves were deemed to be contrary to the fundamental principle of complementarity between Europe and NATO and were thus strongly opposed by the UK. In August 2003 the British Government subsequently circulated a paper entitled *Food for Thought* to all EU Member and Accessing States. Along with proposals on structured co-operation and mutual defence, the paper presented an alternative to the "Teuveren proposal" and one that would place any EU planning capability firmly within the NATO framework. The paper's support for EU planning within NATO was interpreted by many as a firm indication of UK opposition to the Teuveren plans, a position also supported by several EU Member States including Spain, Italy and Poland. However, it was regarded by others as an acceptance by the UK of its need to remain involved in the ESDP debate in order to shape any potential outcome. The *Food for Thought* paper was considered as the first step towards a compromise.

After considerable negotiation, an agreement was reached at Naples in November 2003 whereby a small operational planning cell of 30-40 personnel would be established within the existing EU Military Staff in Brussels, rather than as an independent entity. Under this 'structured cooperation' agreement an independent EU operation run from its own headquarters would be a last resort when the US or NATO chose not to be engaged. As Anand Menon concluded in 2004:

Given that the persistent theme of UK pronouncements on ESDP has been the need to ensure a policy which is consistent, and not competing, with NATO, it would appear that the outcome of recent discussions within the Union represents something of a triumph for London. On the other hand, it is important that the UK does not allow what may well have been sensible pragmatism to be perceived as thinly disguised obstructionism...[which] runs the risk of seeing its partners...attempting to resurrect the more ambitious schemes that the Iraq crisis, for the moment, has consigned to the dustbin.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Anand Menon, "From crisis to catharsis: ESDP after Iraq", *International Affairs*, 2004, p.648

A number of commentators expressed concern at the time, however, “that a large oak [would] grow from the acorn being planted in Brussels”.¹¹⁵

In order to demonstrate the UK’s continued commitment to the ESDP agenda and smooth over tensions that had arisen over the Teuveren proposals, measures to advance ESDP were put forward at the Franco-British summit in November 2003. As part of the longstanding aim to develop European military capabilities, the summit proposed the establishment of EU ‘battlegroups’ as part of the Helsinki Headline Goal which would be capable of rapid deployment in support of UN or other crisis management operations. These plans were based on the need for effective, credible and coherent high-readiness forces and were not intended to replace the European Rapid Reaction Force or the NATO Response Force.¹¹⁶ At a meeting of the EU Council of Ministers in November 2003 the British government also agreed to the establishment of the European Defence Agency in an effort to improve the EU’s defence capabilities.¹¹⁷

Many observers, however, expressed strong doubts as to the actual European military capability that materialised despite all the declarations associated with ESDP. An article in the *International Herald Tribune* in January 2004 commented that the EU:

Does not have the capacity or the will to deploy and sustain troops outside Europe for prolonged periods of time. At the same time, its political leverage – for all its worth – is a poor substitute for hard power.¹¹⁸

Bernard Jenkin noted that “European defence policy is more about EU vanity than real defence capability: almost entirely fantasy”.¹¹⁹ Jenkin went on to claim that, “what Mr Blair has bequeathed at the end of his ten years in office is an EU political defence apparatus duplicating and competing with NATO, but which is unable to carry out anything but the most minor of humanitarian operations”.¹²⁰

Nevertheless, by mid-2007 and Blair’s departure from office the EU had conducted a significant number of ESDP operations, albeit mostly small-scale crisis management, police and rule-of-law missions. The EU has since 2004 also undertaken some high-level peacekeeping operations such as Operation *Artemis* in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Operation *Concordia* in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Operation *Althea* in Bosnia. The EU also established a civil-military operation in Darfur.

¹¹⁵ “Defensive war: Arguments on defence further complicate negotiations on EU constitution”, *The Economist*, 6 December 2003. The plans to establish an EU operational planning cell are examined in greater detail in Library Research Paper RP06/32, [European Security and Defence: Developments since 2003](#), June 2006. This idea of “mission creep” is also examined in section II A, as part of current developments in ESDP.

¹¹⁶ The EU battlegroups concept is examined in greater detail in Library Research Paper [06/32](#).

¹¹⁷ The proposal for a European Armaments/Defence Agency has been discussed for a number of years, with the establishment of OCCAR (the Organisation Conjointe de Coopération en Matière d’Armement) in 1996 by the UK, France, Germany and Italy regarded by many as a possible precursor to a fully fledged armaments agency. The signing of the Six Nation Framework Agreement in July 1998 was also regarded as a further step towards greater armaments co-operation. Further information on the structure and role of the European Defence Agency is available in Library Research Paper [RP06/32](#).

¹¹⁸ Borut Grgic, “Why the Gulf looks to America”, *International Herald Tribune*, 30 January 2004

¹¹⁹ Bernard Jenkin MP, *A Defence Policy for the UK, Conservative Way Forward*, 2007, p.34

¹²⁰ *Ibid*, p.35

Thus, the last decade has seen ESDP gain significant momentum. While many commentators continued to bemoan the military credibility and effectiveness of European capabilities, there is no doubt that Blair's activism with regard to ESDP was an important factor in the gradual strengthening and consolidation of European defence.

D. Defence Procurement

The Government's basic objective of equipment procurement was made clear in a supporting essay of the Strategic Defence Review in 1998:

The MOD must procure the Armed Forces need, when they need it. We must ensure that the Services have equipment which is capable, reliable, and durable. It must be procured in time, and to cost; to do otherwise, as has happened all too often in the past, would be letting down not only our Service men and women, but also the taxpayer.¹²¹

Equipment procurement has traditionally taken up around 40% of the UK defence budget. However, equipment acquisition is a process beset by financial and time constraints, the political impact of legacy programmes and is influenced by both strategic perceptions and domestic industrial priorities. Successive governments have struggled with these often conflicting dynamics and made various attempts over the years to improve the process.

By 1997 the National Audit Office report estimated that the majority of the top 25 major defence equipment projects were over budget and would not achieve their in-service date.¹²² The central problems were identified as slippage due to technical difficulties, budgetary constraints and the redefinition of requirements; and cost over-runs due to programme changes, poor estimation of costs, and defence equipment cost inflation. On this basis of inherited problems Labour made the reform of procurement policy a major objective of the SDR.

1. Introduction of Smart Procurement/Smart Acquisition

The basic framework for changes to the procurement process was developed in the SDR and built upon in subsequent reviews. In an attempt to create efficiency savings the emphasis has been on more rationalised processes, greater competition, improved customer-industry relationships, the adoption of a through-life approach, incremental upgrading, streamlined acquisition cycles, and the creation of a more commercially adept MOD.

Out of the SDR emerged the Smart Procurement Initiative (which would later come to be known as 'Smart Acquisition'). The general objective of Smart Procurement was to deliver equipment "faster, cheaper and better".¹²³ Smart Procurement was not so much a radical departure from existing policy, but rather part of a longer-term reform process in

¹²¹ Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review: Supporting Essays*, Cm3999, Session 1997-98

¹²² *Ibid*, essay 10

¹²³ Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999, Session 1997-1998, para.161

defence procurement. Its central idea focused on the need to identify and address potential technical problems more in the assessment phase of a programme, through comprehensive project planning and spending more during the development phase, including on the testing of prototypes. It highlighted the need for better, less confrontational relations with industry – something the Conservative Government had also recognised – and a ‘through-life systems approach’ with Integrated Project Teams (IPTs) bringing together the major stakeholders for the life of a particular project and introducing a greater measure of accountability.¹²⁴ It aimed at improved commercial practices, including greater incentives for contractors and fixed price contracts for programmes of up to five years duration. It was hoped the SPI would save £2 billion over ten years.¹²⁵

A number of organisational changes accompanied the implementation of Smart Procurement. The Equipment Capability Customer (ECC) was created to function as the primary customer and liaison for IPTs in order to define the equipment requirements of the Armed Forces. In April 1999 two new organisations were launched as key elements of SPI: the Defence Procurement Agency (DPA) and the Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO). The DPA’s management structure would be slimmed down and place IPTs at the centre of its work. The DLO would bring together the separate single Service logistic organisations, and IPTs from the DPA would transfer across to the DLO at the end of the manufacture phase of a programme and once the equipment entered service.

Commentators were sceptical as to how much difference smart procurement would actually make. As Colin McInnes noted at the time, “Smart procurement will limit the extent of cost overruns in the defence programme, but it is unlikely to solve the problem”.¹²⁶ Others suggested that it was little more than a marketing idea and that “SMART could be said to stand for Same Methods Appearing Rather Trendy”.¹²⁷ Taking the longer term view, some simply saw SPI as “the latest in a series of panaceas to ameliorate the affordability problem”.¹²⁸ The Defence Select Committee’s *Major Procurement Projects* report of July 2000 was also cautious in its assessment of the SPI, noting that:

It will inevitably take some time to see hard evidence of any improvements flowing from the smart procurement initiative. There are, however, it seems to us, some early signs of a more imaginative and robust approach emerging, and these offer a glimpse of what improvements the initiative may be able to provide.¹²⁹

In October 2000 the MOD decided that the Smart Procurement Initiative would be renamed ‘Smart Acquisition.’ This was part of an attempt to refine and develop SPI. The central objectives of Smart Acquisition were delivering more projects to time, cost and performance, acquiring capability progressively at lower risk, and cutting the time for key

¹²⁴ All major equipment projects were transferred into the IPT structure by April 2000.

¹²⁵ Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review: Supporting Essays*, Cm3999, Session 1997-98

¹²⁶ Colin McInnes, “Labour’s Strategic Defence Review”, *International Affairs*, 1998, p.843

¹²⁷ David Moore and Peter Antill, “Integrated Project Teams: The MOD’s New Hot Potato?”, *RUSI Journal*, February 2000

¹²⁸ Matthew Uttley in Dorman et al, *Britain and Defence 1945-2000*, 2001, p.128

¹²⁹ Defence Select Committee, *Major Procurement Projects*, HC528, Session 1999-2000

technologies to be introduced onto the front-line. The whole-life approach introduced under the SPI was continued and the concept of Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) – a wider Government initiative – was more firmly endorsed as a central aspect of Smart Acquisition.

The National Audit Office's Major Projects Report 2002 commented upon the progress of Smart Acquisition:

There is a continuing improvement in project performance, especially regarding cost control, but maintaining this improvement will be the challenge. Notably, there are encouraging indications that Smart Acquisition is resulting in innovation in the design of programmes to deliver equipment capabilities faster, cheaper and better. Messages on the management of individual programmes to time and cost once they are underway are more varied.¹³⁰

Despite its comments in July 2000 the Defence Select Committee was, however, more pessimistic about the success of the Government's procurement initiatives in its 2003 report on Defence Procurement:

Slippage continues to be a problem, particularly on older 'legacy' projects. But even in regard to newer projects which should be able to be fully moulded according to Smart Acquisition principles, there remains a question about the agility of the Department's procurement systems.¹³¹

2. Defence Industrial Strategy

In 2002 the Government published its Defence Industrial Policy (DIP), which would be a precursor to the more influential Defence Industrial Strategy of 2005. The DIP sought to link up government and industry initiatives to provide a clearer framework for the defence procurement process and a more realistic and effective prioritisation in defence research and development. It also emphasised the need to maximise the future competitiveness and global sustainability of the UK defence industry through improved regulatory environments, the harmonisation of military requirements, and the abolition of protectionism in foreign markets. The DIP took forward ideas that had originally been outlined in the SPI and was generally well received.¹³² An article in *Jane's Defence Weekly* in October 2002 commented:

In a change widely welcomed by defence industry executives, the UK Ministry of Defence has announced new procurement guidelines that clarify existing policies and make explicit the weight of preserving the UK defence industrial base in competitions...the question, however, remains over how the policy will be put into effect.¹³³

¹³⁰ National Audit Office, *Ministry of Defence: Major Projects Report 2002*, HC91, Session 2002-03, p.1

¹³¹ Defence Select Committee, *Defence Procurement*, HC694, Session 2002-03

¹³² Further information on the basic principles of the Defence Industrial Policy is available in Library Standard Note SN/IA/3759, *Defence Industrial Strategy*, 23 September 2005

¹³³ "UK Spells Out New Defence Procurement Policy", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 23 October 2002, p.19

The first test of the guiding principles of the DIP came in July 2003 when the MOD awarded a contract for the Hawk Advanced Jet Trainer to BAE Systems in a deal worth £800m. While some analysts argued that the contract was supportive of the approach laid down in the DIP, others have suggested that the Hawk deal was protectionist and contradictory to the principle of achieving best value for money. An article in the *Financial Times* prior to the announcement suggested:

The intensity of the political battle over Hawk jets, which has pitched Gordon Brown against four cabinet colleagues, reflects the wider implications of the deal. Tony Blair's decision on whether to hand the multi-billion pound contract to BAE Systems will set an important precedent for defence spending. The prime minister is faced with an essentially simple choice when he deals with the Hawk papers waiting on his desk. Should the government opt for the cheapest deal that offers the technical capabilities it needs? Or should it pay more to safeguard thousands of jobs, skills and potential future export orders?

The deal has acquired huge political resonance principally because it puts two key factors - the Treasury's pet criterion of value for money versus British jobs and orders - into clear conflict [...]

The defence industrial strategy launched by the government last year was meant to resolve such dilemmas. Hailed by defence companies and unions - and trade ministers - as a victory for UK manufacturing, it promised procurement decisions would take into account industrial capabilities and export potential as well as value for money. The problem is the policy failed to spell out which factor should take priority.

An editorial piece in the *Financial Times* also argued:

What should have been a routine decision to buy 20 training jet aircraft needed by the armed forces has turned into a surprise test of the government's ability to spend money efficiently and resist propping up failing industries. Unfortunately, yesterday's promise to spend up to £800m on 44 Hawk jets to preserve jobs at BAE Systems shows that Ministers have failed a crucial challenge.¹³⁴

The aims of the DIP were subsequently taken forward with the publication of the Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS) in December 2005. A review into the DIP, undertaken in November 2003, concluded that greater clarity was required in setting down what future capabilities would be required in the long term and which sectors and skills within the domestic defence industrial base would thus need to be retained. The DIS was the Government's practical attempt to respond to these concerns. The foreword to the DIS report stated:

greater transparency of our future defence requirements and, for the first time, set out those industrial capabilities we need to retain in the United Kingdom to ensure we can continue to operate our equipment in the way we choose.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ "Hawk climbdown", *The Financial Times*, 31 July 2003, p.16

¹³⁵ Ministry of Defence, *Defence Industrial Strategy*, Cm 6697, Session 2005-06

The issue of 'appropriate sovereignty' was a guiding principle embodied in the strategy. The then Minister for Defence Procurement, Lord Drayson, stated in a speech at RUSI in September 2005 that:

I do not expect the list of capabilities that must be fostered and sustained in the UK to be a long one. But it does extend beyond those where we have long had an absolute requirement, for reasons of national security, to retain a full capability, from concept through delivery, support and regular upgrade, to disposal. Appropriate sovereignty is a key principle we are using in our analysis.¹³⁶

Another major objective of the strategy was to make it easier for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to do business with the MOD, thus lowering the thresholds for the advertising of MOD tender and contract opportunities. These changes were designed to promote a dynamic and competitive supplier base for prime and subcontract opportunities with the MOD. It was also intended to bring the MOD closer into line with wider EU policy as specified in the European Defence Agency's Code of Best Practice.

In establishing the DIS Lord Drayson was considered to have taken a bold line in dealing with industry. His vision was for much more open and flexible relationships, combined with more appropriate contracting strategies. It also re-emphasised the importance, as had been seen in Smart Acquisition, of measuring performance in terms of delivering through-life capability. Among commentators and industry, the DIS was generally positively received. The Defence Select Committee welcomed "the clarity that the Defence Industrial Strategy has provided to industry about future defence requirements, which should help to make the UK an attractive market to defence companies".¹³⁷

Whilst the substantive content of the DIS was considered to be sound, most concerns centred on the problem of implementation as a determinant of success, a specific problem associated with the earlier DIP. The RUSI Defence Acquisition Focus Group noted that:

The DIS will only be successful if culture is changed. Success of implementation will, therefore, be measured by the change of culture, and this will only be achieved by strong, consistent Ministerial leadership over a lengthy period.¹³⁸

This problem was also acknowledged by the MOD's Bill Jeffrey, who suggested that "the problem with Smart Acquisition was not that it was mistaken, but that it was insufficiently and unevenly implemented".¹³⁹ Defence commentator Lewis Page was, however, extremely sceptical as to whether the DIS was really that transformative and described it as 'Business As Usual'.¹⁴⁰ He argued:

¹³⁶ Speech by then Minister for Defence Procurement, Lord Drayson, to the Royal United Services Institute, 12 September 2005

¹³⁷ Defence Select Committee, *The Defence Industrial Strategy*, HC824, Session 2005-06, p.43

¹³⁸ "Implementation of the Defence Industrial Strategy", RUSI Acquisition Focus, autumn 2006, p.78

¹³⁹ Bill Jeffrey, "The Debate: Implementing the Defence Industrial Strategy", *RUSI Defence Systems*, autumn 2006, p.22

¹⁴⁰ Lewis Page, *Lions, Donkeys and Dinosaurs*, 2006, p.309

The DIS, boiled down, says the most of the remaining defence-industrial base in the UK will continue to be sustained by guaranteed government cash flow...The idea is that this will give us national control over our own parts and support chain...and so permit us to have wars without consulting other countries, which is assumed to be a good idea...‘Appropriate sovereignty,’ appears to be much the same as ‘very little sovereignty, or none at all.’ And yet it is going to be a very, very expensive thing to buy. We will have to spend fortunes keeping a relatively small number of civilians employed in the UK.¹⁴¹

3. Defence Acquisition Change Programme

The last major policy initiative in defence procurement introduced by the Blair Government, and in large part designed to address many of the problems associated with earlier initiatives, was the Defence Acquisition Change Programme (DACP). This was presented as a single and coherent reform programme initiated to deliver aspects of the cultural, behavioural, procedural and organisational change identified in the Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS) and Tom McKane’s ‘Enabling Acquisition Change’ (EAC) report of June 2006.¹⁴² The new initiative was a consequence of a chain of seriously overrun projects and procurement failures and a more general need to generate efficiencies across the MOD. DCAP was designed to implement the recommendations of the EAC report by 1 April 2007. Its vision was stated as:

To bring about a step change improvement in acquisition performance – i.e. in the delivery of capability to the Front Line and value for money for the taxpayer - through creating a more agile acquisition system and managing capability through life.

The EAC report called for a more strategic approach to budgeting, greater realism in planning to combat the conspiracy of optimism¹⁴³ endemic in the procurement process, improved unity of effort through organisational streamlining, clarity in the roles of senior executives, and changes intended to enhance long-term responsibility and accountability for projects. One of the most significant organisational changes to emerge from DCAP was the creation of the Defence Equipment and Support (DES) agency, which merged the Defence Procurement Agency with the Defence Logistics Organisation on 2 April 2007. This merger was undertaken based on the need for a single organisation with a focus on through-life capability delivery, which had been a key target of the DIS, and one that would be responsible for the procurement, maintenance and containment of military capability. It is expected to release around £200m in efficiencies over a 25 year period.

Another important development in organisational terms was the establishment of the Defence Support Group which was a merger of the non-privatised elements of DARA and ABRO. Its aim was to create a, “flexible, responsive and operationally excellent

¹⁴¹ Lewis Page, *Lions, Donkeys and Dinosaurs*, 2006, p.311-12

¹⁴² *Enabling Acquisition Change: An Examination of the Ministry of Defence’s ability to undertake Through Life Capability Management*, June 2006

¹⁴³ Ibid. RUSI acquisition Focus explains this is a result of the MOD and industry having a ‘propensity to strike unrealistic agreements, alter recognising, but not necessarily admitting, that the basis on which contracts had been let was highly optimistic. The result is that the contracted cost and schedule are almost always far too low, thereby causing apparent cost growth and schedule overruns as the programme proceeds.

organisation that delivers cost-competitive in-house maintenance, repair, overhaul and upgrade capability to support the air and land systems of the UK Armed Forces".¹⁴⁴

4. Emerging Themes

On the basis of the policy changes introduced over ten years of a Blair government, a number of general themes can be derived upon which current defence equipment acquisition is based:

- Competition and partnering with industry – while these two concepts may appear paradoxical the Government has attempted to fashion a flexible approach, with emphasis on competitive tendering for contracts where possible in order to achieve best value for money and encourage a more responsive and innovative approach by industry. Yet, in line with its defence industrial policies, it has recognised the need, in certain circumstances, for extremely close partnering with industry to ensure the appropriate balance between capability, cost and time.¹⁴⁵ As Lord Drayson explained in an article in *RUSI Defence Systems*, partnering "is about ensuring value-for-money for the taxpayer in environments where competition is not possible".¹⁴⁶
- Prime contracting – linked to the idea of partnering, this initiative became the basis for complex systems where there was a clear need for a strong relationship with a major contractor that has the ability to integrate various separate systems, manage risk and deal with suppliers effectively. Also, a prime contractor would have the ability to deliver support services and develop future requirements for the project over an extended period. This was increasingly combined with the need to develop the supply chain and, in particular, small and medium-sized enterprises given that, according to Drayson, "anachronistic opaque monopoly supply structures do not provide the flexibility, adaptability and behaviours that are needed for the future".¹⁴⁷
- Through-life approach – this was embodied most clearly in the single Integrated Project Team concept and became a central focus of the EAC report which led to the merger of the DPA and the DLO. These initiatives were intended to bring together all relevant stakeholders in a project from the point at which a certain capability gap is identified to its final disposal. This approach was also intended to improve accountability for projects.
- De-risking at an early stage – this has involved a commitment to greater investment during the concept and assessment phases of the acquisition cycle and more accuracy and clarity in determining the cost and time of a project, itself dependent on a closer and more transparent relationship with industrial partners.

¹⁴⁴ <http://www.dsg.mod.uk/>

¹⁴⁵ Denis Ranque, "Confronting Reality in Defence Procurement: Future Trends and Challenges", *RUSI Journal*, April 2004, p.57

¹⁴⁶ Lord Drayson, "The Debate: Implementing the Defence Industrial Strategy", *RUSI Defence Systems*, autumn 2006, p.20

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, p.21

Smart Acquisition suggested that, as a rule of thumb, up to 15% of the initial procurement costs should be spent on the Assessment phase.¹⁴⁸

- Incremental acquisition – the thinking behind this initiative was based on the need to be able to upgrade equipment incrementally throughout the life of existing equipment, particularly with regard to projects involving high performance and rapidly evolving technologies. Thus, it called for the development of equipment ‘suites’ that can be easily upgraded as new technologies are introduced. This is based on the recognition that project risk can be reduced by building up capability in stages.
- Privatisation – throughout the tenure of the Blair government there has been an increased use of contractorised, civilianised and out-sourced provision of support services such as transport, maintenance and logistics as part of the general Blair objective to modernising public service provision. In the defence sector this wasn’t a novel concept, arguably the Conservatives began this process as a result of the Frontline First review in 1994. However, an unprecedented and increasing trend under Blair was the use of Private Finance Initiative (PFI) to deliver frontline operational services. The most high profile example of this has been the Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft (FSTA) programme which is expected to deliver a privatised solution to air-to-air refuelling capabilities across the Services. Another high profile privatisation under Blair was the division of the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency in 2001 and the subsequent privatisation of QinetiQ which began in 2003 and was completed in 2006.¹⁴⁹
- Appropriate sovereignty – a common theme articulated in procurement policy during the Blair era was the need to preserve a sufficient domestic industrial base in certain key areas that had been identified as essential to ensuring national security. This was at the heart of both the DIP and the DIS.
- International collaboration – the Blair Government displayed a strong commitment to international collaborative procurement arrangements with both the EU and US, primarily in the hope of achieving economies of scale and driving down costs through greater harmonisation of requirements, pooling of capabilities and coordination of research spending. With the introduction of Smart Procurement it was expected that collaboration would account for over 40% of future major procurements.¹⁵⁰ This policy was reflected in the UK’s membership of the Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation (OCCAR)¹⁵¹ and the signing of the

¹⁴⁸ Rt Hon Bruce George MP, “Managing Procurement Risk”, *RUSI Defence Systems*, summer 2005, p.38

¹⁴⁹ An examination of the privatisation of QinetiQ was conducted by the National Audit Office in November 2007 and the Public Accounts Committee in June 2008. Copies of those reports are available online at: http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/07-08/070852.pdf and <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmpubacc/151/151.pdf>

¹⁵⁰ John Spellar, “Smart procurement: an objective of the Strategic Defence Review”, *RUSI Journal*, April 1998

¹⁵¹ OCCAR’s members are Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the UK. OCCAR was actually established in 1996 but the Convention that gave it legal basis was signed in 2001.

1998 Six Nations Framework Agreement.¹⁵² At the EU level, however, perhaps the most notable development came with the creation of the European Defence Agency in 2003/2004.¹⁵³ As Trevor Taylor explains UK involvement was supportive but hesitant: “it endorsed European cooperation on many aspects of defence, but only when it judged that such cooperation would have no negative consequences for transatlantic relations”¹⁵⁴

The close relationship between Blair and President Clinton bore fruit in 2000 with the signing of the Defence Trade Security Initiative (DTSI).¹⁵⁵ Under that agreement the US and UK resolved to work together to improve co-operation in export controls, harmonisation of requirements and security of supply. An important element of that initiative was the intention to negotiate an International Trafficking in Arms Regulations (ITAR) waiver for the UK. However, due to Congressional opposition a British ITAR waiver was not concluded under either the Clinton administration or the subsequent government of President George W. Bush. Considered by some analysts to be a ‘parting gift’ to Tony Blair before he left office in June 2007, the US administration established the UK-US Defence Trade Co-operation Treaty which was intended to operate in essentially the same way as an ITAR waiver.¹⁵⁶

While the changes introduced under Blair are considered to have contributed to noticeable improvements in the procurement process, particularly in the relationship between the MOD and industry, it has been generally accepted that it may take many years before the full benefits of this emerging culture begin to show.

Nevertheless, despite the bold aspirations and high hopes that accompanied the introduction of Smart Acquisition under Blair, serious problems remained by the end of his ten years in power. Many commentators have continued to complain about the existence of an underfunded forward equipment plan, shortfalls in important capabilities such as helicopters and strategic transport, and continued delays and cost overruns in many programmes.

In 2006, Former Vice Admiral in the Navy and President of EADS, Sir Jeremy Blackham, noted that one of the greatest barriers to progress in procurement practices:

is the substantial unaffordability of the E[quipment] P[lan] (or perhaps to be accurate one should say of the MOD’s aspirations, though the difference is slight). It is difficult to overestimate the impact this has on industry’s confidence in the MOD’s good intentions, because of the short-term expedients it forces on

¹⁵² The signatories to the Six Nation framework Agreement are the UK, France, Sweden, Germany, Italy and Spain.

¹⁵³ Background information on the European Defence Agency is available in Library Research Paper RP06/32, [European Security and Defence Policy: Developments since 2003](#), June 2006

¹⁵⁴ Trevor Taylor, “Governments and Industry”, *RUSI Defence Systems*, summer 2004, p.43

¹⁵⁵ Further information on the principles of the DTSI is available in Library Research paper RP03/78, [UK Defence Procurement Policy](#), 20 October 2003

¹⁵⁶ That treaty is still awaiting ratification by the US Senate. More information on the principles of the treaty is available in Library Standard Note SN/IA/4381, *The UK-US Defence Trade Co-operation Treaty*. Recent developments are also covered in section II A.

programme managers, and the constant changes in expectations to which it subjects industry. There is no easy cure for this problem, other than some very hard decisions.¹⁵⁷

Of particular concern has been the affordability of the expeditionary strategy laid out in the SDR, and the priority afforded to NEC in the SDR New Chapter and 2003 White Paper. Neither of those documents addressed the financial implications for delivering these capabilities within the context of the overall equipment plan. Commenting at the time, the then Director of RUSI, Rear Admiral Richard Cobbold, stated:

The trouble is that fewer platforms can be achieved at the stroke of a pen, whereas achieving a joint net-worked capability is a big challenge that cannot be met quickly. On past experience, achieving such a capability to time, cost and specifications, may be an insurmountable hurdle.¹⁵⁸

This is particularly pertinent given the fact that the MOD's forward equipment plan far exceeds available resources in the 2008-2015 timeframe when the major transition to NEC technologies is expected to take place.¹⁵⁹ It also rests on the assumption that the key capabilities within this plan will be delivered to time and budget. With respect to the main expeditionary/NEC programmes, by the time Blair left office in June 2007, main contracts for the future carrier had still to be signed; the A400M strategic transport aircraft was approximately 15 months late; while decisions on taking forward both the FRES and Watchkeeper programme's were still to be made.¹⁶⁰ Speculation was also rife that cuts to the forward equipment plan to fund these priority capabilities could be on the cards.¹⁶¹

E. Personnel Issues

Personnel policy covers a wide variety of issues such as training and education, clothing and equipment, pay and pensions, housing, medical care, and adequate continuity of care upon leaving the Forces. The adequate provision of these basic terms and conditions of Service has been a longstanding issue under successive governments. Yet it has always been acknowledged that Service morale and effective recruitment and retention are premised upon the effective delivery of these variables.

It is inevitable that real progress in this area is dependent on much more than, for instance, simply raising pay or providing better medical care. The welfare and morale of personnel are also heavily dependent on other factors such as the intensity and frequency of operational tours, and/or levels of public support for the operations

¹⁵⁷ Jeremy Blackham, "MoD and Industry: Changing the Mind-set", *RUSI Defence Systems*, spring 2006, p.53

¹⁵⁸ Rear Admiral Richard Cobbold, "Only connections", *RUSI Journal*, August 2004, p.5

¹⁵⁹ During this timeframe years of peak expenditure are also expected, among others, on the A400M strategic transport aircraft, the future carrier, Joint Strike Fighter, and the Future Rapid Effects System.

¹⁶⁰ Figures are based on the NAO's Major projects Report 2006 which was published in November of that year. The MPR for 2007 was not published until well into Gordon Brown's first term and therefore has not been used as a source for these particular figures.

¹⁶¹ This is examined in greater detail in section II D.

undertaken by the Armed Forces.¹⁶² The cumulative effect of overstretch, which is primarily defined as ‘trying to do too much with too little’,¹⁶³ is that harmony guidelines may be breached, the ability to adequately train personnel is undermined, and ultimately recruitment and retention and the maintenance of an acceptable “manning balance” suffers.¹⁶⁴ A downward spiral is easily set in motion as the development of a manning crisis, coupled with periods of intense deployment, exacerbate the factors which led to the crisis in the first place.

Whatever emphasis is placed on platforms and high-tech equipment in defence policy decision-making Service personnel with the appropriate skills have to operate such equipment and employ them appropriately and effectively. As recent operational commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan have also demonstrated, the concept of ‘boots on the ground’ is not an obsolete one. As the SDR highlighted, it is ultimately people that lie at the heart of Britain’s defence. Based on this principle it went on to state that:

We must therefore recruit highly motivated people. We must invest in their training. We must retain them and maintain their motivation. To do this we must equip them properly for the tasks we give them. We must also ensure that our demands on them and their families do not become unreasonable.¹⁶⁵

Within this context the Blair Government has been committed to improving conditions for military personnel. The ‘Policy for People’ aspect of the SDR was a major step forward in that for the first time it put the welfare of personnel at the heart of a major policy review, even though as some commentators observed, it was “largely a promise to give the matter attention”.¹⁶⁶ The subsequent *Armed Forces Overarching Personnel Strategy* (AFOPS), published in April 2000, and associated Action Plan were designed to institute an all-encompassing, tri-service approach to personnel issues whilst retaining single service responsibility in some areas. In 2003 the AFOPS was updated, while the 2003 *Defence White Paper* reaffirmed the MOD’s commitment to building on such initiatives, particularly in relation to recruitment and retention and training.¹⁶⁷ In March 2001 the Government also launched its cross-departmental Veterans’ Initiative which aimed to identify and address the needs of the veteran’s community. As part of that initiative the MOD published its *Strategy for Veterans* in March 2003 and its *Communications Strategy for Veterans* in September 2003. The main themes of these initiatives included measures to tackle homelessness, social exclusion, health concerns and financial hardship.

¹⁶² General Sir Michael Walker, in a 2005 Sunday Times interview, attributed morale and recruitment problems to a ‘guilt by association’ with Tony Blair’s decision to go to war and the fact that the war has become ‘deeply unpopular at home (Carey Schofield, “Army chief says guilt factor is hitting morale”, *The Sunday Times*, 2 October 2005)

¹⁶³ Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999, Session 1997-98

¹⁶⁴ Each of the Services has established harmony guidelines determining the optimal interval between operational tours and the level of separated service for individuals. The manning balance is defined as between -2% and +1% of the identified trained requirement for each of the Services.

¹⁶⁵ Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999, Session 1997-98, p.31

¹⁶⁶ Summary of some key points submitted by Hew Strachan to the Defence Select Committee, June 2000 (<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmdfence/689/0070502.htm>)

¹⁶⁷ These are examined in greater detail in Library Standard Note SN/IA/4088, *Armed Forces personnel Policy: An Update*, November 2007

However, for the majority of the last ten years it has been the intensity of operational deployments, and the subsequent impact on harmony guidelines, training and recruitment and retention that has largely been the key issue in relation to welfare. While the Deepcut Review in received a lot of attention and highlighted shortcomings in the initial training of recruits and the care of personnel under 18, it was only in the last year of the Blair government that the terms and conditions of Service personnel and their families rose in the public consciousness and prompted allegations that the Government was breaching its duty of care to Service personnel and undermining the Military Covenant between the Armed Forces and society.

Given the extent of the personnel policy agenda the following chapter only briefly examines some of these broader themes.¹⁶⁸

1. Recruitment and Retention

Recruitment and retention problems are historical features of British defence and are by no means specific to the Blair period. Nevertheless, it is an issue that has generated great concern in recent years, not only because of the extent of the problem itself but also because of its importance (as both cause and consequence) in terms of the widely perceived overstretch of the armed forces.

Tables outlining the strengths and requirements of each Service, levels of intake and outflow and the overall manning balance of each service during the 1997-2007 period are available in the accompanying background paper RP08/58. The precise levels of both recruitment and retention have fluctuated over the decade and in relation to each service. With the exception of 2003 and 2004, throughout this ten year period the numbers leaving the forces exceeded those coming in and the rate of drop-out from basic army training increased from a quarter to a third. As Anthony Forster has noted:

In a study carried out by the Ministry of Defence in the last quarter of 2005, almost 25 per cent of members of the armed force wanted to leave at the earliest opportunity.¹⁶⁹

As Richard Holmes commented in a lecture in 2006:

Recruiting has fallen off, especially in the infantry, largely, I think, because the 'gatekeepers' – parents, careers teachers and the like – see the army as a poor prospect. Join the army, runs the argument and you will get bullied in training and then be sent to Iraq where you risk prosecution for doing your job or being blown up by a mindless fanatic. Retention, too, seems to be suffering, at least in some key areas...the structural damage that their premature disappearance does the army is long lasting. This damage is exacerbated by the fact that the supply of 'bright, adventurous 18-year olds will be reduced by changing demographics. The average age of recruits will be pushed up as more and more people

¹⁶⁸ Further information on Armed Forces personnel policy, veterans' policy and the issues relating to terms and conditions of Service personnel is available in the following Library publications: SN/IA/4088, *Armed Forces Personnel Policy: An Update*, November 2007; SN/IA/4495, *The Military Covenant*, November 2007 and SN/IA/3070, *Veterans Policy*, June 2005.

¹⁶⁹ Anthony Forster, "Breaking the Covenant", *International Affairs*, Vol.82, No.6, 2006, p.1047

undertake tertiary education, and the competition for the best graduates will become intense.¹⁷⁰

Commentators have highlighted a variety of reasons for the problems faced by the Armed Forces in recruiting and retaining personnel. Some relate to longer term structural changes and others are the direct consequences of current policy. The terms and conditions of service and specifically the levels of pay and adequacy of accommodation are considered fundamental to effective recruitment and retention practices. In a report in July 2007 the Public Accounts Committee noted:

The increasing frequency of deployments on overseas operations and time away from home are factors causing people to leave the Armed Forces. More than 15% of Army personnel are away from home more often than is planned for under the Department's 'harmony' guidelines which are being consistently broken. The Department has little scope to reduce the operational tempo which is impacting on personnel but in case of enduring operations, such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, it needs to provide people with greater stability of work patterns. The Department should give longer notice of deployments and let serving personnel know their work patterns over a longer time horizon.

There are indicators of overstretch in specific areas, such as the severe shortfalls in personnel in some specialist trades, such as nurses, linguists and leading hands, and the routine breaking of harmony guidelines. The longer this situation continues the more it will begin to affect operational capability. The Department maintains that the Armed Forces are stretched, but not overstretched, and would only be overstretched if there was a failure to meet military commitments. But the Department also needs to ascertain the 'tipping points' where the degree of stretch itself precipitates the loss of scarce skills, putting operational capability at risk.¹⁷¹

Hew Strachan offers a further suggestion as to why recruitment problems have emerged. He points to the attitudinal changes in society such as individualism and hedonism that may have impacted on an institution proud of its tradition of strong discipline, group cohesion and respect for authority, but he suspects that:

Far more significant ...were socio-economic shifts. The pre-1914 armed forces recruited their other ranks and ratings from unskilled labour working for daily wages in the big cities, and from the unemployed. In 2000 the armed forces are still fished in the same pool. In 1914 the working class as a whole constituted about 80 per cent of the nation's population, but by 2000 those who earned their living in manual occupations were a minority. The pool was drying up.¹⁷²

A major issue with regard to retention, hinted at by Holmes above, has been the problem of retaining personnel in 'pinch-point' trades.¹⁷³ As the NAO and the Defence select

¹⁷⁰ Richard Holmes, 'Soldiers and Society', Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives Annual Lecture, 10 May 2006

¹⁷¹ Public Accounts Committee, *Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces*, HC 43, Session 2006-07

¹⁷² Hew Strachan, "The Civil-Military Gap in Britain", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, June 2003, p.47

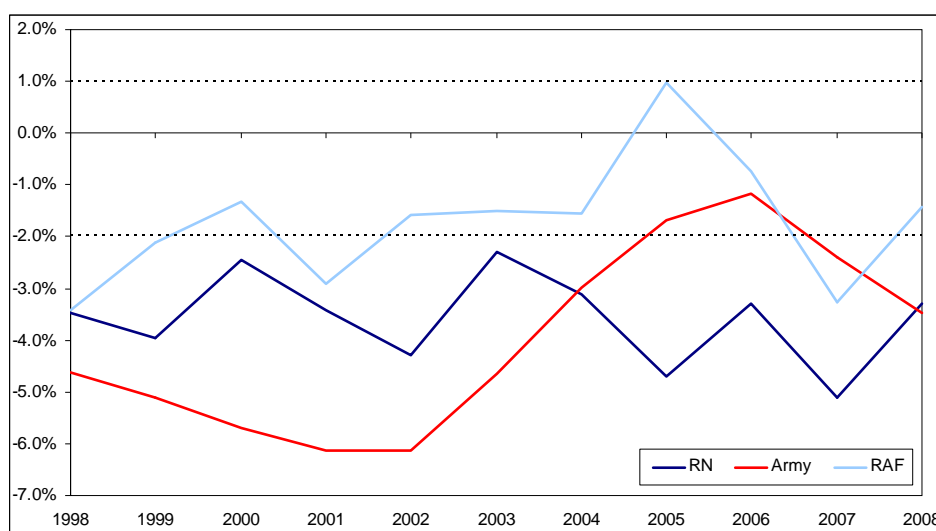
¹⁷³ Pinch point trades refer to those skills and trades within the military which are in high operational demand but are not fully manned, such as medics, explosive ordnance disposal and logistics personnel.

Committee have often made clear, while overall retention figures have remained at fairly sustainable levels, this has not been the case with regard to a number of vital trades. The biggest fear among the military also relates to the loss of experienced and skilled officers. This is often expressed as the difference between qualitative and quantitative retention, where quantitative retention does not adequately reflect the relative qualitative losses entailed by the numbers of officers and specialist personnel leaving the Forces. A number of (former) senior military officers have expressed more concern over this particular problem, mainly because of the loss of skilled personnel on whom considerable investment in both time and money has been made.

2. Harmony Guidelines, Manning Balance and Overstretch

During the majority of the tenure of the Blair Government the defence planning assumptions of both the SDR and the 2003 white paper were consistently exceeded.¹⁷⁴

Coupled with problems in recruitment and retention (highlighted above) the cumulative effect of a high operational tempo has been an almost consistent failure to achieve a target manning balance within the Royal Navy in the last ten years and only marginal achievement in the Army in 2005 and 2006. In contrast, the RAF manning balance has been relatively more consistent over this period:



Notes:

1. Manning balance is defined as between -2% and +1% of the trained strength requirement, and is measured against the requirement prevailing at the time. Since that requirement is dynamic, the underlying baseline numerical target varies over the period.
2. As at April 01 each year
3. Including Royal Marines

Source: DASA

¹⁷⁴ The level of operational commitments is examined in section I F.

With respect to harmony guidelines, the MOD's annual report for 2006-07 outlined:

Unit Tour Intervals		
Royal Navy	Fleet Units to spend maximum of 60% deployed in a 3 year cycle.	The Royal Navy continues broadly to meet its Unit Tour Interval Harmony guidelines.
Army	24 month average interval between unit tours.	Infantry average tour interval of 21.0 months; Royal Artillery 20.7 months; Royal Engineers 21.2 months; Royal Signals 18.4 months; Royal Logistic Corps 23.3 months.
Royal Air Force	Unit tour intervals to be no less than 16 months.	Unit Tour Intervals are not easily measured for the Royal Air Force. However RAF Regiment Field Squadrons average tour intervals around 10.5 months; Air Combat and Service Support units also breaching guidelines; Nimrod, Air Transport and Air-to-Air Refuelling squadrons heavily tasked

Source: Ministry of Defence, Annual Report and Accounts, 2006-07, HC 697, Session 2006-07

These figures represented a marginal improvement on previous years. In the 2003-2004 annual reporting year for example, the average tour interval for units in both the infantry and the Royal Artillery was 18 months.

Despite these minor improvements, harmony guidelines have been regularly breached during the last ten years. In its July 2004 report on the Defence White Paper, the Defence Select Committee observed that:

Since the Strategic Defence Review, the MOD's own harmony guidelines have too often not been achieved in terms of the work-life balance of Armed Forces personnel. We have seen no evidence in the White Paper that the demanding operational tempo of the past six years and consequent stretch on too many of our service personnel will not be repeated. We urge MoD to place the achievement of harmony guidelines at the top of its list of priorities.¹⁷⁵

In evidence to the Committee Major General Andrew Ritchie noted:

many battalions and gunner regiments have done six month tours every year for the past three or four years, which is at least double what they should be doing. The key issue is that it has long-term effect in terms of retention and in other ways in terms of training and equipment.¹⁷⁶

The Defence Select Committee's *UK Operations in Iraq* Report of August 2006 stated that "The MoD's confidence that the UK Armed Forces are not overstretched contrasts with what we are hearing from service personnel on the ground".¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ Defence Select Committee, Defence White Paper 2003, HC 465-I, Session 2003-04

¹⁷⁶ Major General Andrew Ritchie, Evidence to Defence Committee, 13 March 2007, Q192, HC 381-ii

¹⁷⁷ Defence Select Committee, *UK Operations in Iraq*, HC 1241, Session 2005-06

Criticism of manning levels and more specifically of the level of operational commitments undertaken by the Armed Forces has also come from a number of senior military figures. In an interview with the *Daily Mail* in October 2006 the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard Dannatt suggested that the “Army was running hot” and that “our troops are stretched to capacity. We have only one spare battalion. Almost everyone is going to end up serving in Iraq or Afghanistan”.¹⁷⁸ In March 2007 the Defence Select Committee also raised these issues in an evidence session with the Chief of Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshall Sir Jock Stirrup. During the evidence session he stated: “I think about stretch and overstretch more in terms of people than anything else, and we are very stretched at the moment”.¹⁷⁹

As a result of these pressures on the Armed Forces some commentators have argued that the Armed Forces are too small to fulfil the tasks being asked of them. Arguments for increasing the size of the Army were subsequently raised. In evidence to the Defence Committee in March 2007 Major General Andrew Ritchie stated “Emphatically, we need a bigger Army...I believe that the Army needs to be 3,000 bigger”.¹⁸⁰ However this argument has not only been based on concerns regarding overstretch, but has also been related to the nature of modern warfare which many believe, regardless of RMA and the technological advancements of NEC and related technologies, is still particularly demanding of manpower.

3. Reserve Forces

In the last 20 years the size and role of the Reserves has altered significantly in the light of the changing strategic environment. Under the last Conservative government measures to allow the Reserve Forces to be more flexible and usable and engage more freely with the Regular Forces in the type of rapid deployment, peacekeeping operations expected of the post-Cold War period were introduced.¹⁸¹ Nevertheless, prior to the SDR, the Reserves were still largely seen as an insurance policy in the event of general war and were configured primarily to fight a conventional large scale war in Europe.¹⁸²

Under the Blair government that trend toward integrating the Reserves more closely continued and indeed the level of operational commitments undertaken by the Reserves has increased significantly over the last ten years. Specifically, the SDR examined how the policy of integration between the Reserves and the Regular Forces could be enhanced and set out plans to significantly restructure the Territorial Army so that it would be more capable of deploying rapidly to support expeditionary operations. The SDR also promised to develop the use of sponsored reserves, primarily for the supply of medical personnel. In his introduction to the SDR, the then Secretary of State for Defence, George Robertson, noted:

¹⁷⁸ “Sir Richard Dannatt: a very honest general”, *The Daily Mail*, 12 October 2006

¹⁷⁹ Defence Select Committee, UK Defence: Commitments and Resources: Uncorrected Transcript of Evidence, HC 381-I, Session 2006-07

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, Q.215

¹⁸¹ Primarily the *Reserve Forces Act 1996*

¹⁸² See Library Research Paper 04/71, [The Defence White Paper](#), p.11

Our Reserve Forces must adapt to the new world. We must make our Reserves relevant and usable by integrating them more closely with regular units and improving their training and specialist skills so that they can deploy more easily on operations.¹⁸³

While the general vision set out in the SDR for the role of the Reserves was widely praised, a number of important concerns were voiced at the time, largely over the manpower cuts envisaged by the review.¹⁸⁴ The Defence Committee believed the proposed cuts were contradictory to the overall vision and amounted to a “black day for the Territorial Army”, reduced the ‘national footprint’ of the Reserves and could seriously undermine civil-military relations.¹⁸⁵

In the SDR New Chapter a further significant development was the establishment of the Civil Contingency Reaction Forces (CCRFs) able to deploy 6,000 personnel nation-wide in support of homeland defence. At the time the Defence Select Committee expressed concerns over the implications of this policy for the normal activities of the volunteer reserves.¹⁸⁶ The 2003 White Paper represented a progression on this earlier thinking but, as well as noting progress made on the formation of CCRFs, emphasised a number of key areas:

We will continue to use the Reserves, not only for large-scale operations but also to reinforce some specialist capabilities such as medical and logistics support to smaller scale deployments. This will require ever closer integration between the regular and reserve elements of the Services.

Although the White Paper did not announce major changes to the Reserve Forces, it did acknowledge the growing importance of the Reserves and set out a number of recommendations regarding support and financial assistance for both Reservists and employers.¹⁸⁷

Based on the premises of the 2003 White Paper the MOD subsequently published its new strategic vision for the Reserve Forces in February 2005. Entitled *Future Use of the UK's Reserve Forces*, the strategy document clearly defined the future role of the Reserve Forces and how the Government intended to deploy them both domestically and overseas in the future. The document identified three primary roles for the Reserves and two other areas in which the Reserves were regarded as potentially playing an important role:

- Augmenting the Regular Forces on enduring operations – when enduring operations overstretch the Regular Forces, the Reserves would be mobilised to provide an additional source of manpower. Whenever possible mobilisation would be on a voluntary basis, although compulsory service may be utilised if necessary.

¹⁸³ Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999, Session 1997-98, p.2

¹⁸⁴ Under the SDR recommendations were made for the TA to be cut from 56,000 to approximately 40,000 personnel.

¹⁸⁵ Defence Select Committee, *The Strategic Defence Review*, HC 138, Session 1997-98, para 263 and 274

¹⁸⁶ Defence Select Committee, *A New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review*, HC 93-II, Session 2002-03

¹⁸⁷ See the SaBRE website at: <http://www.sabre.mod.uk/>

- Providing additional capability on large-scale operations to add either weight or specialist capability – these scenarios are acknowledged as likely to require the largest number of Reservists, most of whom would be mobilised irrespective of whether they had volunteered.
- Providing specialist capability – a number of specialist capabilities are impractical to maintain on a full-time basis. These are capabilities to which Reservists can contribute by virtue of the skills and experience they can bring from their civilian roles.

In addition, the strategy document identified an important role for the Reserves in the CCRF and in maintaining links between the military and civilian communities. It also noted that when mobilising Reservists the Volunteer Reserve Forces (VRF), rather than the Regular Reserve,¹⁸⁸ would be called up in the first instance, and that the Regular Reserve would be called up only when the relevant VRF resources were exhausted or the specific capability that was required does not exist within the VRF. It also recommended that the frequency of mobilisation be altered from one year in three (which has legal basis) to one year in five.

In line with the policy changes determining the future structure and role of the Reserves, those forces have been extensively used and deployed on almost all of the significant operations undertaken by the Armed Forces since 1997. As a 2006 NAO report noted, “Reserve Forces have once more become an integral and vital part of the United Kingdom’s defence capability. Regular officers who have commanded reservists in the field emphasise the importance of their contribution”.¹⁸⁹

To give an indication of the extent of deployment of the reserve forces, and primarily the Territorial Army, over the last ten years: between 1995 and 2003 the Reserve Forces provided between 10-14% of UK personnel in the Balkans.¹⁹⁰ As part of Operation *Tellic* in Iraq the overall number of Reservists called out in support of operations totalled more than 14,500 between March 2003 and June 2006.¹⁹¹ During the major combat phase (March-May 2003) Reserve forces had comprised some 12% of British personnel.¹⁹² In July 2004 the percentage of deployed Reserve forces had risen to 15%¹⁹³ and by September 2004 was 20%.¹⁹⁴ However, by May 2006 the number of Reservists in Iraq represented approximately 10% of the UK’s total deployed forces,¹⁹⁵ while in April 2007 the number of Reservists in Iraq had fallen even further to approximately 4.9% of forces on the ground.¹⁹⁶ In Afghanistan, as of April 2007, approximately 3.6% of British forces on the ground were Reserves.¹⁹⁷

¹⁸⁸ The Reserve Forces are primarily made up of the Volunteer Reserves Forces such as the Territorial Army and the Regular Reserves who are ex-Service personnel who are still liable to mobilisation.

¹⁸⁹ National Audit Office, *Reserve Forces*, HC 964, Session 2005-06, p.1

¹⁹⁰ Defence Select Committee, *Defence White Paper 2003*, HC465-I, Session 2003-04, p.48

¹⁹¹ HL Deb 29 June 2006, c1324

¹⁹² National Audit Office, *Reserve Forces*, HC 964, Session 2005-06

¹⁹³ HC Deb 1 September 2004, c712W

¹⁹⁴ HC Deb 13 September 2004, c1440W

¹⁹⁵ HC Deb 22 May 2006, c1200

¹⁹⁶ HC Deb 26 April 2007, c1252W

¹⁹⁷ Ibid

The Reserves, like the Regular forces, continue to face serious problems in recruitment, retention and manning, largely as a result of their extensive operational use. Approximately 15,670 TA members left the Reserves between the invasion of Iraq and October 2005, leaving an overall shortfall of around 7000 personnel.¹⁹⁸ In March 2007 the TA were still 15% below their required strength.

In March 2006 the National Audit Office published a report on the *Reserve Forces*. That report highlighted the serious manning problems in the Reserves and the associated impact on training, particularly prior to deployment to ensure proper integration with Regular forces. It noted that, given the increased use and value of the Reserves, increased effort must be placed on improving their capability and longer term sustainability.¹⁹⁹

In summary, the Reserves underwent significant change during the Blair era and developed into a very different force to the one a decade previously. As the MOD has commented:

The days of the Reserve Forces being seen as Britain's Homeland Defence are long gone. Today's Reservists are a highly trained and integral part of the UK Armed Forces and they are mobilised wherever needed to work alongside Britain's Regular Armed Forces. Reservists can find themselves responsible for providing Force Protection, emergency relief, contingency planning and regularly provide the lead role in reconstruction efforts in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq and the Balkans.²⁰⁰

Yet at a time when National Service, which ended in January 1963, is rapidly becoming a distant memory for many, the bridge that the Reserve Forces can form between the Armed Forces and the wider community has also been acknowledged. Hew Strachan has noted:

As the Reserves have become increasingly concentrated in certain areas of Britain – the Royal Navy on the south coast, the Army in Wiltshire, and the Royal Air Force on the east coast – the reserve units are often the only military presence in an average sized community.²⁰¹

In June 2007 the Parliamentary All Party Group for the Reserve Forces published a wide ranging study into the role of the TA. Among other things that report also stressed the importance of retaining the TA's local identity:

The committee believes that one of the great strengths of the Territorial Army is its local identity. This is true in its role as an ambassador for the Armed Forces to

¹⁹⁸ "Thousands of TA Troops Quit Since Start of Iraq War", *Edinburgh Evening News*, 15 June 2006

¹⁹⁹ Further information on the recommendations of the NAO is available in Library Standard Note SN/IA/4088, *Armed Forces Personnel Policy*, November 2007.

²⁰⁰ SaBRE, *Reservists around the world*, 2007.

²⁰¹ Hew Strachan, "The Civil-Military Gap in Britain", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, June 2003, p.59

an increasingly demilitarised society, and in enabling it to provide the local knowledge essential in a civil emergency.²⁰²

This is considered particularly important in an age when society has very little contact with the Armed Forces and there is poor public understanding of military life.²⁰³

4. Terms and Conditions of Service

Although longstanding issues, it was only in the last year of the Blair Government that the nature of the terms and conditions of Service personnel received a notably high public and political profile. Such a development was considered largely inevitable given the large scale restructuring of the Armed Forces since 2003,²⁰⁴ and the significant and very public operational role of the Armed Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. It has been this last point in particular which has served to raise awareness of issues relating to the standard of equipment and personal kit issued to operationally deployed personnel and the medical care of returning injured Service personnel.

However, other issues have also achieved prominence, including the standard of Service accommodation, the level of pay and allowances, particularly among the more junior ranks, and the welfare support provided to Service families. These issues are examined in greater detail in Library Standard Note SN/IA/4495, *The Military Covenant*. In part, this increase in public awareness has been the result of the willingness on the part of both ex-Service and current Service Chiefs to speak out on these issues.²⁰⁵

In a 2006 lecture former Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Mike Jackson, delivered an outspoken attack on the MOD, mainly in relation to troop welfare:

Throughout my career I have been taught, and I have striven to instil, that soldiering requires the Army's leaders always to have in the forefront of their minds that it is the soldiers themselves who will make the endeavour succeed...Sadly, I did not find this fundamental proposition shared by the MOD.²⁰⁶

Most notably he described the condition of Service accommodation as "still, frankly, shaming and hemmed around by petty regulation".²⁰⁷

In an interview with *The Daily Mail* in October 2006 the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard Dannatt also raised issues over healthcare, accommodation and pay. In his concluding remarks he stated:

²⁰² Report of the All Party Parliamentary Reserves Group, *Recognising the Opportunity- Part 1: The Territorial Army*, 2007, p.23

²⁰³ These issues are examined in section II C in relation to the 2008 study on National Recognition for the Armed Forces.

²⁰⁴ Regiments have historical local associations. The amalgamation of several regiments under the new Future Infantry Structure in the last few years has received a great deal of local coverage and in some cases, opposition.

²⁰⁵ The wider issue of civil-military relations is addressed in the background paper RP08/58.

²⁰⁶ General Sir Mike Jackson, 'The Richard Dimbleby Lecture', 6 December 2006

²⁰⁷ Ibid

I am going to stand up for what is right for the Army. Honesty is what it is about. The truth will out. We have got to speak the truth. Leaking and spinning, at the end of the day, are not helpful.²⁰⁸

Towards the end of Blair's tenure many of the issues relating to manning deficiencies, the breaking of harmony guidelines and deficiencies in Armed Forces welfare, increasingly began to coalesce around the issue of the Military Covenant and allegations that the Government was breaching its commitments of duty of care to Service personnel, their families and veterans. However, this issue became more prominent over the summer of 2007 and has been a major theme of defence policy during Gordon Brown's first year as Prime Minister.²⁰⁹

F. Operations and Commitments

Operational commitments have been a consistent feature of the Blair government's defence and foreign policies. As senior officers have testified and the Government has acknowledged, the actual level of commitments has regularly exceeded the defence planning assumptions of both the 1998 Strategic Defence Review and the 2003 White Paper. The National Audit Office has observed that the Armed Forces have been operating "at or above the most demanding combination of operations envisaged by the [Defence Planning Assumptions] since 2001 at least".²¹⁰ These concerns have been shared by the Defence Select Committee:

We are deeply concerned that the Armed Forces have been operating at or above the level of concurrent operations they are resourced and structured to deliver for seven of the last eight years, and for every year since 2002.²¹¹

Many commentators have also expressed doubts over the extent of the UK's reserve capacity should other contingencies arise. As Lawrence Freedman makes clear:

We are a smallish country with a limited capacity and when we are totally preoccupied with hard-fighting in one or two countries there will always be a problem somewhere else.²¹²

With respect to recent contingency operations, as General Sir Mike Jackson has also observed:

We have seen a pattern in the way campaigns have evolved: often starting with a short intense decisive campaign which involves more or less conventional

²⁰⁸ "Sir Richard Dannatt: a very honest General", *The Daily Mail*, 12 October 2006. See also "Former army chief criticises MOD", *BBC News Online*, 7 December 2006; "The troops let down by our leaders", *The Daily Mail*, 1 June 2007 and "One of Britain's most distinguished generals says the moral cowardice of our politicians and military chiefs has all but destroyed this country's armed forces", *The Daily Mail*, 13 April 2007

²⁰⁹ The military covenant is examined in section II C.

²¹⁰ National Audit Office, *Recruitment and Retention in the Armed Forces*, HC 1633, Session 2005-06

²¹¹ Defence Select Committee, *Annual Report and Accounts 2006-07*, HC 61, Session 2007-08

²¹² Defence Select Committee, *UK Defence: Commitments and resources: Uncorrected Transcript of Evidence*, HC 381-ii, Session 2006-07, Q168

fighting, followed by long, sometimes very long, periods of peace support operations, nation building, post-conflict operations, call them what you will.²¹³

Operations in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq all support Jackson's analysis. The fact that many of the deployments of British forces were intended to be short, limited interventions, but in fact turned into drawn-out and highly demanding commitments has placed great strain on the defence planning assumptions with the Armed Forces widely seen to be operating beyond their optimal capacity.²¹⁴

1. High Profile Contingent Operations

During Blair's time in office, the UK was involved in five high profile conflicts that spanned almost the entirety of that period. While these operations differed significantly in terms of the reasons for which and how they were fought, they all reflected Blair's interventionist approach to foreign policy and his belief in the utility of force when required. These operations also appeared to confirm the necessity of the expeditionary strategy outlined in the SDR and the 2003 White Paper.

a. *Iraq: Operation Desert Fox, 1998*

The United Nations Special Commission team (UNSCOM) tasked with monitoring Iraq's progress in relation to Resolution 687 of 1991 was, in February 1998 denied access to important sites believed to be associated with WMD storage. The US and UK threatened a military response unless Baghdad complied. This crisis was defused when UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan obtained a Memorandum of Understanding from the Iraqi Government of full resumption of cooperation with the UN. The confirmation of the Understanding in UNSC Resolution 1154 of March 1998 threatened 'severest consequences for Iraq'²¹⁵ in the case of violations.

Inspections resumed in March and despite declarations of improved cooperation, relations between UNSCOM and Baghdad began to deteriorate during late June and July. Talks on the inspection process broke down in August and Iraq announced it was suspending all cooperation with the UN inspection teams. Inconclusive talks were held in October between Annan and Iraqi officials and Resolution 1205 of 5 November 1998 condemned Iraq's violations of previous Resolutions. On 11 November UNSCOM personnel were withdrawn from Iraq. Military action authorised by the US and UK on 14 November was narrowly averted by a last ditch agreement between the UN and Iraq, and inspectors were allowed to return to Iraq on 17 November. The so-called 'Butler report' of 15 December 1998, by the Executive Chairman of UNSCOM, concluded that Iraq had 'not provided the full cooperation it promised.'²¹⁶

²¹³ General Sir Mike Jackson, 'The Richard Dimpleby Lecture', 6 December 2006

²¹⁴ In April 2006, for example, the then Secretary of State for Defence, John Reid, expressed the hope that British forces would leave Afghanistan in three years without a single shot being fired.

²¹⁵ UNSC Resolution 1154 (1998). Available online at:
<http://www.un.org/Depts/unscom/Keyresolutions/sres98-1154.htm>

²¹⁶ 'Letter from the Executive Chairman of UNSCOM to the Secretary-general of the United Nations', 15 December 1998.

This failure to comply led to the initiation, on 16 December 1998, of four days of US and British air strikes against Iraq designed primarily to degrade Saddam's capacity to develop and deliver WMD. The British Government held they had sufficient legal basis for military action under existing Security Council Resolutions.²¹⁷ It was however the first major commitment of forces under Blair.²¹⁸

Between 17 and 19 December UK forces participated in 32 sorties, representing 15% of total missions flown and the overall cost of *Desert Fox* was estimated by the MOD at approximately £3 million.²¹⁹ The operation was pronounced a success at the time with most targets damaged and destroyed and Saddam's ability to pursue WMD programmes significantly curtailed. Throughout, the operation received support from all the major UK political parties. More importantly the operation was considered an early indication of the direction of Blair's foreign policies and specifically the priority Blair would afford the Special Relationship with the US. As John Kampfner noted:

Blair's first taste of military adventure pales into insignificance with the four wars that were to follow. It was off the front pages within days. But it was a crucial test of his resolve and his determination to show that this Labour Prime Minister would not shrink from using force.²²⁰

b. Kosovo: Operation Allied Force 1999

The origins of the Kosovo conflict in 1999 lie in the revocation by the Serbian President, Slobodan Milosevic of Kosovo's partial autonomy in 1989 and his campaign to impose Serbian cultural and political hegemony on the province. In response the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) emerged in the mid 1990s and began a low-level campaign of violence. In 1997 Serbian forces began reacting to KLA attacks in a disproportionate manner and the issue became an increasing priority for the international community.

Months of diplomatic effort by the international community, sponsored by the six-nation 'Contact Group' culminated in the Rambouillet peace talks in February 1999 which subsequently failed to resolve the crisis. Meanwhile NATO continued to build up its forces in the region and in early March 1999 deployed the NATO Rapid Reaction Corps to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

After months of fighting and the breakdown of further talks in March, President Clinton announced that either the international community stood by and watched the fighting continue or it used force to pressure Milosevic to back down. Russia and China opposed the use of air strikes but on 21 March the US issued a final warning to Milosevic stating that he either halted aggression against the Kosovar Albanians or bear full responsibility for the consequences of NATO military action.

²¹⁷ In particular UN Security Council Resolutions 687 (1991), 1154 (1998) and 1205 (1998).

²¹⁸ Further information on British participation in patrolling the No Fly Zones in Iraq, which were established in 1991 after the Gulf War and were still being conducted at the time of *Desert Fox*, is available in Library Standard Note SN/IA/1981, *No Fly Zones over Iraq*.

²¹⁹ HC Deb 3 Feb 1999, c 654w

²²⁰ John Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, 2003, p.35

The Supreme Allied Commander of NATO was given authority to initiate air strikes against the military capability of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia on 23 March 1999. Operation *Allied Force* began on 24 March and was NATO's first major autonomous military offensive. The military objective of the campaign was to reduce the Serbs' capability to repress the Albanian population and avert humanitarian disaster. Strongly worded UN Resolutions had been adopted with respect to Kosovo, but did not sanction the use of force. Given the threat of a Russian veto, no attempt was made to obtain UN approval so instead NATO, citing humanitarian and political grounds as the legal basis for military action, initiated operations on the basis of the unanimous agreement of all 19 Alliance nations.

There was an expectation that Milosevic would quickly concede when faced with the threat and use of credible force, but this hope proved to be unfounded. The campaign lasted 78 days and comprised 38,000 air sorties with just over 60% flown by US aircraft and 10% by UK aircraft. During the campaign a number of high-profile 'collateral damage' incidents occurred, including the bombing of a refugee convoy on 14 April and the Chinese Embassy on 7 May. The campaign, however, made little use of ground forces or joint operations, and came to characterise one of the main problems of military action by an Alliance of 19 nations acting on the basis of unanimity. As the bombing campaign continued and the humanitarian crisis intensified, Blair increasingly came to support the idea of a ground invasion, but was unable to persuade the US to back the idea as the then President Clinton was unwilling to risk American lives. The military operation also raised problems among the NATO allies over doctrinal differences and disputes over targeting. Maintaining unity carried a high price²²¹ and from the UK's perspective, it could only attempt to influence strategy but not dictate it.²²² Throughout, the conflict did however receive broad domestic support.²²³

Following increased Russian diplomatic pressure, the threat of a ground invasion and continued bombing, on 9 June Milosevic signed an agreement on the withdrawal of Serb forces from Kosovo and on 10 June NATO suspended its air strikes. UN Security Council Resolution 1244 was adopted to oversee the return of the refugees. All NATO's military objectives had been achieved and in that sense *Operation Allied Force* was deemed a success.²²⁴

Yet, serious inadequacies with the campaign were evident. The strategy adopted by NATO failed to swiftly coerce Milosevic into compliance with the Alliance's demands. Also, the air campaign did not prevent the unfolding of a humanitarian disaster on the ground in Kosovo as the bombing did little to degrade tactical Serbian military capabilities. The campaign had also displayed the difficulty of establishing and maintaining a fragile consensus in coalition warfare in which political consultations and

²²¹ Defence Select Committee, *Lessons of Kosovo*, HC 347-I, Session 1999-2000, para 70-83. The Defence Committee concluded that the decision not to at least display a potential commitment to using ground troops was a 'serious error of judgement' because it displayed a lack of resolve and hamstrung NATO diplomatic leverage over Milosevic.

²²² *Ibid*, para.65

²²³ John Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, 2003, p.47

²²⁴ For a more detailed account of the military campaign refer to Library Research Paper 99/48, [Kosovo: Operation 'Allied Force](#), 29 April 1999.

agreement were essential to military effectiveness. From the UK's perspective, the Defence Select Committee's *Lessons of Kosovo* report commented that "Engaging in Kosovo risked bringing the UK to the very limits of, and quite possibly exceeding, the concurrency criteria set out in the Strategic Defence review".²²⁵ However, the Kosovo operation did help to frame Blair's approach to the idea of humanitarian intervention and despite the impact on the defence planning assumptions was considered to have demonstrated that the underlying premise of the SDR with respect to expeditionary operations was a sound one.

c. Sierra Leone: 2000

The British response to the crisis in Sierra Leone in 2000 did not receive a great deal of attention in the press at the time, yet the military action it involved was indicative of the type of tasks demanded of British Forces, including both expeditionary peace support and hostage rescue operations.

Following years of civil war, a peace agreement was eventually signed in 1999. Under the provisions of that agreement "the rebels were given seats in government and a legal amnesty in return for peace".²²⁶ 6,000 UN peacekeepers were deployed to maintain order, but they were largely ineffective and fighting began to intensify. In May 2000 the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) took 500 peacekeepers hostage and it was this turn of events that prompted British intervention.

In early May 2000 700 British troops were deployed with the ostensible aim of evacuating foreign nationals caught up in the fighting. The idea was that the troops would secure the airport before more UN troops arrived, after which the British would withdraw. Given widespread concerns that the UK would be dragged into a potentially costly commitment of indefinite length, Blair maintained that the UK deployment was purely intended to support the UN and would be wound down as soon as order was re-imposed. Nevertheless, it became clear that Blair saw the need for a more proactive and determined response. The mission objectives therefore began to expand from the minor objectives at the time of the first deployment. Blair believed that, given that British forces were deployed on the ground, they had a bigger responsibility to restore order and drive the RUF from Freetown. They were reported to have confronted the RUF in at least one battle that left close to 20 rebels dead. UK troops also assisted in capturing the rebel leader, Foday Sankoh, and laid out a military strategy which eventually forced the RUF to retreat. 200 Royal Irish Regiment soldiers remained as a short-term training team for the government army and had no other military role.

However, in an unexpected set-back, on 25 August 2000 eleven soldiers from the Royal Irish Regiment were taken hostage by a rebel group called the West Side Boys who were demanding the release of their leader from prison. Negotiations with the group secured the release of five of the soldiers on 3 September, although further negotiations broke down and the West Side Boys threatened to kill the remaining hostages. The hostage rescue operation, *Operation Barras*, took place on 10 September and involved

²²⁵ Defence Select Committee, *Lessons of Kosovo*, HC 347-I, Session 1999-2000, para 308

²²⁶ John Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, 2003

150 members of the 1st Battalion The Parachute Regiment, supported by members of the Special Air Service (SAS). The hostages were rescued and flown to safety within twenty minutes, but the fighting continued until the area was secure, and carried on into the afternoon as British troops hunted down and captured the rebel leader Foday Kallay and seventeen others. Twenty-five West Side Boys, including three women, and one British soldier were killed.

d. *Afghanistan: 2001–present*

Following the events of 9/11 the Bush administration promptly decided to intervene in Afghanistan and remove the Taliban regime that had provided sanctuary to al-Qaeda, the perpetrators of the attacks, since 1996. In the aftermath of 9/11 Blair had pledged his total support for the US and immediately set to work helping assemble a broad coalition for military action against the Taliban. NATO for the first time in its history invoked Article five: its mutual defence clause. In what was considered by some to be a snub to the Alliance, and particularly its European member States, the US declined the Alliance's offer of support, preferring to progress unilaterally. Meanwhile the UK and US agreed to co-ordinate their military and counter-terrorist plans.

The road from 9/11 to military intervention was swift and involved only two British Cabinet meetings during that time.²²⁷ An ultimatum, whose main demand was for the handover of al-Qaeda leaders to America, was delivered to the Taliban regime by President Bush on 20 September, and was rejected by them a day later. A dossier entitled 'Responsibility for the Terrorist Atrocities in the United States' was produced by the Joint Intelligence Committee, presented to Parliament on 4 October and formed a central plank of the Government's case for war against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. In the meantime diplomacy continued as Blair secured support from countries such as Russia and Pakistan for military action.

The implication for the UK in military terms was its involvement in the US-led Operation *Enduring Freedom* to remove the Taliban regime by force. Military strikes began on 7 October 2001. Essentially, the coalition used a strategy of relying on heavy bombardment supplemented by US and British Special Forces and intelligence operatives on the ground, working closely with the opposition Northern Alliance. On 11 November the Taliban were defeated and driven from the northern town of Mazar-e-Sharif. In mid November forces from the Northern Alliance entered Kabul which marked the beginning of the collapse of remaining Taliban positions. Kunduz fell at the end of November. On 7 December the Taliban stronghold of the southern city of Kandahar fell, followed by the mountain hideout of Tora Bora on 16 December. On 22 December Hamid Karzai was sworn in as chairman of a six-month interim government.

Compared to the UK's later deployments in Afghanistan, the UK contribution to the initial campaign was very limited and is summarised on the MOD website:

Royal Navy submarines fired Tomahawk missiles against the Taliban and Al Qaida networks, and RAF aircraft provided reconnaissance and air-to-air

²²⁷ John Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, 2003, p.128

refuelling capabilities in support of US strike aircraft. The US flew missions from Diego Garcia, part of the British Indian Ocean Territory. UK troops were first deployed in November 2001, when Royal Marines from 40 Commando helped to secure the airfield at Bagram. A 1,700 battlegroup based around Royal Marines from 45 Commando, was subsequently deployed as Task Force JACANA. Their role was to deny and destroy terrorist infrastructure and interdict the movement of Al Qaida in eastern Afghanistan. In several major operations, Task force JACANA destroyed a number of bunkers and caves, and it also provided humanitarian assistance in areas previously dominated by the Taliban and Al Qaida. It withdrew in July 2002.²²⁸

Prominent Afghans met in Bonn in December 2001 under the auspices of the United Nations to determine Afghanistan's future. As well as determining a twin-track political and stabilisation process for Afghanistan, UN Security Council Resolution 1386 laid down the mandate for a 5,000 strong International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to deploy to Kabul in order to provide security and to assist in the reconstruction of the country, whilst the US continued to conduct independent counter-terrorism operations primarily in the East of the country.

British participation in ISAF was relatively limited in the first few years, although Special Forces were still committed to Enduring Freedom. However, once NATO assumed command of ISAF in August 2003 and steadily expanded its operations to cover the entirety of Afghanistan, British forces on the ground in Afghanistan steadily rose, largely as a result of the deployment of personnel into southern Afghanistan. By the summer of 2007, the number of British personnel deployed had risen from 3,300 to approximately 7,700 personnel.²²⁹

The ISAF operation had been regarded as a fundamental test of NATO's ability to effectively operate outside its traditional sphere of influence and its ability to carve out a role for the Alliance in the post 9/11 environment. However, as outlined in section I C the perceived unwillingness of NATO allies to meet their force generation obligations has led to political divisions within the Alliance and concerns expressed over the possibility of a "two-tier" NATO developing. This debate has been particularly pertinent to the UK which has the majority of its forces deployed in the more volatile southern provinces. Speaking at RUSI on 19 September 2006 the Secretary of State for Defence, Des Browne, expressed the view that:

I know that some of our partners feel, with some justice, that they have done their bit, and many are now focused on other tasks elsewhere in the world. Some have doubts that the mission will succeed. Others, candidly, have more direct concerns about the level of risk they are prepared to expose their soldiers to. These are understandable concerns.

But those of us who are already fully committed in the south – ourselves, the Canadians, the Dutch, the Danes, the Estonians and the ever present Americans

²²⁸ Ministry of Defence [Background Briefing](#).

²²⁹ The deployment of British forces in Afghanistan is covered in more detail in Library Standard Note SN/IA/4143, *International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan: Recent Developments*.

– must remind our partners that it was their agreement and support that brought us to this point., and that the mission is as vital as it always has been [...]

The fundamental point is that NATO is an alliance. When it decides to use military force, all partners should be prepared to face equal risk.²³⁰

e. Iraq: 2003–present

Operation Telic has been the UK's largest operational military deployment since the 1991 Gulf War. The operation was part of a larger coalition led by the United States, which at its peak was some 467,000 strong. At the height of major combat operations (March-May 2003) British forces deployed in the region totalled approximately 46,000 personnel.

The background to the conflict is covered extensively in Library Research Papers RP02/64, *Iraq and UN Security Council Resolution 1441*, 21 November 2002 and RP03/22, *Iraq: Developments since UN Security Council Resolution 1441*, 13 March 2003, and therefore is not re-examined here. However, it is worth noting a few defining characteristics of that period in the run up to the beginning of the conflict in March 2003.

In the aftermath of 9/11 Tony Blair had declared his commitment to stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with America and this was reflected in the UK's political and albeit limited military support for the Afghan campaign. Blair's motivations for dealing with Iraq were, however, somewhat different to those propounded by the US. Blair did not subscribe to the connection between Iraq and al-Qaeda but instead argued for action based on Iraq's suspected possession of WMD and the threat Saddam Hussein posed to regional and international security. In April 2002 Blair signalled his intention in principle to go along with the US, although he remained concerned about the lack of public and party support for any military action against Iraq. Blair was determined to obtain a UN resolution approving the use of force. Bush agreed to this approach, but stressed that if consensus could not be reached at the UN or it failed to ensure Iraq's disarmament, the US would not be dissuaded from using force against Iraq unilaterally. Blair also promised British support for military operations if the diplomatic route failed. Divisions within Europe were also growing at this time with the French demanding that inspections be given more time. As John Kampfner noted:

Blair's world was closing in on him. The Americans were becoming impatient. Blix was finding nothing. Opposition at home was growing. The second resolution, which had only ever been a desirable option, had now become a matter of political survival.²³¹

²³⁰ Speech by the Secretary of State for Defence to the Royal United Services Institute on 19 September 2006. A copy of his full speech is available online at:

<http://www.rusi.org/events/ref:E4507D412CAD4A/info:public/infoID:E450FB4C61AE34/>. In an interview with *The Guardian* on 4 September the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard Dannatt had already suggested that Britain "was doing more than its share of what is required in Afghanistan" ("Britain's top new soldier", *The Guardian*, 4 September 2006).

²³¹ John Kampfner, *Blair's Wars*, 2003, p.274

Military operations began officially on 20 March 2003.²³² A limited air strike on the Iraqi leadership opened the campaign, followed by the launch of simultaneous air and ground operations. British and US Marines were deployed in the south of the country to secure the Al Faw Peninsula, the southern oilfields, the port of Umm Qasar and the region around Basra. The US Army 5th Corp advanced rapidly north towards Baghdad.

After several weeks of heavy fighting and air strikes British troops launched an assault on Basra on 6 April and succeeded in capturing the city centre. After several days of incursions into the capital, US forces took effective control of Baghdad on 8 and 9 April. Tikrit fell to the Coalition on 13 April, bringing the main combat phase of the campaign to a close. Major combat operations were officially declared to be over on 1 May 2003.

The coalition strategy relied on establishing rapid air superiority (and then dominance) to allow air strikes against key targets such as regime infrastructure, military centres and communications systems, as ground forces advanced through the desert towards Baghdad.²³³ Also, decapitation strikes were launched against the Iraqi leadership and air power was increasingly used to support the ground troops as they advanced. The campaign was integrated and joint from the outset, which differed from the 1991 Gulf War when thirty-eight days of air strikes had preceded the ground campaign. The campaign made extensive and unprecedented use of networked systems between force components and between allies. Many Iraqis reverted to guerrilla style resistance tactics as US forces pushed north, which placed an emphasis on the need to protect convoys, whilst securing key towns took longer than expected. Nevertheless, the speed with which coalition troops took Baghdad defied expectations. As Jeremy Black noted:

On the whole, the war demonstrated the advantages brought by new weaponry information systems, but also the continued friction on the battlefield and the problems involved in coalition operations – even between the USA and Britain, with their long experience of joint training.²³⁴

For a more detailed account of the progression of the military campaign see Library Research Paper 03/50, *The Conflict in Iraq*, 23 May 2003.

Most of the coalition's military objectives were achieved within four weeks of crossing the border into Iraq, including the major objective for the British, which was to take the southern city of Basra. The major exception was the failure to find any Iraqi WMDs. A number of problems associated with the campaign were also identified. An NAO report noted that the readiness levels required were over and above planning assumptions; there were gaps in capability prior to the conflict; operational stock levels (such as spare-parts and ammunition) were insufficient, and the tracking of supplies in theatre was ineffective. It also highlighted the difficulties stemming from the transition from conflict to post-conflict phase, combined with post-conflict planning insufficiencies.²³⁵

²³² Some preparatory air operations had been undertaken in the southern no-fly zone on 19 March 2003.

²³³ Tim Garden, "Iraq: the military campaign", *International Affairs*, 2003, p.705

²³⁴ Jeremy Black, *The Dotted Red Line: Britain's Defence Policy in the modern World*, 2006, p.59

²³⁵ National Audit Office, *Operation Telic – United Kingdom Military Operations in Iraq*, HC 60, Session 2003-04

Following the end of major combat operations the British military presence was significantly reduced to around 18,000 troops and the UK became the lead nation for Multi-National Division (South East) which covered the South-Eastern area of Iraq including Basra. Further troop withdrawals occurred over the years and by May 2007, just prior to the departure of Tony Blair, British troops in Iraq had been reduced to 5,500 personnel.

The MOD described the mission of British forces in the south of Iraq as:

working in partnership with the Iraqi Government, to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq. This involves the direct provision of security by MNF through security operations and work training and equipping the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) so that the Iraqi authorities are, increasingly, able to take responsibility for providing security themselves.²³⁶

British forces were thus primarily involved in providing security, training Iraqi security forces, and supporting reconstruction. Over the last few years British forces have gradually moved toward the provision of an overwatch capability as they have handed over security responsibility for the southern provinces to Iraqi authority.²³⁷

2. Other Contingent Commitments

In addition to the major contingent combat operations conducted throughout the period covered by this paper, the British Armed Forces have also been deployed on smaller contingent operations. These operations, however, have reflected the wide variety of tasks that have been asked of the UK military in the modern context and further reflect the kind of activist, internationally engaged foreign policy followed under Blair. They also placed additional strain on the military at a time when larger high-profile operations in Iraq and Afghanistan were ongoing.

The UK's Armed Forces contributed to a number of peacekeeping operations throughout the Blair period. Some of these have been long running commitments, such as the UK's contribution to the policing of the 'green line' in Cyprus. Others were in response to developments in various countries, often in the aftermath of Western military intervention, such as the contribution of personnel to NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR) following the bombing campaign of 1999.²³⁸ In March 2004 the UK deployed the NATO Operational Reserve Force for a period of 30 days following violent disturbances between ethnic Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. The UK has also contributed significant

²³⁶ Ministry of Defence Factsheet, *Operations in Iraq*.

²³⁷ Further information on the British deployment of forces in Iraq is available in Library Standard Note SN/IA/4099, *Coalition Forces in Iraq: Recent Developments*.

²³⁸ Initially that contribution totalled approximately 9,600 personnel although that decreased to approximately 3,500 in 2000; 2,200 in 2002, 1,400 between 2003 and 2005; 400 in 2006 and then by the end of Blair's term in office, 200 personnel were deployed in KFOR (Source: international Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance*, various years).

numbers of personnel to the NATO-led SFOR operation in Bosnia, which was subsequently handed over to the EU in 2004 (Operation *Althea*).²³⁹

Compared to some other nations, the UK contributed relatively few troops to UN peacekeeping missions during this period, appearing to favour instead committing troops to operations alongside the US or within the NATO umbrella. As of June 2007, for example, the UK had only 281 military personnel, 71 police and 21 military observers deployed on 20 UN peacekeeping operations worldwide.²⁴⁰ With the exception of Operation *Althea* (previously SFOR) British commitments to ESDP led operations had also been minimal.²⁴¹

UK forces have also made significant contributions to disaster relief operations. Following the 2004 Tsunami in southern Asia, British military personnel were deployed as part of a major international humanitarian relief effort under Operation *Garron*. Royal Navy and Royal Air Force personnel helped deliver a range of humanitarian assistance including the provision of urgently needed supplies and help with cleaning up and rebuilding affected areas. The British military also provided assistance to the relief effort following the Pakistan earthquake in 2005 through the provision of military personnel, equipment and supplies (Operation *Maturin*).

In the light of the volatile and violent situation in Cote d'Ivoire in early November 2004, the UK deployed a small military team to review contingency plans, liaise with the French military authorities regarding the safety of British citizens, and offer expert advice to the British Ambassador in Abidjan. An evacuation operation commenced early on 12 November 2004, when RAF Hercules aircraft flew into Cote d'Ivoire to take UK nationals and other evacuees to Accra (*Operation Phillis*).

As of April 2007 15,010 British personnel, including those deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, were deployed overseas.²⁴²

3. Standing Commitments

While the Blair era was characterised by several high profile contingent operations overseas and a smaller number of commitments to ongoing peacekeeping operations it is also useful to consider the variety of 'standing commitments' that the Armed Forces undertake and which consume significant resources, manpower, time and effort. Some

²³⁹ In 1997 5,753 British personnel were deployed as part of SFOR. Those force numbers were decreased in 1999 to 4,850; 3,050 in 2000; 2050 in 2002; 1750 in 2003 and 1,450 in 2004. Those force numbers were decreased to 1,100 in 2005 under Operation *Althea* and 600 in early 2007 before British forces were withdrawn from Bosnia and Herzegovina later that year. A small number of British personnel remain in Operation *Althea* attached to the operational HQ in Sarajevo (Source: international Institute for Strategic Studies, *Military Balance*, various years).

²⁴⁰ Contributors to UN Peacekeeping Operations, 30 June 2007. Tables of monthly contributions since 2000 and yearly summaries since 1995 are available online at:

<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/>

²⁴¹ The majority of ESDP operations have been civilian crisis management, policing and rule of law missions. British participation in the latter has been minimal largely due to the lack of a British gendarmerie force.

²⁴² HC Deb 4 June 2007, c158W

of these are specific commitments that have existed for many years, whilst others are more general responsibilities required of the Armed Forces.

The Armed Forces have longstanding defence commitments which focus on the protection of UK territorial sovereignty, including the integrity of UK waters and airspace, and the provision of security in support of other Government departments, more commonly referred to as Military Aid to the Civil Community (MACC). Indeed, during Blair's period in office, the Armed Forces were repeatedly called upon to undertake such commitments, underlining the less prominent yet significant demands made on the Armed Forces in addition to contingent operations.

In September 2000 the Armed Forces assisted during the fuel crisis, while during the 2001 foot-and-mouth crisis 2,100 Armed Forces personnel provided important command and control capabilities for the civil authorities. The Armed Forces were again called upon during the firemen's strike of 2002, at a time when troops were preparing to deploy to Iraq. The impact on defence policy of the increased threat from terrorism after 9/11 was also emphasised when troops were deployed to Heathrow Airport in 2003 to assist the police when intelligence reports suggested a plan by al-Qaeda to hijack a plane in Eastern Europe and fly it into a terminal at the airport.

The MOD also has a long-standing obligation to provide for the external defence and security of the UK's 13 Overseas Territories and the Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) in Cyprus, including the provision of support and assistance to the civil authorities of those territories. In the Falkland Islands, for instance, the UK maintains an Army infantry company to guard against invasion and provide a continuous presence on the ground. Their role includes conducting training for soldiers based at Mount Pleasant Airfield, as well as for the Falkland Island Defence Force, who are the locally maintained volunteer defence unit. The Royal Navy also has a number of standing tasks including fleet ready escort, fisheries protection, Atlantic patrol Task (North) and Atlantic patrol Task (South) and an obligation to the Standing NATO Response Force Maritime Group (SNMG).²⁴³ Northern Ireland naval operations ended in April 2005; while at present the UK does not contribute to NATO's SNMG1, formerly NATO's Standing Naval Force Atlantic.²⁴⁴ In addition, the UK maintains a continuous-at-sea nuclear deterrent capability.

G. UK Defence Expenditure

To better comprehend the issues and trends examined in this chapter, it is necessary to understand how the defence budget is set up and the relevant terms and definitions associated with it. Of fundamental importance is the change from cash accounting to Resource Accounting and Budgeting (RAB) which occurred in 2002. The change to RAB has had a significant effect on the defence budget, in terms of inflating the MoD's headline budget figures and affecting the time series comparability of the data. These issues are examined in detail in the accompanying background paper RP08/58.

²⁴³ Previously NATO Standing Naval Forces.

²⁴⁴ HC Deb 6 March 2006, c1193W

1. The Figures

As measured under the near cash system the defence budget, for the years 1997/98 to 2006/07, is as follows:

Defence expenditure (a) : 1997/98 to 2006/07

	£ billion	£ billion at 2006/2007 prices (b)	£bn change over previous year in real terms	% change over previous year in real terms	As per cent of GDP
1997/98	20.9	26.0	-	-	2.5%
1998/99	22.5	27.2	1.2	4.7%	2.6%
1999/00	22.6	26.8	-0.4	-1.6%	2.4%
2000/01	23.6	27.6	0.8	2.9%	2.4%
2001/02	26.1	29.8	2.3	8.2%	2.6%
2002/03	27.3	30.3	0.5	1.6%	2.6%
2003/04	29.3	31.6	1.3	4.3%	2.6%
2004/05	29.5	31.0	-0.5	-1.7%	2.5%
2005/06	30.6	31.4	0.4	1.3%	2.5%
2006/07	31.5	31.5	0.0	0.0%	2.4%

Notes: (a) Figures show the department's net cash requirement. This series allows for comparisons between pre and post RAB implementation

(b) Adjusted using the adjusted GDP deflator as at October 2007

Sources: UK Defence Statistics, DASA (provided by DASA official) - various years
MOD Annual Report and Accounts
Public Expenditure: Statistical Analyses 2004, Cm 6201

During this period there has been a 2.1% average annual increase in real terms defence expenditure. However, this may have been inflated in recent years by the rising cost of operations. Due to the way the spending figures are presented in resource accounting, it is difficult to break down near cash expenditure by Request for Resources to enable meaningful comparison over a period of time. Yet looking at a breakdown of total Department Expenditure Limits (DEL)²⁴⁵ in resource terms, there is a clear step up in the proportion of total defence spending allocated to RfR2 (conflict prevention) in 2002-03, which coincides with the start of military operations in Iraq:

Share of total defence spending

	2001-02 outturn	2002-03 outturn	2003-04 outturn	2004-05 outturn	2005-06 outturn	2006-07 outturn
Total departmental spending¹	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>of which:</i>						
Provision of Defence Capability (RfR1)	85.8%	83.3%	83.0%	85.3%	82.8%	82.0%
Conflict Prevention Costs (RfR2)	1.7%	4.1%	4.2%	3.0%	3.3%	4.5%
War Pensions & Allowances (RfR3)	3.5%	3.3%	3.1%	3.0%	2.8%	2.6%
Armed Forces Pay & Pensions (AFPS RfR1)	9.1%	9.4%	9.7%	8.8%	11.2%	10.9%

Notes:

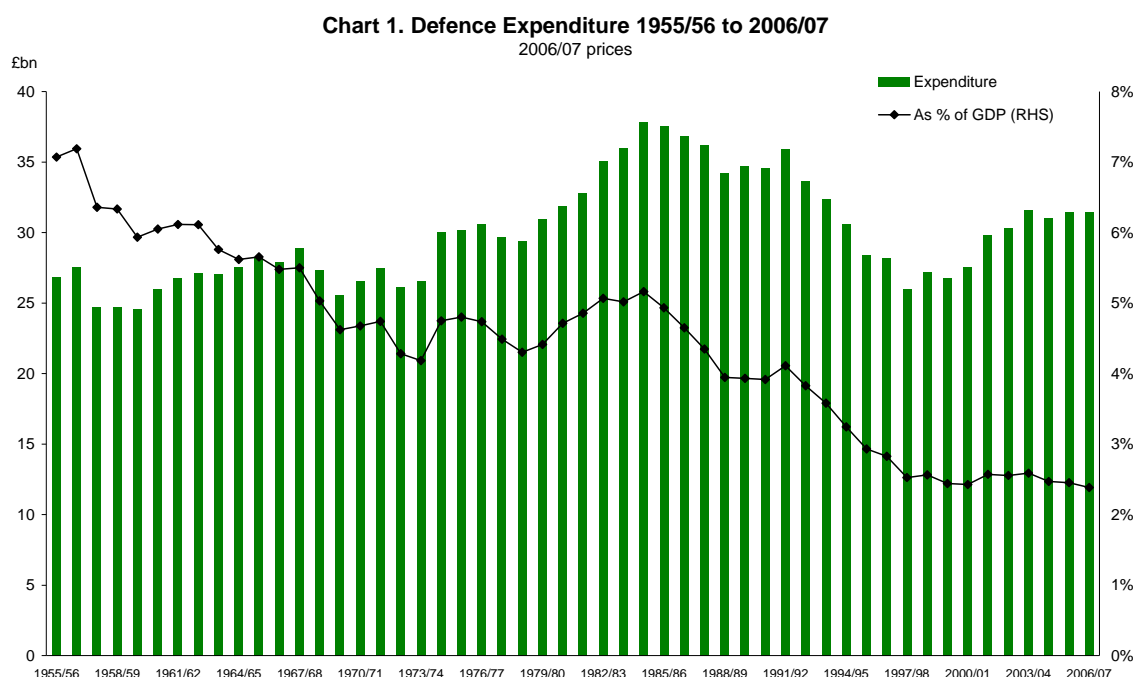
1. Total departmental spending is the sum of the resource and capital budgets (DEL + AME) less depreciation

Source: *The Government's Expenditure Plans 2007-08, Cm 7098*

As a proportion of GDP defence expenditure remained fairly stable over the 10 years of the Blair government, averaging 2.5% of GDP between 1997/98 and 2006/07. However, as Chart 1 below shows, over the longer term this was on a downward trend from 1984/85,

²⁴⁵ A Department's Expenditure Limit (DEL) is the Department's main budget.

when the figure was 5.2%, reflecting the changes in defence policy that followed the end of the Cold War.²⁴⁶



Sources: *British Historical Statistics, Mitchell* - up to and including 1974/75
UK Defence Statistics, DASA (provided by DASA official) - from 1975/76
MoD Annual Report and Accounts (various years)

Defence is also the only major area of Government expenditure that has not seen an increase in spending as a percentage of GDP in recent years, despite the major conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. For example, spending on health increased from 6.7% of GDP in real terms in 1997-98 to 7.2% in 2006/07. Spending on education also rose from 4.5% to 5.6% of GDP between 1997 and 2007.²⁴⁷

Spending on defence has also declined as a proportion of total public spending, while other areas of government expenditure have seen an increase over the same time period. The table below looks at spending on defence within the wider public expenditure framework for selected departmental groups.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ A breakdown of figures showing defence expenditure since 1955 is available in section III of RP08/58.

²⁴⁷ HM Treasury, *Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2008*, HC 489, Session 2007-08

²⁴⁸ A detailed list of departmental groupings can be found in *Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2008*, HM Treasury, HC 489, Session 2007-08

Total Departmental Expenditure Limits¹ in real terms by select departmental group
£ million at 2006-07 prices

	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
	outturn	outturn	outturn	outturn	outturn	estimate
Children Schools and Families ²	14,794	16,594	17,466	19,227	46,169	48,885
Health	65,281	71,176	74,903	80,251	82,630	88,985
Innovation Universities and Skills	13,801	14,425	14,637	15,910	15,854	16,891
CLG Local government ²	41,726	44,359	45,731	47,837	22,763	22,097
Home Office	8,709	9,183	8,920	9,081	8,841	8,989
Defence	32,537	33,518	34,612	34,199	33,964	35,762
Work and Pensions	8,003	8,561	8,553	8,478	7,898	7,764
Total DEL	267,642	287,840	297,716	311,476	319,738	334,544

Notes:

1. Full resource budgeting basis, excluding depreciation

2. Significant changes in figures from 2006-07 reflect changes in the funding structure, including the introduction of the Dedicated Schools Grant

Source: *Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2008, HC 489, Table 1.13*

In terms of Departmental Expenditure Limits spending on health has increased by 36% in real terms since 2002-03, while defence has seen an increase of just 10%. The average annual increase in the health budget over this period was 6.4% in real terms, compared with 1.9% for the defence budget. In addition, the proportion of total DEL spent on health rose from 22.4% in 2002-03 to 26.6% in 2007-08, while that on defence fell from 12.2% to 10.7% over the same time period.

2. Pressures on the defence budget

Despite the intentions of the Strategic Defence Review, it was widely criticised at the time for its supposition that defence can be solely foreign policy-led. Philip Pugh writing in *RUSI Defence Systems* in 2006 commented:

Foreign policy may determine priorities but it is the reality of costs and budgets that determine how far down a descending order of priorities capability can extend.²⁴⁹

The Defence Select Committee also noted in 2001 that:

We believe that, if it is our policy to maintain such a range of capabilities, it follows that we must be prepared to pay for them. If we are to add a chapter to the SDR, we must add the money to pay for it.²⁵⁰

Many observers have argued that the UK's military aspirations and commitments under the Labour government as defined first by the SDR and later by the New Chapter and 2003 White Paper, have not been matched by sufficient funding, leaving a hole in the defence budget and resulting in significant cutbacks and shortfalls in capability. Indeed, commenting on the 2003 defence White Paper the then Chairman of the Defence Select Committee Bruce George argued:

²⁴⁹ "Our Unaffordable Defence Policy: What now?", *RUSI Defence Systems*, autumn 2006

²⁵⁰ Defence Select Committee, *The Threat from Terrorism*, HC 348-I, Session 2001-02

The thing that disturbs me about the whole process is that the process is driven by how much money the Treasury is prepared to allocate you, and frankly if the Prime Minister wishes to deploy those forces readily around the world, then doing it within the constraints of what might be a diminishing budget appears to me a bit of a fantasy. You either decide you are going to have adequate forces, adequately funded, adequately led, adequately deployed and adequately resourced, or you do not.²⁵¹

In an interview with *The Daily Mail* in 2006 General Sir Richard Dannatt also commented:

Twenty-nine per cent of government spending is on social security. Five per cent is on defence. Others can take a view on whether that proportion is right.²⁵²

In particular, the conclusion that the Defence Planning Assumptions have been consistently exceeded since 2002 is considered to have put a major strain on the defence budget. Despite the allocation of supplementary funding for military operations, it has been argued that this does not cover the full costs of these commitments. Since the defence budget is set on the basis of the planning assumptions it is reasonable to conclude that the budget is consequently too small to meet current commitments.

The sections below examine the three key areas of defence spending – operations, equipment and personnel – which have all experienced significant cost growth over the period under consideration and subsequently put the defence budget under increasing strain. They also examine the arguments put forward that defence spending has failed to keep up with these cost pressures over the past decade.

a. Spending on overseas operations

While resources for peacekeeping operations, including in Africa, are set out in the MoD's Main Estimates, no formal budget is set for the cost of operations. The Department is voted additional resources in RfR2 to cover the net additional costs of operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Balkans, which are paid for out of the Treasury Reserve rather than the main defence budget. This request for resources is made in the MoD's Supplementary Estimates, despite calls from the Defence Select Committee that estimates of the net additional costs of operations should be included in the Department's Main Estimates. Justifying this position the MOD has stated:

Requests for resources for [operations] have normally been made in the Supplementary Estimates because costs are difficult to forecast in fast moving operational circumstance: Supplementary Estimates are the first occasion when the Department can reach a reasonably firm conclusion on likely costs.²⁵³

The Chancellor has set aside a total of £7.8bn from the special reserve since 2001 to cover the additional costs of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the

²⁵¹ Reported in HL Deb 22 November 2007, c932

²⁵² "Sir Richard Dannatt: a very honest General", *The Daily Mail*, 12 October 2006

²⁵³ Defence Select Committee, *Cost of Military Operations: Spring Supplementary Estimate 2006-07*, HC 558, Session 200607, Appendix

UK's other international obligations, as set out below.²⁵⁴ This includes funding for Urgent Operational Requirements (UORs), a process designed to provide forces on the ground with the equipment they need quickly through off-the-shelf purchases.

Pre-Budget 2002	£1,000m	
Budget 2003	£2,000m	
Pre-Budget 2003	£800m	(£500m for 2003/04; £300m for 2004/05)
Pre-Budget 2004	£520m	(for 2004/05)
Budget 2005	£740m	(£340m for 2004/05; £400m for 2005/06)
Pre-Budget 2005	£580m	(for 2005/06)
Budget 2006	£800m	(for 2006/07)
Pre-Budget 2006	£600m	(for 2006/07)
Budget 2007	£400m	(for 2007/08)
Pre-Budget 2007	£400m	(for 2007/08)
Total	£7,840m	

Due to the significant increase in the UK's overseas operational commitments, particularly in Afghanistan, operational costs have been high in recent years. The additional costs of the military's three main operations – in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Balkans – totalled £6.8bn between 2002/03 and 2006/07.²⁵⁵

Annual outturn expenditure figures for operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Balkans between 2002/03 and 2006/07 were as follows:²⁵⁶

Outturn expenditure on three main Operations, 2002/03-2006/07
£bn

	Iraq	Afghanistan	Balkans	Total
2002/03	0.847	0.311	0.166	1.324
2003/04	1.311	0.046	0.104	1.461
2004/05	0.909	0.067	0.087	1.063
2005/06	0.958	0.199	0.063	1.220
2006/07	0.956	0.738	0.056	1.750
<i>Total outturn</i>	<i>4.981</i>	<i>1.361</i>	<i>0.475</i>	<i>6.817</i>

Source: MoD Annual Report and Accounts (various years)

²⁵⁴ HC Deb 7 February 2006 c1122W

²⁵⁵ Details on the cost of the UK's current overseas operations can be found in the Library Standard Note SN/SG/3139, *The cost of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan*.

²⁵⁶ The MoD identifies the costs of operations in terms of the net additional costs it has incurred. That is, those costs which the MoD would have incurred had the operation not been undertaken – for example expenditure on wages and salaries or on conducting training exercises – are deducted from the total costs of the operation.

The cost of the UORs approved in each financial year to support the above operations between 2002-03 and 2006-07 were:

Cost of Urgent Operational Requirements £ million	
Financial year	Approval cost
2002-03	500
2003-04	180
2004-05	130
2005-06	260
2006-07	790
Total	1,860

Note: Full figures for UORs approved in 2001-02 are not held centrally

Sources: *HL Deb*, 14 December 2007, c85-6WA; *HC Deb* 1 May 2008 c594W

As outlined above the Armed Forces have consistently been operating beyond the defence planning assumptions. That the government continues to view current operations as 'short term' commitments means that, as a result, spending has not been adjusted accordingly, effectively resulting in the armed forces fighting two conflicts on a peacetime budget.²⁵⁷ Furthermore, the MoD has frequently underestimated the cost of its overseas operations. For example, the Department forecast the net additional cost of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2006/07 at £1.40bn in its Winter Supplementary Estimate, while the outturn figure for that year was £1.74bn. The underestimate of operational costs in 2006/07 as a whole resulted in net expenditure for RfR2 in the MoD's Annual Report and Accounts that was £20.9m in excess of the amount authorised by Parliament. The excess on RfR2 was described as being:

primarily the result of operational activity in both Afghanistan and Iraq being substantially higher than originally forecast. The unpredictability in activity levels is a significant cause of the underlying difficulties in forecasting Request for Resources 2 and in particular gave rise to additional depreciation and cost of capital charges. The main items were the firing (and consequent accelerated depreciation) of more Hellfire missiles than expected, particularly in Afghanistan, and the incomplete capture of depreciation costs associated with the operational use of capital spares.²⁵⁸

b. Equipment

The MoD spends almost £12bn annually on buying and supporting fighting equipment.²⁵⁹ Due to the introduction of RAB, it is not possible to provide recent figures that are fully consistent with those prior to 2001-02. The MoD resumed publishing estimates of

²⁵⁷ See for example Jeremy Blackham and Gwyn Prins, "The Royal Navy at the brink", *RUSI Journal*, April 2007, p.12

²⁵⁸ Defence Select Committee, *Annual Report and Accounts 2006-07*, HC 61, Session 2007-08

²⁵⁹ Ministry of Defence, *Defence Plan, including Government Expenditure Plans 2008-2012*, Cm7385, Session 2007-08

equipment expenditure in 2007.²⁶⁰ Based on these figures, spending on equipment as a proportion of total defence spending²⁶¹ averaged 36.6% during 2003/04 to 2006/07.

Key influences considered to affect the equipment budget include: the rising cost of equipment; pressures exerted from the high intensity of military operations;²⁶² and the impact of outside influences on the forward equipment plan and the acquisition process, including the financial fall-out from legacy programmes.

Defence inflation

A lot of attention has been given to the concept of defence inflation in recent years. This refers to the fact that the annual cost of a given unit of defence capability in most European countries has been growing considerably faster than year-on-year general inflation figures. This is particularly true when it comes to equipment costs. The focus of procurement has become increasingly high-tech since the end of the Cold War, an emphasis which has been reflected in the priority given to the procurement of NEC capabilities in both the SDR New Chapter and the 2003 defence White Paper. Technological advancements on this level have led to significant cost increases. As David Kirkpatrick at RUSI has pointed out:

the unit costs of most classes of increasingly-sophisticated defence equipment are growing at 5-10 per cent per year faster than general inflation.²⁶³

Other studies have estimated the annual rate of increase in the price of military equipment as being as high as 10%.²⁶⁴

Giving evidence during the Defence Select Committee enquiry into the MoD's Annual Report and Accounts 2006-07, Bill Jeffrey CB, Permanent under Secretary of State, said:

It is certainly the case that some of what we buy increases in price by more than general inflation. The most recent example of that was fuel; we are spending a great deal more than we were even just a couple of years ago simply because the cost of fuel has increased. Also a lot of our staff costs, to the extent that pay settlements exceed general inflation, and we have to find that.²⁶⁵

On the issue of equipment, Mr Jeffrey added:

The trouble with the defence area is that we are buying more and more complex equipment and they do increase substantially in price but it is hard to just home in and say that the inflation rate for defence equipment is X compared with general

²⁶⁰ DASA, *UK Defence Statistics 2007*, Table 1.4

²⁶¹ Defined as the near cash defence expenditure outturn.

²⁶² See for example National Audit Office, *Hercules C-130 Tactical Fixed Wing Airlift Capability*, HC 627, 27 June 2008

²⁶³ David Kirkpatrick, "How 'real' is the CSR increase in UK defence expenditure?", RUSI Commentary (<http://www.rusi.org/research/militarysciences/strategy/commentary/ref:C470DE2F832A32/>)

²⁶⁴ See for example Yaacov Lifshitz, *The Economics of Producing Defense: Illustrated by the Israeli Case*, 2003

²⁶⁵ Defence Select Committee, Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2006-07, HC 61, Session 2007-08

inflation of Y. It is certainly the case in some areas—some electronic components, for example, office equipment and that sort of thing—where costs have been going up probably less than general inflation. In others there is no doubt that some of the most advanced equipment is more expensive than its predecessors, but then again it is more capable. It is a difficult judgment.²⁶⁶

There are a number of reasons why high-tech military equipment does not experience the same reduction in costs over time as that seen in the commercial sector:

- production runs are short in terms of numbers and often spread over a long period of time;
- the technologies needed are often very specific to military usage and have limited application beyond;
- the length of the acquisition cycle from conception to deployment is typically 10-20 years, and it is therefore difficult to take advantage of technical innovation, which occurs at a much faster rate.²⁶⁷

In addition, some items of equipment may cost substantially more than their predecessors, however fewer units may be required for the task. Buying fewer units also means that research and development costs have to be recovered over smaller quantities purchased.

The Defence Select Committee has called for the MoD to produce an index of defence inflation, despite the fact that estimating the rising costs of defence equipment is recognised to be an extremely complicated task. That work is now underway. However, as the MOD has acknowledged:

This will however be resource intensive and we expect it will take up to two years to complete. Until then it will be difficult to provide coherent estimates for the different rates of inflation that affect the Defence budget.²⁶⁸

Operational impact

Another factor contributing to the increasing costs of military equipment is the impact of the intensity of operations on equipment life which is being reduced by higher than planned usage over a long period in theatre in Iraq and Afghanistan. The full repair costs of returning equipment are also not being fully accounted for. In 2007 the Defence Select Committee expressed its concern that:

equipment returning from operational theatres – whether it was procured through the routine acquisition process or as UORs – will require substantial expenditure

²⁶⁶ Defence Select Committee, Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2006–07, HC 61, Session 2007–08

²⁶⁷ M. Alexander & T. Garden, “The Arithmetic of Defence Policy” *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.77, No.3, 2001

²⁶⁸ Defence Select Committee, *Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2006–07: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2007–08*, HC 468, Session 2007-08

to repair, refurbish, support and store, and it appears that no provision has been made for this in the MoD's budget.²⁶⁹

Although the immediate equipment needs for the protection of the UK Armed Forces in theatre are met by Urgent Operational Requirements (UORs), which are paid for out of the Treasury Reserve, the scale of operations is still having an impact on the defence budget. Sir Jeremy Blackman argues that high UORs are in themselves indicative of overstretch, since they are capabilities needed "to bring our apparently 'high-intensity warfare' force to a suitable condition for the kind of operations they are regularly conducting".²⁷⁰

Furthermore, high operational commitments have changed the focus of the MoD's equipment procurement to short-term needs rather than longer term planning.

The politics of procurement

As outlined in section I D, there are several dynamics which influence the procurement of equipment. They are not unique to the Blair government but have been important, in particular with respect to their impact on the defence budget at a time of fiscal constraint. The intention is not to reiterate the contents of that paper here, but it is worth briefly summarising some of the main issues in relation to the budget.

First, smart acquisition has generally entailed the basic principle of competitive tendering in order to achieve the best value for money. However, the 2005 Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS) talked of the need to ensure "appropriate sovereignty" for certain key capabilities:

we must maintain the appropriate degree of sovereignty over industrial skills, capacities, capabilities and technology to ensure operational independence against the range of operations that we wish to be able to conduct...not only being assured of the delivery of ongoing contracts but also the ability to respond to Urgent Operational Requirements (UORs)...²⁷¹

A consequence of ensuring sovereignty is that the principle of best value will not necessarily be met. The decision to buy British 'where appropriate' could feasibly lead to the MoD purchasing products only produced in small quantities, resulting in escalating costs due to a lack of competition and economies of scale. Indeed the feasibility of the initial defence industrial policy was tested almost immediately after its inception with the domestic procurement of the Hawk Jet Trainer. Similar issues have also been raised over the current Future Lynx programme for the RAF. In line with the DIS principle of retaining onshore capabilities, the Future Lynx contract was awarded to AgustaWestland, a deal that will safeguard 800 jobs in the UK. However critics of the programme have pointed to the fact that the new helicopters are expected to cost £14m each and will not come into service until 2013. In contrast the American Seahawks

²⁶⁹ Defence Select Committee, *UK land operations in Iraq 2007*, HC 110, Session 2007-08

²⁷⁰ Sir Jeremy Blackman, "Rebalancing at the expense of high level capability", *RUSI Defence Systems*, Autumn 2006

²⁷¹ Ministry of Defence, *Defence Industrial Strategy*, Cm 6697, Session 2005-06

helicopter could be purchased commercially off the shelf (COTS) for £6m each and could enter service in a much shorter timeframe.²⁷²

It is not just the financial implications of specific procurement choices that have been questioned over the last few years, but also the affordability of the forward equipment plan more generally. The main concern has been the ability of the MOD to afford both the capabilities underpinning the expeditionary strategy laid out in the SDR and subsequent papers, but also the network enabled capabilities prioritised in the SDR New Chapter and 2003 White Paper, and which are regarded as the cornerstone of future integrated capability. As Michael Codner has noted with respect to the SDR “It was a matter of *when*, rather than *if*, the strategy in its 1998 form would become unaffordable”.²⁷³ Whether the MOD will cut longstanding programmes from its equipment plan in order to fund these priority capabilities has been at the crux of the procurement debate. This is examined in greater detail in section II D.

An additional constraint on the equipment budget is that imposed by the political commitment to legacy programmes such as Eurofighter Typhoon and the Nimrod MR4A programme, which continue to be significantly over budget and years outside their agreed timeframe.

c. Personnel

Personnel costs constituted a significant proportion of the defence budget. The proportion of total defence expenditure spent on personnel averaged almost 40% between 1979-80 and 2000-01, although this declined from 44.2% in 1992-93 to 37.2% in 2000-01.²⁷⁴

The amount of resource (in cash terms) consumed as a proportion of the total yearly near cash outturn of the MOD between 2001-02 and 2006-07 is set out in the table below. A proportion of these personnel costs (for example some operational allowances) is recovered from the Treasury Reserve. These figures are not directly comparable with those up to 2000-01 due to the introduction of RAB.

MoD personnel expenditure as proportion of near cash outturn	
Financial Year	Percentage
2001-02	38%
2002-03	36%
2003-04	38%
2004-05	35%
2005-06	37%
2006-07	36%

Source: HC Deb 18 March 2008 c1044W

²⁷² “UK helicopter industry 'will die in MoD cuts”, *Daily Telegraph*, 29 April 2008

²⁷³ Michael Codner, Defence Select Committee, *UK Defence: Commitments and Resources: Uncorrected Oral Evidence*, HC 381-ii, Session 2006-07, Memorandum

²⁷⁴ DASA, *UK Defence Statistics 2002 and earlier editions*, Table 1.3

Rising personnel costs also contribute to 'defence inflation', since costs rise above overall price inflation, representing another economic constraint on the defence budget. As Professor Keith Hartley has observed, personnel costs in the armed forces are closely tied to the health of the wider economy. As wage costs and salaries rise in the civil sector, the armed forces must also pay more in order to compete effectively in the jobs market.²⁷⁵ David Kirkpatrick has commented:

Inflation of Service remuneration must match that of civilian salaries and wages, which is (because of rising productivity) about 2 per cent higher than the general level of price inflation.²⁷⁶

It has also been argued that, due to the special nature of employment in the armed forces, military salaries need to rise at a faster pace than those in the civilian sector:

personnel costs for an all-volunteer force have to rise faster than the increase in civilian labour costs in order to attract people to the military with its unique employment contract (eg. discipline; hours and conditions of service; probability of injury and death). Moreover, as government adds new roles and missions to its armed forces, the military respond with an ever increasing demand for new equipment and more personnel.²⁷⁷

Based on crude calculations using MoD expenditure data, spending on personnel has been rising in recent years:

Expenditure on personnel	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07
Total expenditure on personnel (£m)	10,435	10,996	11,255	11,204
- forces	7,974	8,047	8,263	8,423
- civilian	2,461	2,948	2,992	2,781
Total personnel ('000)	321.0	322.4	315.3	305.3
- forces	213.4	213.3	206.9	201.4
- civilian	107.6	109.0	108.5	103.9
Total spending per head (£)	32,508	34,107	35,696	36,698
- forces	37,366	37,726	39,937	41,822
- civilians	22,872	27,046	27,576	26,766

Source: UKDS 2007, DASA

It has nevertheless been argued that spending still falls severely short of what is required to recruit and retain the necessary level of armed forces personnel. As Tim Edmunds and Anthony Forster have observed:

²⁷⁵ Professor Keith Hartley, *The defence industrial strategy: an economist's view*, May 2006.

²⁷⁶ David Kirkpatrick, "How 'real' is the CSR increase in UK defence expenditure?", RUSI Commentary (<http://www.rusi.org/research/militarysciences/strategy/commentary/ref:C470DE2F832A32/>)

²⁷⁷ Professor Keith Hartley, *The defence industrial strategy: an economist's view*, May 2006.

The relentless number of operations the armed forces have been required to deploy since the end of the Cold War has seen investment in people and infrastructure increasingly sacrificed to the altar of equipment and operations.²⁷⁸

Lewis Page has illustrated this point by comparing the average starting salaries in 2005 of a combat soldier (£14,000) a police officer (£22,000) and a firefighter (£25,000).²⁷⁹ Another often cited example is the state of military housing, with as many as 19,000 family homes – over 40 percent of the total – being identified as below standard by the National Audit Office in 2007.²⁸⁰ In addition, the MoD has received criticism for its apparent failure to provide proper care for service personnel injured in Iraq and Afghanistan.²⁸¹ Furthermore, concern has been expressed over reported cuts in training and military exercises.²⁸²

3. International comparisons

There are problems when making international comparisons of military expenditure. One of the most important of these is the suitability of the exchange rates used when expenditures in national currencies are converted to a common basis. The use of current exchange rates can lead to substantial distortions when comparing defence expenditures. This is because the official exchange rates of currencies are often not an accurate reflection of the purchasing power of the respective currencies – rates of exchange may be fixed by administrative decree, or in the case of a floating rate, by forces reflecting many factors, such as the movement of capital or expectations about the future. Also, the national definitions of military spending may vary. These problems mean that international comparisons of defence expenditure tend to be crude measures which should be treated with a substantial amount of caution.

Furthermore, the basis of payment through which the military sector acquires resources can differ between countries. If, for example, conscription takes place in a country, the total cost of the armed forces in that country is likely to be lower than in a country with a similar size of force which is fully professional.²⁸³

The table below shows the top 10 worldwide military spenders in 2007, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). Figures are given at constant 2005 prices and exchange rates, in both market exchange rate (MER) and purchasing power parity (PPP) terms.²⁸⁴ In MER terms, the UK was ranked the second-highest military spender behind the US in 2007, with spending amounting to US\$59.7bn, compared with

²⁷⁸ Timothy Edmunds and Anthony Forster, *Out of step: the case for change in the British Armed Forces*, DEMOS, November 2007

²⁷⁹ Lewis Page, "The Poor Bloody Infantry", *Prospect*, March 2007

²⁸⁰ National Audit office, *Managing the Defence Estate: Quality and Sustainability*, HC 154, Session 2006-07

²⁸¹ "The forsaken: how Britain is failing to care for badly injured troops", *Independent*, 15 July 2007

²⁸² "Britain must honour its commitment to our troops", *Independent*, 2 September 2007

²⁸³ Although the professional force may well be more effective i.e. the size of professional force necessary to perform a specific defence role may be smaller than that required with conscripts

²⁸⁴ PPP is a criterion for an appropriate exchange rate between currencies. It is a rate such that a representative basket of goods in country A costs the same as in country B if the currencies are exchanged at that rate.

US\$546.8bn for the US. However, under the PPP method, the UK was ranked fifth behind the USA, China, Russia and India, with spending amounting to US\$54.7bn.²⁸⁵

Top 10 military spenders in 2007
At constant 2005 prices and exchange rates

Rank	Country	Spending (US\$ billions)	Country	Spending (US\$ billions)
<i>Market exchange rate terms</i>			<i>Purchasing power parity terms</i>	
1	US	546.8	US	546.8
2	UK	59.7	China	[140.0]
3	China	[58.3]	Russia	[78.8]
4	France	53.6	India	72.7
5	Japan	43.6	UK	54.7
6	Germany	36.9	Saudi Arabia	52.8
7	Russia	[35.4]	France	47.9
8	Saudi Arabia	33.8	Japan	37.0
9	Italy	33.1	Germany	33.0
10	India	24.2	Italy	29.6

Notes: [] = SIPRI estimate

Source: SIPRI Yearbook 2008

The table below shows international comparisons of defence expenditure for countries of the NATO-Russia Council given as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), for 1997-2007. This includes all spending on military forces, military aid to another nations, military pensions, NATO infrastructure and civilian staff costs, but excludes spending on paramilitary forces. In view of the differences between this and national definitions, the figures may diverge considerably from those which are quoted by national authorities or given in national budgets, although for the UK the difference is minor.

²⁸⁵ The arguments for using PPP are strongest for Russia and China. Both the UN and IMF have issued caveats concerning the reliability of official economic statistics on transitional economies, particularly those of Russia, some Eastern European and Central Asian countries. Non-reporting, lags in the publication of current statistics and frequent revisions of recent data (not always accompanied by timely revision of previously published figures in the same series) pose transparency and consistency problems. Another problem arises with certain transitional economies whose productive capabilities are similar to those of developed economies, but where cost and price structures are often much lower than world levels. PPP dollar values are used in preference to market exchange rates in cases where using such exchange rates may result in excessively low dollar-conversion values for GDP and defence expenditure data (IISS, The Military Balance 2007).

Defence Expenditure as % of GDP, 1997-2007 ^(a)

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007 ^(b)
Belgium	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.0	1.3	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.1	1.1	1.1
Bulgaria	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2.5	2.5	2.3	2.3
Czech Republic	..	..	2.2	2.2	2.1	2.0	2.0	1.8	1.8	1.7	1.6
Denmark	1.7	1.7	1.6	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.4	1.3
Estonia	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1.6	1.5	1.4	1.6
France	2.9	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.5	2.4	2.4
Germany ^(c)	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.3	1.3
Greece	4.6	4.8	4.8	4.9	4.6	3.4	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.7	2.8
Hungary	..	..	1.6	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.7	1.5	1.4	1.2	1.1
Italy	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.9	1.8	1.8
Latvia	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1.3	1.3	1.6	1.7
Lithuania	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1.4	1.2	1.2	1.2
Luxembourg	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.7
Netherlands	1.8	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5
Norway	2.1	2.3	2.1	1.8	1.7	2.1	2.0	1.9	1.6	1.5	1.4
Poland	..	..	2.0	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.9
Portugal	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.7	1.6	1.5
Romania	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	2.0	2.0	1.8	1.9
Russian Federation	..	..	..	..	..	..	3.3	2.8	..	..	..
Slovak Republic	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.7
Slovenia	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.6
Spain	1.4	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2
Turkey	4.1	4.4	5.4	5.0	5.0	4.4	3.8	3.1	2.8	2.9	2.7
United Kingdom	2.7	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.5	2.5	2.3
Canada	1.2	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.3
United States	3.3	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.1	3.4	3.8	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0

Notes: (a) NATO definition of defence expenditure as a proportion of gross domestic product (based on current prices).

Figures are for financial year with most months in fiscal year i.e 2007 is 2007/08 for UK and Canada

(b) 2007 figures are estimates.

(c) These percentages have been calculated without taking into account the expenditure for Berlin.

Sources: NATO press release (2007)141 - 'Financial & Economic Data Relating to Defence' Table 3 and earlier editions

Estimates for 2007 reveal that only six NATO members (including the UK) reached the unofficial 2% of GDP benchmark for defence spending, with only four spending proportionately more than the UK.²⁸⁶ At an estimated 2.3% of GDP in 2007, UK defence spending is above the NATO European average of 1.7%, with spending on a par with France and higher than that of Germany and Italy.

The fact that NATO members are choosing to spend a lower proportion of their national income on defence has obvious implications for international security operations. Since funding for NATO operations is determined on a "costs lie where they fall" basis, many smaller and newer NATO Member States are reluctant to commit large forces to NATO operations as deployment is expensive. In addition, many countries lack key capabilities such as strategic airlift, command and control and other expeditionary capabilities and are therefore reliant on the larger Member States – including the UK – for actual deployment into theatre and the formation of an operational HQ.

²⁸⁶ 2% of GDP is the unofficial self-imposed recommended level of spending for NATO Member States.

II Defence Policy under Gordon Brown

The legacy of ten years of a Blair government and the policies implemented in that time provide valuable context for any analysis of the future of UK defence policy under Gordon Brown. In particular the current debate over the strategic basis for the UK's defence policies, the ability of the Armed Forces to meet their commitments and the attitude of the government toward defence spending and the welfare of Service personnel have been heavily shaped by events of the last ten years.

An interesting dynamic for Gordon Brown is the fact that these issues are at the top of the political agenda at a time when public awareness of the welfare of Service personnel is also high. While the Iraq conflict undoubtedly had a lasting impact on the perception of the Blair government, it was not on the whole affected by the conflicting demands which are already shaping the Brown agenda just one year in. It was only towards the very end of Blair's tenure that the outcry over the treatment of Service personnel among the general public and the willingness of the ex-Service Chiefs to publicly berate the Government over defence spending, came to the fore. Public awareness of the terms and conditions of Service personnel has taken on a whole new dimension under the Brown government in part because of the Royal British Legion's 'Honour the Covenant' campaign which was launched in September 2007 and became the theme of the 2007 poppy appeal.

In addition, the Prime Minister has recently been accused of not having sufficient interest in the Armed Forces, both in his current position and previously in his post as Chancellor of the Exchequer. During a debate on the Armed Forces in the House of Lords on 22 November 2007, former Chief of the Defence Staff, Lord Guthrie stated:

At the Lord Mayor's banquet last week, the Prime Minister affirmed his commitment that he would, at all times support and strengthen our Armed Forces, our defences and security. In my experience as Chief of the Defence Staff in Whitehall, he was the most unsympathetic Chancellor of the Exchequer as far as defence was concerned, and the only senior Cabinet Minister who avoided coming to the Ministry of Defence to be briefed by our staff on our problems. The only time that I remember him coming to the Ministry of Defence when I was there was when he came to talk about the future of the Rosyth dockyard, which was in his constituency. He must take the blame for the very serious situation we find the services in today.²⁸⁷

Michael White writing in *The Guardian* has noted:

The defence secretary, Des Browne, seems to be well enough liked by the forces, although they fear he is more interested in operational matters than in strategic thinking. More worrying, others echo the complaint that they have a prime minister who (unlike Tony Blair) neither likes nor understands defence.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁷ HL Deb 22 November 2007, c961

²⁸⁸ "Security of defence: why the military feels misunderstood", *The Guardian*, 19 February 2008

Max Hastings also comments:

I suspect that the prime minister's attitude is rooted, first, in a visceral lack of sympathy for the armed forces, whose activities he regards as getting in the way of the real business of government. Second, he may cling to a delusion that, once Tony Blair's imperialistic follies have been purged from the body politic, Britain will no longer fight wars in places like Afghanistan.²⁸⁹

Compounding these views has been the appointment of Secretary of State for Defence, Des Browne, to the tandem position of Secretary of State for Scotland in the very first few days of Gordon Brown taking office.²⁹⁰ Commenting on the decision during a debate on the Queens Speech in the House of Lords on 7 November 2007, Lord Gilbert stated:

The double-hatting of Defence Secretary with Scottish Secretary is one the most disgraceful appointments that I have ever heard of. I hope that the Prime Minister realises the damage that it is doing to him, to his party, to the Government and to people's respect for government. There are people who have relatives serving in the Armed Forces—young men and women at risk. We all know that Cabinet offices in this country are part-time jobs, because one has a salary as a Member of Parliament and as a Cabinet Minister. That the Defence Secretary's job has been divided further, so that he answers Scottish Questions, is—I am trying to find a moderate word—deplorable.²⁹¹

Liberal Democrat Defence Spokesman Lord Lee also questioned the commitment of the incoming Prime Minister to defence saying "the former Secretary of State for Defence, the noble Lord, Lord King, passionately questioned the commitment of this Government to defence, and he was right".²⁹²

During a further debate in the House of Lords on 22 November 2007 Lord Boyce also argued:

I make absolutely no apology for raising this issue again; it is very serious. It is seen as an insult to our sailors, soldiers and airmen on the front line [...] and it is certainly a demonstration of the disinterest, and some might say, contempt that the Prime Minister and his Government have for our Armed Forces. It shows an appalling lack of judgement at a time when our people are being killed and maimed. It is not for nothing that the Chief of the General Staff has said that his people feel undervalued. They really do deserve better from the Government.²⁹³

In an article in the *RUSI Journal* in February 2008 Chief Political Commentator for *The Times*, Peter Riddell, defended the Prime Minister:

The current mood – provocatively described at the beginning of this article as victim psychology – is in danger of staining relations between the military and

²⁸⁹ "Brown can no longer afford to treat Britain's war casualties so shoddily", *The Guardian*, 7 January 2008

²⁹⁰ Gordon Brown assumed office on 27 June 2007 and appointed Des Browne as Secretary of State for defence and for Scotland on 28 June.

²⁹¹ HL Deb 7 November 2007, c120

²⁹² Ibid, c127

²⁹³ HL Deb 22 November 2007, c952

politicians. That is epitomised by the protests by former Chiefs of Defence Staff, notably in the November 2007 debate in the House of Lords, that the interests of the military are being ignored by the Government, and, in particular, Gordon Brown. The Prime Minister certainly paid little attention to the armed services during his early years as Chancellor when their interests were championed by Tony Blair. But this changed well before Mr Brown became Prime Minister when he arranged briefings from both the heads of the intelligence agencies and the chiefs of staff.

Similarly, the former Chiefs of Defence Staff are in danger of politicising themselves by repeating complaints about Des Browne having two jobs, as Scotland Secretary in addition to being Defence Secretary. This double-hatting is wrong, but not for the reasons usually advanced. The problem is not that Mr Browne is a part-time Defence Secretary, the frequently heard complaint in the defence world, but that he does not have a real job to do as Scotland secretary. The post is retained for symbolic political reasons, although it has ceased to have any substantive role.²⁹⁴

The question of whether the conduct of defence policy under Gordon Brown will be naturally prudent or whether it will be artificially constrained by the situation inherited from the Blair government and the prevailing trend in public perception of the armed forces is a vital one. Going forward, these converging dynamics could potentially, and unusually, make defence policy in general, and the government's attitude toward the Armed Forces more specifically, an issue in any future general election. As Max Hastings has pointed out:

Until a few months ago, it seemed unlikely that the mistreatment of defence would cost votes. The government could therefore afford to shrug off its critics. Now, however, there are many indications that the public has awoken to what is going on – or rather not going on – and dislikes it.²⁹⁵

The following section examines some of the more high profile issues which have dominated the defence agenda during the first year of Gordon Brown's premiership and how they may shape the future direction of policy.

A. 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 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 five years, the long term strategic priorities, subsequent defence planning assumptions and the capability requirements of each of the Services established in that 2003 paper therefore provide the current strategic context for defence policy planning.²⁹⁶ That strategic context must

²⁹⁴ Peter Riddell, "Armed Forces, media and the public", *RUSI Journal*, February 2008

²⁹⁵ "Brown can no longer afford to treat Britain's war casualties so shoddily", *The Guardian*, 7 January 2008

²⁹⁶ Further detail on the conclusions and recommendations of the 2003/2004 review is set out in Library Research Papers [RP 04/71](#) and [RP 04/72](#). A brief summary of the main recommendations and conclusion is set out in section I B.

also be considered in line with the constraints imposed by the Government's defence spending plans.

1. A New Defence White Paper?

At the beginning of Gordon Brown's tenure 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, 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 decision. 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.²⁹⁷

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.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁷ "British defence policy: a pivotal moment?", *Strategic Comments*, April 2007. See also "Uncertainty awaits the UK", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 16 May 2007

²⁹⁸ "Britain's armed forces are beset by bureaucracy and big willy syndrome", *The Guardian*, 2 August 2007

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

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.²⁹⁹

To date, that white paper has not, however, emerged. A number of analysts have argued that the lack of a new defence white paper is symptomatic of the more general feeling of malaise with respect to defence policy that is pervading the Government at present and that the Government is lacking a clear sense of purpose and direction in this area. Within that school of thought many have pointed to the fact that affordability has 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. The premise in the paper that quantity as a measure of military effectiveness is no longer considered effective has also been questioned.³⁰⁰ Others have suggested the lack of clarity is the result of incoherence in the Government's overarching foreign policies more generally. During the 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.³⁰¹

However, a number of commentators have pointed to the Government's National Security Strategy (NSS) which was published in March 2008 as an alternative, and adequate, assessment of the Government's strategic priorities for the future. In publishing the NSS the Government has attempted to identify the security parameters which will define the UK's strategic objectives in both the immediate and longer term and

²⁹⁹ A copy of this report is available online at:

http://www.libdems.org.uk/media/documents/parliament/Our_Nations_Duty_Dec07.pdf

³⁰⁰ These issues are examined in greater detail in sections I D and II D on defence procurement and the prospects for the forward equipment plan respectively.

the principles that will guide the UK's response. The underlying premise of the NSS is 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 has limited utility. Very little in the NSS assessment of the future strategic environment can be regarded as new. The emphasis that the paper gives to non-proliferation, terrorism and failed states, in addition to 'non-traditional' threats to security such as environmental³⁰² and societal issues,³⁰³ have already been acknowledged in the 2003 Defence White Paper and have been a consistent theme of the work of the MOD's Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre in its *Strategic Trends* publication³⁰⁴ The same is 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 can be considered as merely a reiteration of an existing assessment.

More importantly, the NSS does 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 examines the Government's intended response to the security challenges facing the UK takes a broad brush approach, focusing purely on the overarching principles for delivery.³⁰⁵ It does 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 will adequately meet the diversity of the security challenges set out in the NSS; or indeed whether the Armed Forces are configured appropriately in terms of their size and structure. The conclusions in the NSS with respect to this latter point were merely that:

We remain committed to maintaining strong conventional forces capable of deterring and responding to a range of state-led threats. The challenge is to invest in the right capabilities to safeguard the United Kingdom's security for the long term, while at the same time ... continuing to give priority to supporting our forces on overseas operations.

We will continue to favour capability over quantity [...] As a result, the capability of a given aircraft, ship, or infantry unit far outstrips that of even 10 years ago, and that of most conceivable adversaries. We are determined to shift the overall balance of defence procurement towards support of current operations [...] but we will also continue to invest for the long term in a broad range of military capabilities [including] capabilities that would be difficult to rebuild from scratch if the relevant threats should re-emerge in the future. We retain this broad range of capabilities and this high-technology approach to safeguard our ability to prevent and deter aggression, reinforcing our membership of NATO and our commitment to the international system.³⁰⁶

Defence planning assumptions, military objectives and the size and structure of the armed forces cannot be considered separately from the broader strategic baseline from

³⁰¹ HL Deb 22 November 2007, c955

³⁰² Such as climate change, flooding and competition for energy and resources

³⁰³ Such as pandemics, trans-national crime, poverty and poor governance

³⁰⁴ The DCDC was originally the Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre.

³⁰⁵ For example the need to strengthen international conventions on non-proliferation or the promotion of security sector reform.

which they emanate. On that basis it is arguable whether the NSS has any utility from the perspective of defence planning. It is certainly widely acknowledged that it does not adequately fulfil the role of a defence white paper.

In November 2007 a DEMOS report by Tim Edmunds and Anthony Forster noted:

National security priorities have changed considerably in recent years. But national defence and security policies have yet to catch up. We welcome the publication of a National Security Strategy but this must be supported by a National Security Secretariat based in the Cabinet Office to integrate and coordinate all levels of UK security policy. In light of the present and future security environment the UK government should instigate a review of the role of the armed forces and the organisation of the Ministry of Defence in protecting national security.³⁰⁷

More recently the MOD published its defence plans for 2008-2012, including the Department's expenditure plans for that period.³⁰⁸ Following the defence settlement agreed under the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review, the plans seek to outline the Department's objectives for the next four years. Compared to previous expenditure plans,³⁰⁹ the 2008-2012 plans are significantly more detailed in terms of the strategic context for defence spending and future priorities.

However, like the NSS, the Defence Plan does not link strategic objectives or priorities to a review of the defence planning assumptions or requisite force structure recommendations. Instead, it assumes that the strategic priorities identified in 2003 remain unchanged and that the defence planning assumptions remain credible. Indeed, in the foreword to the document, the Secretary of State for Defence confirms that "we are committed to a high tempo of operations, and will remain so throughout the period covered by this Plan".³¹⁰ Despite the broader scope of the plan, it is questionable as to whether this plan therefore meets the calls for a defence white paper that many politicians and analysts have been pushing for.

Without a new defence white paper it is difficult to have a meaningful discussion as to whether the overall direction of the UK's defence policies is likely to shift under a Brown government in the longer term. For the immediate future one can only look to the general approach that the Government has taken thus far. During the last year the government has focused its attention on more 'grass roots' priorities that the general public can relate to, such as the command paper on service personnel terms and conditions, which is due out in summer 2008, and wider issues related to the Military Covenant more generally, rather than re-examining the strategic context within which the Armed Forces is expected to operate. The publication of the report examining *National Recognition of the Armed*

³⁰⁶ Cabinet Office, *The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom*, CM7291, Session 2007-08

³⁰⁷ Tim Edmunds and Anthony Forster, *Out of Step: the case for change in the British Armed Forces*, DEMOS, November 2007, p.13

³⁰⁸ Ministry of Defence, *Defence Plan, including the Government's Expenditure Plans 2008-2012*, Cm 7385, Session 2007-08

³⁰⁹ These are available online at:

<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/CorporatePublications/BusinessPlans/GovernmentExpenditurePlans/>

³¹⁰ Ministry of Defence, *Defence Plan, including the Government's Expenditure Plans 2008-2012*, Cm 7385, Session 2007-08

Forces on 19 May 2008 has demonstrated the political priority given to this particular aspect of defence policy.³¹¹

At a more strategic level others have pointed to the natural differences in leadership style between Blair and Brown and the fact that Brown is likely to be far more measured in his attitude towards the US and in his willingness to engage UK forces so readily in US-led multi-national operations than his predecessor. The desire of the new Prime Minister to distance himself from the shadow of the Blair-Bush relationship was initially considered likely to have an impact on the deployment of forces in Iraq.

Yet Brown's longer term attitude to the general principle of liberal interventionism, which so defined the Blair era, remains unclear. In his first major foreign policy speech in November 2007, the Prime Minister highlighted the importance of principles such as the 'responsibility to protect' and indicated his support for the ideals of humanitarian intervention. In that speech he stated "we now rightly recognise our responsibility to protect behind borders where there are crimes against humanity".³¹² Those concepts have also been reiterated by the Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, who in a speech on 12 February 2008 accepted that "discussion about the Iraq war has clouded the debate about promoting democracy around the world" but went on to argue that, even so, leading powers should not shy away from liberal interventionism in the pursuit of democracy.³¹³

The attitude of the Brown government towards the development of the European defence concept has also been considered a potentially interesting indicator of the UK's future strategic priorities. The identification of defence as a 'red line' in discussions over the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty was considered to have set an early precedent in the Brown premiership, although subsequent Franco-British declarations in March 2008 on the progress of ESDP and European defence capabilities more generally have led to concerns over how far the Government will cede to French pressure for progress in this area. The Government's approach to proposals already coming out of the French Government regarding their priorities for the Presidency on the EU in the latter half of the 2008 could provide a better indication of how close the Brown government will hold the EU in relation to defence issues in the future.

2. Defence Relations with Allies

The UK's foreign policy priorities under the new Government are examined in Library Research Paper RP08/56, *British foreign policy since 1997*. The following section looks more specifically at the defence aspects of the UK's relations with its allies, rather than taking a broad brush approach to examining the UK-US special relationship and the UK's relationship with the EU.

³¹¹ This report and issues relating to the Military Covenant more generally are examined in greater detail in section II C.

³¹² Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Lord Mayor's Banquet Speech, 12 November 2007

³¹³ Speech on 'The Democratic Imperative', Aung San Suu Kyi Lecture, Oxford University, 12 February 2008

a. The UK-US Relationship

The nature of the UK-US 'special' relationship in the aftermath of the transition from Blair to Brown has come under close scrutiny in the last year. From a defence standpoint the crux of the Brown-Bush relationship thus far appears to have been dominated by the deployment of forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. Such focus has been unsurprising given the longstanding priorities of the Blair government with respect to both theatres of operation, and the debate at the time of Brown's assumption of the premiership over the withdrawal of British forces from Iraq and the continued unwillingness of NATO allies to take on a greater share of the burden in Afghanistan.

Yet, despite this apparent focus on the deployment of forces and the debate over whether the 'special relationship' will take on a new strategic foreign policy direction as a result of a new British Prime Minister, and indeed a new US President in 2009, decisions have been taken in the last year that would very much suggest that behind the high profile rhetoric and debate over the Brown-Bush relationship, and the differences in opinion over Iraq, in practice the defence ties between the UK and the US remain as strong as ever.

Iraq

As Gordon Brown took over as Prime Minister in June 2007 a six-monthly force rotation of British personnel in Iraq was underway. As a result of that roulement the British presence in Iraq was subsequently reduced by 1,600 personnel to approximately 5,500. Shortly afterwards in July 2007 a further reduction of 500 British personnel in Iraq was announced, along with the intention to begin withdrawing forces from Basra City to a contingency operating base on the outskirts.³¹⁴ Despite the fact that the main force reduction had been announced almost five months previously in February 2007 the unintentional timing of the force rotation with the arrival of the new British Prime Minister raised concerns, particularly in the US, over the longer term commitment of the UK under a new government potentially eager to distance itself from the legacy of its predecessor.

Of particular concern for the US was the security situation in Basra province and the apparent attitude of the British toward controlling that situation. During a media briefing on 23 August 2007 a Pentagon Spokesman suggested:

[In the south] This is less an insurgency issue that it is a criminal, a borderline Mafia kind of situation. You've got competing criminal interests looking for territory down there. So that has certainly complicated matters for the Brits down there, and it certainly remains a concern for us [...]

Right now the south is being manned by the Brits and that is their area of responsibility, and we are trusting them to do the best they can to maintain law and order down there.³¹⁵

³¹⁴ HC Deb 19 July 2007, c31-33WS

³¹⁵ "US concerned about worsening Basra security", *Defense News*, 24 August 2007

In response to that assessment a number of retired US Generals criticised British operations in Basra and the decision to withdraw all forces back to the Contingency Operating Base at Basra airport.³¹⁶ Former Vice Chief of Staff of the US Army, General Jack Keane (Retd) suggested during an interview with the BBC in August 2007 that:

The British are more focused on training Iraqi troops than controlling deteriorating security [...] I think it has been gradually deteriorating, with almost gangland warfare and the lack of ability of the police to control that level of violence - so the situation is gradually getting worse [...] I think there is a general disengagement from what the key issues are around Basra [...]

The Brits have never had enough troops to truly protect the population and we have found that out painfully in the central region as well.³¹⁷

An article in *The Guardian* suggested:

The Bush administration is becoming increasingly concerned about the impact of an imminent British withdrawal from southern Iraq and would prefer UK troops to remain for another year or two.³¹⁸

Indeed, a number of analysts argued at the time that political pressure from Washington, particularly in light of the conclusions of the Petraeus report on 10 September 2007, would make it difficult for the British Government to make any meaningful reductions in the size of its Iraq operation in the short term. Professor Michael Clarke of RUSI was reported as commenting:

If General Petraeus is saying we need more time and there is some success built into this situation, then any other British drawdown to say 3,000 or 4,000 troops is going to look as if it's in contradiction to that American policy.³¹⁹

An assessment by the BBC's Security Correspondent, Frank Gardner, argued:

Put simply, if the effect of the Petraeus report is to maintain the current high level of US forces in Iraq at close to 160,000 until at least April 2008, then it will be hard for Prime Minister Gordon Brown to order an imminent reduction in British forces much beyond the planned 500 without upsetting Washington.³²⁰

In October 2007, however, the British Government announced that subject to security conditions on the ground, forces in Iraq would be reduced to 2,500 personnel (with a further 500 based in a neighbouring country) from spring 2008. The first phase would involve the reduction in forces to approximately 4,000 personnel shortly after the handover of security responsibility in Basra Province, which was earmarked for

³¹⁶ In September 2007 the final Coalition base at Basra Palace was officially handed over to the Iraqi Security Forces and British personnel permanently re-located to the Contingency Operating Base at Basra Airport.

³¹⁷ "US frustrated with UK in Basra", *BBC News Online*, 22 August 2007

³¹⁸ "US uneasy as Britain plans for early Iraq withdrawal", *The Guardian*, 8 August 2007

³¹⁹ "Petraeus proves tricky for the UK", *BBC News Online*, 11 September 2007

³²⁰ Ibid

December 2007.³²¹ At the time the Government was accused of “using the military as a political football” as the announcement was made during the Conservative Party Conference and at a time when speculation about a snap general election was running high.

Strains in the UK-US relationship over Iraq have not been completely one-sided. Responding to the criticisms levelled at the British Armed Forces by the US, in early September 2007 a number of retired British Generals were also openly critical of US policies in Iraq. Former Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Mike Jackson, labelled post-war US policy as “intellectually bankrupt”,³²² while Major General Tim Cross, who was Deputy Head of the Coalition’s Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, suggested that US post-war policy was “fatally flawed”.³²³

Despite these tit-for-tat accusations, suggestions that a rift was developing between the allies over Iraq so early on into the Brown premiership were vehemently denied by both the Pentagon and the British Government.³²⁴ In evidence to the Defence Select Committee in October 2007 the Secretary of State for Defence stated:

we do not have discussions with our allies, the United States or others, on the basis that we are pulling out to any extent. We have discussions with them about the process of transition which is going on in the south-east and which understandably this Committee concentrates on, but it is going on across Iraq. The Americans are doing similar things in other provinces. The whole American approach to Iraq, and I met with, as you know, Bob Gates to discuss this and other things recently, is to do exactly what we are doing province by province and in fact the Americans welcome this process because it is evidence of progress and it is a template that they themselves will want to follow, and have followed, in other provinces. Whatever conversations people who are not involved in this process may have among themselves of things that those of us who are having, what we suggest is not going on. I could turn to Jon Day who has just come back from the United States of America and I think he will give you confirmation that our relationship with the Americans in relation to this has never been stronger. The process has enhanced our relationship with the Americans.³²⁵

Yet, criticisms of the UK’s troop policies in Iraq and the UK’s handling of the security situation in Basra province have continued afresh after an uprising by Shia militia in Basra in March 2008 resulted in the re-deployment of British forces back into Basra City, and the deployment of 800 US personnel to the city to try and quell the violence. In light of the deteriorating situation on the ground in southern Iraq the Government was subsequently forced to shelve its withdrawal plans. Although the US administration voiced no public criticism of the current position of the UK, a number of analysts have seen recent events as vindication of the concerns expressed in the US in the summer of 2007 over the UK’s apparent willingness “to abandon the city to shia fighters”. This

³²¹ Formal handover of Basra province subsequently took place on 16 December 2007. As of 31 March 2008 there were subsequently approximately 4,000 personnel based on the ground in southern Iraq.

³²² “Army Chief attacks US over Iraq”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 1 September 2007

³²³ “Fresh UK attack on US Iraq policy”, *BBC News Online*, 2 September 2007

³²⁴ Reported in “British withdrawal from Basra has led to drop in violence”, *The Times*, 19 September 2007

³²⁵ Defence Select Committee, *Iraq and Afghanistan: oral evidence*, HC 1091-i, Session 2006-07

apparent “u-turn” in policy has, however, been met with a barrage of domestic criticism, with the British media accusing Gordon Brown of “breaking his promises”.³²⁶ During a defence debate in the House on 8 May 2008, Bernard Jenkin commented:

The Prime Minister’s effort to dissociate himself from Mr. Blair means that he has adopted a one foot in, one foot out approach to our deployment in Iraq. Again, this is the worst of all possible worlds. While the Americans surged into Iraq last year—despite all the obstacles and difficulties, they have made a lot of progress—the British Government were looking to get out of Iraq. Even that has failed. In the wake of his pre-election stunt to try to overshadow the Conservative conference, the Prime Minister told the House in October that he was planning to reduce the size of Operation Telic from 5,500 last September to just 2,500 by now. That simply defied the military logic, as explained by the Minister for the Armed Forces to the Select Committee in July. He said that

“in an actual overwatch situation we cannot go much below 5,000 because we have to sustain the force and self-protect the force itself.”

So it has proved. Operation Telic is now stuck at around 4,000 for the foreseeable future. The Prime Minister has made himself look foolish and devious in the eyes of our servicemen, the British public and our allies. He raised the hopes of our servicemen—who thought they were going to be home soon—and their families, and then dashed them.³²⁷

British forces on the ground in Iraq are now expected to remain at approximately 4,000 personnel for the immediate future, although speculation has been rife that a decision to withdraw the entire British contingent from Iraq could be made before the end of 2008.³²⁸

Afghanistan

The UK has consistently supported first the US-led campaign against terrorism and then the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. The current level of British forces in Afghanistan was largely committed prior to Brown taking office, although various statements on the roulement of forces has subsequently taken place.³²⁹ In November 2007 the MOD announced that, in support of current operations, a temporary brigade headquarters to command UK forces in Afghanistan between October 2009 and April 2010 would be formed. As the first formal indication that British forces could be deployed in the country beyond current assumptions³³⁰ the MOD stated:

The current deployment of UK troops in Afghanistan as part of the NATO-led international security assistance force is planned until 2009, although we have always made clear that our commitment to Afghanistan is a long-term one. The precise size and duration of the UK military in Afghanistan will depend on a

³²⁶ “Gordon Brown accused of breaking Iraq promise”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 March 2008

³²⁷ HC Deb 8 May 2008, c943

³²⁸ See “Iraq troops decision this year”, *BBC News Online*, 9 June 2008

³²⁹ With the exception of the announcement on 16 June 2008 that an additional 230 British personnel would deploy to Afghanistan by spring 2009 (HC Deb 16 June 2008, c677)

³³⁰ Current planning assumptions envisage the deployment of British forces in Afghanistan until at least 2009.

number of factors, including the ability of Afghan security forces to take greater responsibility for the security of their own country. However, to ensure that any forces that we might deploy are properly prepared and commanded, it is necessary for the brigade headquarters to be established now. We will keep our planning assumption under review but currently we assess that this HQ would disband on its return from Afghanistan.³³¹

In December 2007 the Prime Minister outlined the Government's intention to commit to development and stabilisation assistance in Afghanistan beyond 2009, although he stopped short of outlining any military commitment beyond current operational plans.³³² It has been generally accepted, however, that the British commitment in Afghanistan is likely to go on for several years.³³³

Although British political support for operations in Afghanistan has been unwavering the relationship between the US and UK has been marred on occasion by differences in opinion over rules of engagement, the drug eradication programme and tactics employed on the ground in terms of engaging with local tribal leaders and winning "hearts and minds". However, those minor differences of opinion have generally been superseded by a greater common goal – encouraging NATO's European allies to accept a greater share of the security burden in Afghanistan. This situation is of course nothing new. Since NATO assumed command of ISAF in August 2003 the Alliance, and in particular the US and UK, has consistently battled for NATO allies to meet their force generation obligations and reduce national caveats on the deployment of those forces.³³⁴

Ballistic Missile Defence

The most significant of those decisions indicating a "business as usual" approach to the UK-US defence relationship has been the Government's decision in July 2007 to allow the US to upgrade its facilities at RAF Menwith Hill in order to allow it to function effectively as part of the US ballistic missile defence architecture. The UK has continued to express its unequivocal support for the deployment of that system and has committed itself to keeping further British participation in the programme under review.³³⁵ In a Written Ministerial Statement in July 2007 the MOD confirmed:

Also, at RAF Menwith Hill, equipment will be installed and operated by the US Government to allow receipt of satellite warnings of potentially hostile missile launches, and will pass this warning data to both UK and US authorities. The data will also be fed into the US ballistic missile defence system for use in their response to any missile attack on the US. This will guarantee the UK's continued access to essential missile attack warning data, as well as enhancing the US's ability to deal with any attack aimed at their country.

³³¹ HC Deb 7 November 2007, c5WS

³³² HC Deb 12 December 2007, c305

³³³ This is examined in section II B.

³³⁴ These issues are examined in greater detail in Library Standard Note SN/IA/4143, *International Security Assistance Force (ISAF): Recent Developments*.

³³⁵ Further information on the US ballistic missile defence system and the UK's potential participation in it is available in Library Standard Note's SN/IA/4378, *Ballistic Missile Defence: Recent Developments* and SN/IA/4664, *UK Participation in US Missile Defence*.

The Government welcome US plans to place further missile defence assets in Europe to address the emerging threat from rogue states. We welcome assurances from the US that the UK and other European allies will be covered by the system elements they propose to deploy to Poland and the Czech Republic and we have been exploring ways in which the UK can continue to contribute to the US system as well as to any future NATO missile defence system.

These developments reflect the Government's continuing commitment to supporting the development of the US missile defence system. We continue to regard this system as a building block to enhance our national and collective security. NATO has made no decisions about acquiring missile defence for the alliance, and we want to examine how the US system can be complemented and built upon to provide wider coverage for Europe. We have no plans to site missile interceptors in the UK but will keep this under review as the threat evolves. We also want to reassure Russia about the defensive nature and intent of the US system as it develops and to take forward alliance cooperation with them in the field of missile defence.³³⁶

Domestically the decision to allow the US upgrade at Menwith Hill with no formal consultation in Parliament met with significant criticism both within the House and more widely among commentators and the public.³³⁷ Defending its decision to agree to the upgrade, the Government stated in response to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee report that:

MOD published a discussion document on missile defence in November 2002 and Parliament debated missile defence in early 2003 after the Government received a US request to upgrade the missile tracking radar at RAF Fylingdales. The principles underlying missile defence, as they affect the UK, have not changed in the intervening time and the decision to use RAF Menwith Hill as a further contribution to the US missile defence system is in line with these basic principles. The Government does not, therefore, see the need for a further full Parliamentary debate. It was a decision for the Secretary of State for Defence to make, and he did so in consultation with the rest of the Cabinet.³³⁸

UK-US Defence Trade Co-operation Treaty

Progress on ratification of the UK-US Defence Trade Co-operation Treaty³³⁹ has also moved forward within the last year, albeit slowly. This lack of impetus has not been as a result of any change of attitude by the Brown Government, but is perceived to have emanated from the US where several analysts have acknowledged that progress by the US administration in negotiating the implementing arrangements of the Treaty and communicating its intentions to the US Senate "slowed noticeably after Blair departed as Prime Minister".³⁴⁰ It had also been noted that "the administration has made little

³³⁶ HC Deb 25 July 2007, c71-2WS

³³⁷ See Library Standard Note SN/IA/4664 for further information.

³³⁸ Foreign Affairs Committee, *Global Security: Russia – Response of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*, Cm 7305, Session 2007-08, para.81

³³⁹ Further information on the background and purpose of the proposed treaty is available in Library Standard Note SN/IA/4381, *UK-US Defence Trade Co-operation Treaty*.

³⁴⁰ "US-UK defense trade treaty stuck", *Defense News*, 23 October 2007

apparent effort to push the treaties through the Senate”,³⁴¹ including providing the Senate Foreign Relations Committee with details of the ongoing negotiations over the Implementing Arrangements which will set out the specific details of the Treaty including scope and enforcement.³⁴²

However, a general inertia within Congress with respect to the principles of the Treaty has also been noted, in particular among those Senators who are more supportive of the concept of “Buy American” and the protection of US defence technologies. At issue has been the exact detail of the implementing arrangements of the Treaty, in particular with respect to the exclusivity of the ‘approved community’ of companies that would benefit from this Treaty; the technologies that will or will not be included within the parameters of the Treaty and the level of access to information that would be granted to non-British nationals involved in the approved community. While the UK has generally argued for an inclusive approach, the US has taken the opposite view. The nature of the current US legislative agenda which is dominated by the 2009 fiscal year authorization bills³⁴³ is also regarded as a potential stumbling block to the conclusion of this Treaty before the US presidential election in November 2008.

At a meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 21 May 2008 the Committee unanimously agreed that all details of the Treaty, including the Implementing Arrangements, would need to be submitted for scrutiny before ratification of the Treaty could be agreed. Commenting at that meeting, Chairman Senator Joseph Biden stated:

The Senate can't change a ratified treaty. Once we give consent, we're basically out of the game. You [the US administration] argue that the implementing arrangements and regulations are not subject to advice and consent, it seems to me they are. Until that's resolved, I can tell you as chairman of this committee that we're not going to move [on the treaties].³⁴⁴

Those Implementing Arrangements are not expected to be fully completed until the end of the summer. Whether the US administration will reverse its decision not to submit the concluded text to the Senate for scrutiny also remains to be seen. In contrast the MOD, in its response to the Defence Select Committee report on this Treaty, acknowledged its intention “to provide the Committee with copies of the agreed Implementing Arrangement text once negotiations are complete on a privileged basis”.³⁴⁵ Many commentators have regarded this contrast in position as an indication of the overall merit and importance with which the respective governments of the UK and US view the treaty.

Future Prospects

Given the historical defence ties between the US and UK it is considered unlikely that a fundamental shift in policy or perspective by the UK is likely in either the immediate or

³⁴¹ A similar treaty is being negotiated between the US and Australia.

³⁴² “US-UK defense trade treaty stuck”, *Defense News*, 23 October 2007

³⁴³ The US legislative authorization process will conclude in the summer, ahead of the start of the new fiscal year on 1 October.

³⁴⁴ “Senate: no OK for trade treaties without details”, *Defense News*, 21 May 2008

³⁴⁵ *UK/US Defence trade Cooperation Treaty: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2007-08*, HC 375, Session 2007-08

longer term. Despite Brown's initial inclination to distance his government from the Blair-Bush relationship and the debate over whether Brown will take a more measured approach to the deployment of British forces, the underlying truth is that the US-UK bilateral defence relationship underpins nearly every aspect of strategic UK defence policy. NATO is regarded as the cornerstone of UK security; defence planning assumptions are predicated on the fact that the UK is unlikely to engage in the future in high spectrum warfighting without the US; the UK's nuclear deterrent is closely bound up with requisite US capabilities, while operational deployments and the interoperability of conventional forces gravitate toward support for this alliance. Indeed, in its Defence Plan 2008-2012 the MOD firmly acknowledges that "the importance of our relationship with the US will not diminish".³⁴⁶

On the flip side, the US needs the UK as an ally in Europe in order to push the defence capabilities agenda within the EU, temper the excessively pro-European aims of several Member States, support the expansion of ballistic missile defence, cajole NATO's European allies to accept a greater share of the burden in Afghanistan, and as a key coalition partner in its ongoing campaign against terrorism, both politically and operationally.

The outcome of the US Presidential election in November 2008 will undoubtedly have an impact on the future strategic direction of this relationship. Although the whole direction of future US foreign policy will impact on the UK, in particular the nature of continued US engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US attitude toward potential military action in Iran, and the scope of ballistic missile defence will be very much shaped by whether a Republican or a Democrat is in the White House. With respect to Iraq, for example, Democrat candidate Barak Obama has advocated the full withdrawal of troops by the end of 2009 and has opposed the establishment of permanent US military bases in the country. Republican candidate John McCain on the other hand has continued to support the campaign in Iraq and was one of the most outspoken proponents of Bush's 'surge strategy'. Both candidates have, however, adopted similar approaches to possible military action against Iran, suggesting that the use of military force should not be ruled out.³⁴⁷

b. NATO

As discussed earlier, the UK has always regarded NATO as the cornerstone of the UK's security and defence and synonymous with retaining US participation in the collective security of Europe. This has been the case regardless of the party in Government. If anything, it has been the differences in attitude between successive governments toward the European defence agenda and not the value which has been placed on the NATO Alliance that has shaped the debate over the UK's strategic approach to its allies.

Despite the importance given to the NATO alliance, an approach that Blair consistently adopted, in the last few months concerns have been expressed domestically that the

³⁴⁶ Ministry of Defence, *Defence Plan, including the Government's Expenditure Plans 2008-2012*, Cm 7385, June 2008, p.8

³⁴⁷ Further information on the candidates positions on a range of foreign policy issues is available from the Council on Foreign Relations at: http://www.cfr.org/publication/by_type/issue_tracker.html

Brown Government is not making the NATO alliance as much of a priority as it should. The Government's failure to appear before the House to provide an oral account of the outcome of the Bucharest summit in April 2008, which is unprecedented in almost 20 years,³⁴⁸ has been highlighted as evidence of this attitude. During Business Questions in the Commons on 24 April the Chair of the Defence Select Committee, James Arbuthnot, raised this issue as a matter of concern:

May I revert to the question asked by the shadow Deputy Leader of the House as to whether there is to be an oral statement on the NATO summit, to which I am afraid we heard no answer? It seems irrefutable that on Sunday Russia shot down an unmanned aerial vehicle owned and flown by Georgia. Last week, Russia appeared to take legal steps to recognise separatists in Georgia. The Defence Committee has just produced a major report about NATO suggesting that there is a crisis of political will in NATO. What is happening in Afghanistan at the moment requires an oral statement on the Floor of the House. Why on earth is this the first time for decades that there has not been one?

Bernard Jenkin also commented:

It is still not too late for an oral statement on that important summit. It is unprecedented for a Prime Minister not to make a statement to the House after a Heads of Government meeting at NATO. The Government regularly acclaim NATO as the cornerstone of our defence. The Prime Minister's failure to make a statement on the summit's outcome sends the wrong signal about the importance that the Government attach to NATO.

Despite these assertions, objectively there has not been a change in the general attitude of the Brown government toward the Alliance. The British Government has, however, demonstrated an increased willingness to express its disquiet over the practical functioning of NATO in terms of the day to day running of the Alliance. In particular it has highlighted the manner in which NATO operations are funded and the nature of decision making within the Alliance.

In attempting to resolve these issues both the UK and US have demonstrated a common purpose. Both countries have been consistent in their calls for greater burden sharing among allies, for Member States to spend their defence budgets more effectively and for NATO's European Member States to improve military capabilities. In February 2008, for example, US Defence Secretary Robert Gates expressed his concern that NATO is developing into "a two tiered alliance". At the Bucharest Summit in April 2008 the UK also proposed that the Alliance's approach to funding military operations on a "costs lie where they fall" basis should be reviewed. As a first step agreement was reached on the concept of establishing a trust fund scheme whereby countries will be able to offer equipment or financial contributions instead of committing forces. The UK is reported to have offered to contribute £5m to that fund. Whether this initiative will be sufficient,

³⁴⁸ Since 1991 an oral statement to the House has been given by either the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for Defence. Rome Summit – HC Deb 12 November 1991, c901; Brussels Summit – HC Deb 12 January 1994, c177; Madrid Summit – HC Deb 9 July 1997, c937; Washington Summit – HC Deb 26 April 1999, c21; Prague Summit – HC Deb 25 November 2002, c35; Istanbul Summit – HC Deb 30 June 2004, c285; Riga Summit – 30 November 2006, c1240

however, to overcome the concerns over burden sharing that have recently affected the Alliance remains to be seen. Indeed, an article in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 22 June 2008 reported one Pentagon official as expressing regret that operations in southern Afghanistan had been handed over to NATO in the first place.³⁴⁹

In March 2008 the Defence Select Committee published a report into *The future of NATO and European defence*.³⁵⁰ The report sought to offer a comprehensive analysis of the Atlantic Alliance, its role, purpose and prospects. It strongly endorsed NATO as the cornerstone of UK defence policy but warned that the Alliance's future was threatened by a lack of political will among some Member States to commit sufficient forces to current operations, particularly in Afghanistan; to address shortages in NATO's military capabilities; and to invest sufficiently in defence. The Committee concluded:

We are committed to NATO and believe it continues to serve the UK's national interests. The UK's support for the Alliance should not be uncritical or unquestioning, and there are important areas, such as force generation, burden-sharing and capabilities, where NATO must improve. However, we believe NATO remains an indispensable alliance, the essential embodiment of the transatlantic relationship and the ultimate guarantor of our collective security. NATO must remain at the heart of the UK's defence policy.³⁵¹

Yet, while the Committee praised NATO's accomplishments in ensuring the stability and prosperity of Europe over the last half century, it noted that with the more diverse range of security threats that had emerged since the end of the Cold War, NATO's purpose had become less clear and far harder to define, with the result that public support for the Alliance was low. The Committee identified this lack of public understanding about NATO's role and purpose as a "real threat to the long-term future of the Alliance". The Committee said: "if people do not understand what NATO is for or why it is important to them, their support will inevitably decline". To this end, it called upon NATO leaders to agree upon a new Strategic Concept for the Alliance – the authoritative statement on NATO's objectives and the political and military means of achieving them. At the NATO Summit at Bucharest in April 2008, NATO leaders agreed in principle on the need for a new Strategic Concept and said that work toward such a Concept would be launched at the 60th anniversary summit in 2009.

It also maintained that American involvement in, and support for NATO, was crucial to the Alliance's future, but it said that that support would depend on NATO's ability to meet emerging security threats:

United States support for NATO is fundamental to the continued existence of the Alliance; without it NATO would become redundant...To remain relevant to the United States...the Alliance must be capable of tackling today's and tomorrow's security challenges. To do so NATO must become more capable, more

³⁴⁹ "Army crisis as 10,000 troops are unfit to fight", *The Sunday Telegraph*, 22 June 2008

³⁵⁰ Defence Select Committee, *The future of NATO and European defence*, HC 111, Session 2007-08

³⁵¹ *ibid*, para.69

deployable and more flexible, and the European allies together need to demonstrate clearly what they contribute to NATO.³⁵²

On the issue of capabilities, the Committee identified a range of shortfalls in NATO's military capabilities – most notably in strategic lift, reconnaissance and communications. It argued that NATO's commitment to improving European military capabilities for operations like Afghanistan was essential but that it risked being undermined by the "huge gap" in defence spending which persists between the United States and its European allies. The Committee concluded that:

The ability of the NATO Alliance to deliver real and lasting improvements in military capabilities depends on the willingness of Allies to commit sufficient resources. There can be no greater demonstration of political will, or the lack of it, than the amount of money each member of the Alliance is willing to spend on defence. There exists a clear, persistent and growing gap in defence expenditure between the European members of NATO and the United States and there seems little prospect of this being reversed...If European members of the Alliance want to be taken seriously, if they want the United States to remain engaged in, and committed to, NATO, and if they want greater influence in the overall direction of Alliance policy, they must commit the necessary resources and improve their capabilities. We are concerned that an Alliance with such large, and growing disparities in defence expenditure will not be sustainable in the long term.³⁵³

In a Chatham House speech in April 2008 Conservative Leader, David Cameron, also argued that:

NATO remains as essential to Britain's security, and to Western security, in the age of global terrorism as it was in the era of Soviet expansionism. The Conservative Party has always been a staunch supporter of NATO. We remain a NATO-first party. We believe in the primacy of NATO.³⁵⁴

c. Europe

The UK has generally been quite cautious in its attitudes to the development of a European defence policy, regarding it as essential for strengthening the capabilities of the NATO alliance as opposed to the more pro-European view that the EU should establish an independent military capability including independent operational planning structures, outside the NATO framework. However, as already acknowledged ESDP has to a certain degree acquired an impetus of its own, partly due to British encouragement.

How much further ESDP will progress under the Brown Government has so far been unclear. The identification of defence as a 'red line' in discussions over the Lisbon Treaty

³⁵² Defence Select Committee, *The future of NATO and European defence*, HC 111, Session 2007-08, para 65

³⁵³ Defence Select Committee, *The future of NATO and European defence*, HC 111, Session 2007-08, para 165

³⁵⁴ Speech to Chatham House by Rt Hon David Cameron MP, 1 April 2008. A copy of that speech is available online at: http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=143402

was considered to have set an early precedent in the Brown premiership.³⁵⁵ Indeed in one of his first speeches on EU policy in November 2007, the Foreign Secretary David Miliband, appeared to set the UK at odds with those Member States seeking greater EU military integration by arguing that “the EU is not and never will be a superpower” and that greater collaboration with NATO must be sought. He stated:

We must also overcome the blockages to collaboration with NATO. We welcome the signs of increased willingness on the part of key partners to do so.

First, European member states must improve their capabilities. It's embarrassing that when European nations – with almost 2 million men and women under arms – are only able, at a stretch, to deploy around 100 thousand at any one time [...]

European nations need to identify the challenges we face; the capabilities we consequently need; then identify targets for national investment in equipment, research, development, and training necessary to make more of our armed forces; work together for efficiency; and back it up with political drive.³⁵⁶

An article in *The Guardian* went on to report:

Taking questions from students at Bruges College last night, Miliband sounded distinctly sceptical, querying the need for more military instruments when the priority was to make existing ones work better. “The mismatch is between ambition and reality. It’s not an institution we lack” he said. “Let’s not duplicate the work that’s done by NATO or nation states in a new European institution.”³⁵⁷

It had been widely expected prior to the Bruges speech that the Foreign Secretary would use the opportunity to call for a new EU “charter” on military capabilities to be established. The notable absence of that suggestion, however, led many to conclude that the original intentions of the Foreign Secretary to push the ESDP agenda had been tempered by Downing Street for fear of appearing too pro-European. An article in *The Sunday Times* commented at the time:

On Thursday morning Foreign Office special advisers were pleased that they had influenced the newspapers to write that Miliband was to propose a build-up of continental defence capabilities. He was to say Britain must “identify targets for the investment in equipment, research, development, and training necessary to make more of our armed forces”. He was also to propose an extension of the European single market to North Africa and the Middle East by 2030.

By that evening the speech had been radically changed. Special advisers were downcast. All references to an “EU military capabilities charter” had been deleted by Downing Street. Similarly, the idea of extending the single market had been

³⁵⁵ CFSP and ESDP and the UK’s discussions over the specific provisions of the Lisbon Treaty were examined in detail by the Foreign Affairs Select committee in January 2008. A copy of its report is available online at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmfa/120/12002.htm> Library Research paper RP08/09 *The Treaty of Lisbon: Amendments to the Treaty on European Union*, 24 January 2008.

³⁵⁶ “Europe 2030: model power not superpower”, Speech by Rt Hon David Miliband MP to the College of Europe, Bruges, 15 November 2007

³⁵⁷ “Britain scorns France’s plans for EU defence”, *The Guardian*, 16 November 2007

watered down to a vague commitment to a free-trade zone for "the countries of the Maghreb". The foreign secretary had gone from Euro-enthusiast to Eurosceptic in the stroke of a prime ministerial pen.³⁵⁸

In a further move which many analysts interpreted as a distinctly cautious approach by the UK to developing European military ambitions, the UK vetoed a three year budget for the European Defence Agency at a meeting of the agency's steering board on 19 November 2007. Commenting on the decision, a British official was reported as saying that "we [the UK] don't back a budget without seeing what we are paying for".³⁵⁹

Despite these initial overtures, subsequent developments at the Franco-British Summit in March 2008 on the progress of ESDP and European defence capabilities have led to concerns over how far the Government will cede to French pressure for progress in this area. The Summit Declaration outlined the intention of France and the UK to co-operate in the development of European military capabilities, particularly in the field of carrier group operations, strategic lift, and addressing helicopter shortfalls, while also providing for greater co-operation in the harmonisation of requirements and any subsequent capability programmes.³⁶⁰ The declaration also stated:

We call on all our European partners to take decisive steps to strengthen European military and civilian crisis management capabilities during the French Presidency of the EU.³⁶¹

Yet the summit declaration did not address the more controversial issue of an independent operational planning capability for the EU. As an article in *The Economist* pointed out:

The French, mindful of British euroscepticism, are taking care not to push Europe's nascent defence project too hard before Britain ratifies the Lisbon Treaty this summer.³⁶²

Indeed since the Franco-British summit the French Government has been increasingly vocal over its intention to place the development of European military capabilities at the centre of their priorities for the Presidency of the EU in the latter half of 2008. The French Government's plans for ESDP envisage the establishment of a new EU operational planning headquarters in Brussels which is entirely independent of NATO; the establishment, under Permanent Structured Co-operation,³⁶³ of a 60,000 strong intervention force based on the capabilities of the EU's six principal member states: the UK, France, Germany, Spain, Italy and Poland; and the drafting of a European white

³⁵⁸ "Gordon the master ventriloquist", *The Sunday Times*, 18 November 2007

³⁵⁹ "Britain puts foot down on EU defense agency budget", *Defense News*, 20 November 2007. The role and progress of the EDA is examined in greater detail in Library Research Paper RP06/32, [European Security and Defence Policy: Developments since 2003](#), 8 June 2006

³⁶⁰ A copy of the Joint UK-France Summit Declaration of 27 March 2008 is available online at: http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/IMG/pdf/pdf_UK-FR_Communique_270308-Eng.pdf

³⁶¹ Ibid

³⁶² "An entente in London", *The Economist*, 19 March 2008

³⁶³ Clause 1 (50) of the Lisbon Treaty

paper on defence and security. Speaking at the Munich security Conference in February 2008 the French Defence Minister, Hervé Morin, commented:

One of the publicly stated priorities of the French EU Presidency will be to strengthen Europeans' defence capabilities. France is determined to grasp all the opportunities and instruments offered us by the Lisbon Treaty, to concretely flesh out the ESDP and, with the other member states, start production of pooled crisis management capabilities.³⁶⁴

Those proposals were reiterated in the French White Paper on Defence and National Security which was published on 17 June 2008.³⁶⁵ Crucially French President Nicholas Sarkozy has also specifically linked the development of more effective EU military capabilities to the possibility of France returning to the integrated military command structure of NATO. Although the French Government has suggested that the two initiatives are complementary and should be pursued "in close conjunction",³⁶⁶ sceptics have pointed to the fact a decision on French re-integration into the NATO command structure will only be agreed at the end of 2008, once a determination of how far ESDP has progressed during the French Presidency has been made. The move has been regarded as one indirectly aimed at securing political support for furthering the ESDP agenda among the US, the UK and other pro-Atlanticist EU Member States.³⁶⁷ As an article on *BBC News Online* has pointed out:

There will be sceptics who might fear that France will continue to be a disruptive influence within NATO and will constantly try to downplay NATO in favour of strengthening EU defence institutions.³⁶⁸

Tomas Valasek of the Centre for European Reform has also noted that "Paris appears to assume that by offering to behave reasonably toward NATO, it will encourage its allies to sign up to the French vision for European defence".³⁶⁹ However, he also raises the point that the UK is now left with somewhat of a dilemma:

The UK would welcome France's return to full participation in NATO, but it remains lukewarm on many French ideas on ESDP since it continues to prioritise NATO [...]

France's renewed interest in EU operational planning leaves the UK government in a paradoxical situation. It has always wanted NATO and the EU to co-operate closely. Britain now has the best opportunity in a decade to achieve just that. But the full French return to NATO and the prospect of better EU-NATO relations

³⁶⁴ 44th Conference on Security Policy, Speech by M. Hervé Morin, Minister of Defence, 9 February 2008

³⁶⁵ A copy of that white paper is available online at: http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/New-French-White-Paper-on-defence.html#sommaire_3

³⁶⁶ See: http://www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/en/information/special_reports_98/french_presidency_of_the_1322/toward_common_defence_policy_60159.html

³⁶⁷ Indeed Washington has increasingly softened its stance toward ESDP in the last few months. See "Bush eases stance on EU defence capacity", *The Financial Times*, 3 April 2008

³⁶⁸ "France edges closer to NATO", *BBC News Online*, 11 October 2007

³⁶⁹ "France, NATO and European defence", *Centre for European Reform*

hinges on a compromise with France on the unloved EU operational headquarters.

Britain and France clearly need to find a solution that allows France to claim progress on ESDP, but also meets the UK's desire for closer EU-NATO co-operation. This will not be easy because the two sides have already been through the argument over EU operational headquarters once in 2003, and both parties walked away from it embittered.³⁷⁰

How far the Government will support the French proposals is currently unclear.

On the issue of PSC, the Defence Select Committee in its recent report on *The Future of NATO and European Defence* stated:

The provisions for permanent structured cooperation in the Lisbon Treaty promise to enhance European defence capabilities and expenditure. If the Treaty can deliver such long overdue improvements, which can be called on for EU and NATO missions, they can only be welcome. Improving military capabilities throughout Europe is in the interests not only of the EU but also of NATO. However, we remain to be convinced that PSC will deliver such improvements in practice [...]

It is essential that permanent structured cooperation does not lead to the development of a two – or three – tier Europe in defence matters. This would be counter to the interests of NATO.³⁷¹

B. Operational Commitments and the Sustainability of the Defence Planning Assumptions

Under the Premiership of Tony Blair the operational deployment of the British Armed Forces was higher than at any time in the last few decades. This tempo of operations led to assertions that Blair as an interventionist Prime Minister had been keener on foreign policy and the demonstration of British resolve in the world, than on domestic considerations.

In contrast, Gordon Brown has begun his time in Downing Street eager to distance his government from criticism relating to the UK's relationship with the US. At the same time he has been increasingly unable to extricate the UK from longstanding operational commitments without serious political implications, both domestically and on the international stage. However, whether this will be the long term approach of the Prime Minister is not clear. On several occasions over the last year, both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have made the case for humanitarian intervention and the 'responsibility to protect' as general principles. Interestingly, in an interview on BBC Radio Four's 'World Tonight' Programme on 12 May 2008 the Foreign Secretary appeared to suggest that the principle of responsibility to protect could also be applied to

³⁷⁰ "France, NATO and European defence", *Centre for European Reform*

³⁷¹ Defence Select Committee, *The Future of NATO and European Defence*, HC 111, Session 2007-08

cases of natural disaster.³⁷² On 14 May 2008, speaking about Burma during Prime Minister's Questions, Conservative Leader David Cameron asked Gordon Brown to clarify the Government's position on the responsibility to protect:

Mr. Cameron: ...Can the Prime Minister clarify an aspect of the responsibility to protect? The British ambassador to the UN has said that the UK's responsibility to protect does not apply to natural disasters, but yesterday the Foreign Secretary said that it certainly could. Will the Prime Minister make it absolutely clear that, in our view, the responsibility to protect should be extended to Burma and to Burmese people at this time?

The Prime Minister: There are two ways of proceeding. There is the responsibility to protect and there is the right to humanitarian intervention, which was invoked in 1999. We are leaving all the options open...³⁷³

At a conference at RUSI in June 2008 the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard Dannatt, also expressed his belief that "there is a continuing national acceptance of the need to continue to conduct discretionary military operations in support of policy – liberal interventionism has wide support".³⁷⁴

Whether or not the British government under Gordon Brown will in the longer term adopt an interventionist approach to defence policy, for the foreseeable future it may have to deal with one. The UK's position as a reliable ally and partner is at stake, while politicians and independent commentators alike have all pointed to the fact that the UK should not wilfully abandon the commitments and obligations it has already made in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan particularly given the instability of the security situation on the ground in both countries.³⁷⁵ As Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup commented in March 2007:

the problem is that we are engaged on current operations and you cannot take a holiday from them; that is the conundrum we face. We are in Iraq, we are in Afghanistan and it is our job to do our best to see those two to a successful conclusion and to do what it takes. We cannot just say that we will stop that for a year.³⁷⁶

At present there is also simply no way of knowing how long engagement by British forces in Afghanistan is going to be required. In August 2007 Brigadier John Lorimer, Commander of UK forces in Helmand province, was reported as suggesting that British forces could feasibly remain on the ground for over 30 years:

If you look at the insurgency then it could take maybe 10 years. Counter-narcotics, it's 30 years. If you're looking at governance and so on, it looks a little

³⁷² Extracts from transcript of BBC Radio 4's 'The World Tonight Programme', 13 May 2008

³⁷³ HC Deb 14 May 2008 c1376

³⁷⁴ General Sir Richard Dannatt, Speech to the RUSI Land Warfare Conference, 12 June 2008

³⁷⁵ Further detail on operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan is available in Library Standard Notes SN/IA/4099 and SN/IA/4143.

³⁷⁶ Defence Select Committee, *UK Defence: Commitments and Resources: Uncorrected Transcript of Evidence*, HC 381-I, Session 2006-07

longer. If you look at other counter-insurgency operations over the last 100 years then it has taken time.³⁷⁷

In addition to the 14,410 personnel deployed on contingent operations,³⁷⁸ the UK also has personnel deployed in support of the other Military Tasks, including maintenance of the nuclear deterrent, defence of the overseas territories, military aid to the civil power in Northern Ireland and conduct of the naval standing tasks.³⁷⁹ Between July and November 2007 11-12% of the Royal Navy and 7% of the other two services were operationally deployed in support of these other tasks.³⁸⁰

However, the ability of the military to cope with any operational commitments in addition to those tasks already being undertaken has been acknowledged as a serious issue. The biggest questions for Gordon Brown now are whether the Armed Forces can sustain this operational tempo in the future without causing severe damage to the effectiveness, capabilities and morale of the military, and whether the Government's future foreign policy ambitions can or will be met with adequate military capability. The overriding conclusion thus far among analysts, politicians, the media and even the Ministry of Defence, has been that it cannot.

In order to understand this dilemma, it is important to grasp the concept that operational tempo alone does not dictate what the Armed Forces can and cannot do and whether the defence planning assumptions are either realistic or credible. Recruitment and retention, manning levels, training, and adherence to the harmony guidelines all affect the operational capabilities of the military and essentially determine whether the Armed Forces can be considered "overstretched".³⁸¹ The catch 22 is that persistent overstretch contributes to retention difficulties and the ability to adequately train personnel, thus exacerbating manning problems which in turn affects overstretch.³⁸²

In the past the MOD has consistently defended its planning assumptions and the ability of the military to meet its commitments, suggesting that the military is "stretched" but not "overstretched" and that normalisation in Northern Ireland and the withdrawal of troops from the Balkans had reduced the pressure on forces. In response to criticisms of the continuous breach in harmony guidelines the MOD commented in August 2007 that:

The continuing high operational tempo is manageable. It has, however, meant that the harmony guidelines are not always met. Our latest figures show that less than one per cent of Royal Navy, 12 per cent of Army and six per cent of RAF

³⁷⁷ "Afghan victory could take 38 years", *The Observer*, 5 August 2007

³⁷⁸ Correct as of 28 April 2008 (HC Deb 12 May 2008, c1305W). These forces are in addition to those UK forces permanently stationed overseas in locations such as Germany, Cyprus and the Falkland Islands. Further information on British forces deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan is available in Library Standard Notes SN/IA/4099 and SN/IA/4313.

³⁷⁹ Details of the 18 Military Tasks are set out in supporting Essay 2 of the 2003 Defence White Paper.

³⁸⁰ Ministry of Defence, *Spring Performance Report 2008*

³⁸¹ The Strategic Defence Review defined overstretch as "trying to do too much with too little manpower" (Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999, July 1998, p.31)

³⁸² The issue of overstretch and the impact of recruitment and retention, manning levels and harmony guidelines is examined in greater detail in Library Standard Note SN/IA/4088, *Armed Forces Personnel Policy: An Update*

personnel are exceeding the individual Service's harmony guidelines. The number of people exceeding harmony guidelines has been getting better.

In recent months we have withdrawn combat troops from Bosnia, we are reducing the number of troops in Northern Ireland and we have a lower requirement for personnel in Iraq where we have announced a reduction to around 5,000 troops. These reductions will reduce further the pressure on harmony guidelines caused by the current operational tempo.³⁸³

However, in its 2008 Spring Performance Report, the Ministry of Defence acknowledged:

Delivery of operational success has only been possible through continuing to operate above the level of concurrent operations, set out in the December 2003 White Paper, which our force structures assume. Achieving this has required taking greater risk against other objectives, particularly readiness for contingent operations and achievement of single Service harmony guidelines.³⁸⁴

That report concludes that the ability to “generate forces which can be deployed, sustained and recovered at the scales of effort required to meet the government’s strategic objectives”, above and beyond current commitments, cannot be met. More specifically the report goes on to state:

The Armed Forces’ overriding priority is operational success. They have been operating at or above the level of concurrent operations they are resources and structured to deliver for seven of the last eight years, and for every year since 2002. In doing so they have consistently and reliably provided substantial forces at immediate readiness for those operations, deployed them to and sustained them in theatre, and recovered them to their home bases at the end of their tours. In such circumstances the Armed Forces cannot simultaneously be ready for the full range of potential contingent operations provided for in planning assumptions.³⁸⁵

The ability of the MOD to “recruit, train, motivate and retain sufficient military personnel to provide the military capability necessary to meet the Government’s strategic objectives” is also recognised as “likely only to be partly met”.³⁸⁶ Since 2005 the MOD has confirmed that on average 10% of training exercises have had to be cut each year as a result of operational commitments or as cost saving measures.³⁸⁷ Recruitment and retention has also remained a cause for concern, with outflow from the Services in 2008 exceeding the level of intake for the fourth year in a row.³⁸⁸

³⁸³ Ministry of Defence Press Release, 2 August 2007

³⁸⁴ Ministry of Defence, *Spring Performance Report 2007-2008*, May 2008

³⁸⁵ Ibid

³⁸⁶ Ministry of Defence, *Spring Performance Report 2007-2008*, May 2008

³⁸⁷ HC Deb 18 February 2008, c84W; HC Deb 17 October 2007, c1120W; and HC Deb 21 April 2008, c1648W. In comparison the number of training exercises cancelled in 2004 was 20%.

³⁸⁸ Intake and outflow figures for each of the Services between 1997 and 2008 are available in the accompanying background paper RP08/58.

In October 2007 the Liberal Democrat Defence Spokesman, Nick Harvey, commented:

Operational commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan are clearly having a negative impact on our Forces' ability to conduct military exercises. We need to be on top of the crucial task of training to maintain high levels of skills and expertise.

If these exercises are abandoned then we are in danger of undermining our operations. It is proof that our Armed Forces are critically overstretched and suffering from the demands made by fighting in two countries.³⁸⁹

During the Lords debate on 22 November 2007 Baroness Park highlighted this issue, commenting that "mounting political commitments are making it impossible to train the forces to wage high density warfare, which is their primary military task and one which cannot be achieved at the last minute".³⁹⁰ In an interview with the *Daily Telegraph* in December 2007 the Defence Secretary, Des Browne, acknowledged that there were concerns over maintaining necessary skills, although he denied that the armed forces were in a degenerated state. Commenting in that interview he said:

The advice to me was that if we maintained this level of operational tempo in the long term, then the Army's skills would start to degrade. We are not at that stage yet. We need to get back to training properly before the damage that could be done, is done.³⁹¹

As highlighted in section I E the relative inability to achieve a manning balance³⁹² across all three services, or meet stated harmony guidelines, has been a longstanding issue, with consistent non-achievement of targets. This has been attributable to the pressure of sustaining operational effort beyond the DPA, in tandem with the challenge of implementing the changes in overall manpower structure in each of the services as set out by the 2003 White Paper. As of January 2008 the Royal Navy and Royal Marines were 1.5% below manning balance; the Army was 1.6% below manning balance; while the RAF was 0.3% below manning balance. Harmony guidelines also continued to be breached, having been identified in the 2008 Spring Performance Report as follows:³⁹³

³⁸⁹ "Iraq is damaging Forces' readiness for full scale war", *The Times*, 22 October 2007

³⁹⁰ HL Deb 22 November 2007, c934

³⁹¹ "Forces on verge of 'damage' Browne admits", *The Daily Telegraph*, 17 December 2007

³⁹² The manning balance is defined as between -2% and +1% of the trained strength requirement and is measured against the requirement prevailing at the time.

³⁹³ Further examination of the harmony guidelines is set out in Library Standard Note SN/IA/4495, *The Military Covenant*

(f) Unit Tour Intervals

	Guidelines	Performance
Royal Navy	Fleet Units to spend maximum of 60% deployed in a 3 year cycle.	The Royal Navy continues broadly to meet its Unit Tour Interval Harmony guidelines.
Army	24 month average interval between unit tours.	The following front line corps were exceeding unit tour interval guidelines: Infantry 23 months Royal Artillery 18.5 months Royal Signals 19.6 months Royal Logistics Corps 15 months Some specialist units, particularly in the Combat Service Support trades had shorter tour intervals
Royal Air Force	Unit tour intervals to be no less than 16 months.	Elements of Joint Helicopter Command, Harrier, Tactical Imagery Intelligence Wing, Nimrod, Tactical Medical Wing, 90 Signals Unit and RAF Regiment are breaking guidelines.

Source: Ministry of Defence, *Spring Performance Report 2007-2008*

The Service Chiefs and the Chief of the Defence Staff have also reportedly continued to express concerns over the longer term impact of the current tempo of operations on personnel, equipment and future operational capability. In July 2007 the *Daily Telegraph* obtained a leaked MOD document in which it was alleged that the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard Dannatt, said that “reinforcements for emergencies in operations in Iraq or Afghanistan are now almost non-existent” and that “we [the UK] now have almost no capability to react to the unexpected”.³⁹⁴ He was also reported to have gone on to say:

The enduring nature and scale of current operations continues to stretch troops ... when this is combined with the effects of under-manning (principally in the infantry and Royal Artillery) and the pace of training support needed to prepare units for operations, the tempo of life in the Field army is intense.³⁹⁵

In a further report leaked to the *Daily Telegraph* in November 2007, General Dannatt was also reported to have expressed concern that:

Operations on the two fronts of Iraq and Afghanistan are putting soldiers and their families under “great pressure”, and that the long-term impact of operations is “damaging” and is “mortgaging the good will of our [the Army’s] people”.³⁹⁶

The Chief of the Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup reiterated these concerns in comments to the media on 24 June 2008. An article in *The Times* reported:

Britain’s Armed Forces are stretched beyond their capabilities and cannot continue fighting two simultaneous wars, the Chief of the Defence Staff said yesterday.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup gave a blunt warning of the challenge presented by sustaining operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

“We are not structured or resources to do two of these things on this scale on an enduring basis but we have been doing it on an enduring basis for years” Sir Jock

³⁹⁴ “We have run out of troops says head of Army”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 July 2007

³⁹⁵ Ibid

³⁹⁶ “Our forces can’t carry on like this, says General Sir Richard Dannatt”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 November 2007

said. “Until we get to the stage when one of them comes down to small scale, we will be stretched beyond the capabilities we have”.³⁹⁷

The cut in asset numbers implemented since the 2003 White Paper, in particular to the surface fleet of the Royal Navy has also raised concern over the Navy’s ability to meet the defence planning assumptions.³⁹⁸ In December 2007 the *Daily Telegraph* reported that an internal MOD study into the operational status of the Royal Navy had concluded:

The current material state of the fleet is not good; the Royal Navy would be challenged to mount a medium-scale operation in accordance with current policy against a technologically capable adversary [...]

Our diluted worldwide presence inevitably makes it harder to maintain influence in key areas of interest across the globe and has thereby reduced the Royal Navy’s overall strategic effect [...]

The reduction in the number of platforms now significantly fetters our ability to maintain previous levels of influence, deterrence, coercion, and defence diplomacy in peacetime and times of tension.³⁹⁹

Edmunds and Forster in their report for DEMOS suggested that the period of time it would take the Armed Forces to recover from the recent high level of deployments could feasibly be as high as a decade. In order to establish more credible planning assumptions, they also suggested that the “domestic roles” of the Armed Forces should also be incorporated more explicitly into the defence planning assumptions.⁴⁰⁰

Responding to the conclusions of the MOD’s Spring Performance Report for 2008 the Shadow Secretary of State, Dr Liam Fox, commented:

Finally the Government admits what everyone has known for some time – that our Armed Forces are overstretched and that we cannot be ready for the full range of potential operations provided for in the Government’s planning assumptions.

This means the planning assumptions will have to be changed by reducing our overseas commitments, or else the Government will have to increase the size of the Armed Forces.⁴⁰¹

Nick Harvey, was also reported as commenting that “Things cannot go on like this. The Government must urgently begin a strategic defence review to better align capabilities and funding”.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁷ “Sir Jock Stirrup: forces too stretched to cope with Iraq and Afghanistan”, *The Times*, 25 June 2008

³⁹⁸ A chart outlining the change in asset strength across each of the services is available in background paper RP08/58.

³⁹⁹ “Navy would struggle to fight a war”, *The Daily telegraph*, 3 December 2007

⁴⁰⁰ Timothy Edmunds and Anthony Forster, *Out of Step: the case for change in the British Armed Forces*, DEMOS, November 2007

⁴⁰¹ “Half of Armed Forces seriously under strength”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 May 2008

⁴⁰² “Armed Forces can’t cope with more missions”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 May 2008

During a defence debate in the House of Commons a week previously on 8 May Mr Harvey also stated:

The fact that defence planning assumptions have been breached year after year is, in itself, evidence of overstretch. Since the 1998 strategic defence review, one has seen a growing gap between our commitments and our capabilities, both long and short term. The armed forces cannot keep doing more than they have the capability to do – that was the central recommendation of the strategic defence review, and increasingly, in practice, it is being ignored.⁴⁰³

These themes were also reiterated by several Peers during the House of Lords debate on 22 November 2007. During what has been considered an unprecedented attack on the Government's defence policies Lord Chidgey commented:

Experts will of course tell us that it does not matter too much if we exceed the planning expectations for maybe one or two years. But this has been a continual problem for at least seven years, which suggests that our lack of capacity to react to the unexpected or emergencies is not just a one-off but is becoming systemic and endemic.⁴⁰⁴

Lord King of Brigwater also argued:

I hear the Foreign Secretary newly and bravely in his job saying that one of the arms of his policy will be hard power, as though it is some sort of electricity supply that can simply be turned on and is limitlessly available, when realistically no hard power is available at the present time for anything else except trying to deal with the two current crises [Iraq and Afghanistan].⁴⁰⁵

However, none of these concerns were expressed by the MOD in June 2008 when it published its Defence Plan for 2008-2012. This plan sets out the Government's spending plans for the next four years, set against the strategic objectives and defence planning assumptions as defined by the 2003 defence White Paper. The four year defence plan concludes that the UK is "committed to a high tempo of operations and will remain so throughout the period covered by this Plan"⁴⁰⁶ and that "the requirement for deployable, flexible, agile and capable Armed Forces will therefore remain crucial, as will the need to prepare for the longer term".⁴⁰⁷ Indeed the plan does not detract from any of the Government's current obligations or military tasks. It states:

Over the period of this plan the Armed Forces will continue to be engaged on a wide range of continuing operations and other Military Tasks. But the MOD must be ready, within the context of the requirements of those operations, to undertake further tasks that might be required.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰³ HC Deb 8 May 2008, c910

⁴⁰⁴ HL Deb 22 November 2007, c941

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, c948

⁴⁰⁶ Ministry of Defence, *Defence Plan, including the Government's expenditure Plans*, June 2008, p.2

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, p.4

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid, p.17

However, in answer to a Parliamentary question on 9 June 2008 the MOD stated:

The Defence Planning Assumptions are currently under review as part of the Department's routine strategic planning cycle. I expect this work will be completed this year and the results published in the next Defence White Paper in the usual way.⁴⁰⁹

Since November 2007 these issues of overstretch, the breaching of the harmony guidelines and consistent undermanning have also widely informed the emerging debate over the Military Covenant⁴¹⁰ and whether the Government is breaching its generic duty of care to Service personnel. As Lord Craig of Radley commented in the House of Lords debate on 22 November:

Ministers have repeatedly acknowledged that we are committed – and have been for some time – way beyond defence planning assumptions. Admitting it, but then doing too little to correct the situation, or only belatedly, is another example of a failure to fulfil their part of the military covenant. In wars of choice, is it not highly immoral to commit forces that are underprovided and inadequately equipped for their tasks? A government must limit their global aspirations to what they have provided the services, or they fail to honour the military covenant.⁴¹¹

A noteworthy development is the announcement in March 2008 of the MOD's intention to review the future role of the Reserve Forces. The review which began on 21 April 2008 is expected to examine how Reservists from across the three Services have been employed on current operations and how they could potentially be used in other roles in the future. The scope for greater integration into the Regular Forces has been identified as a key theme of the review. The last review of the use of the Reserves was only conducted in 2005. How the recommendations of the current review, which is expected to conclude in the autumn of 2008, will differ from the 2005 strategy is unclear.

1. Prospects for the Future

Despite the assessment set out in the MOD's defence plans for 2008-2012, it seems reasonable to conclude from recent comments by the Chief of the Defence Staff, ex-Service chiefs and even the MOD in its Spring Performance Report for 2008, that regardless of the foreign policy aims of the new Prime Minister, his freedom of action will for the foreseeable future be constrained by a lack of resources. Therefore, it would also be reasonable to assume that the UK may have to prioritise its future choices with respect to operational deployment of the armed forces in the near term. The 2003 defence White Paper already makes the assumption that the UK would be highly unlikely to undertake unilateral action in the most demanding of expeditionary operations; that such operations would only be conducted either with the US at the head of a coalition or within NATO; but that the UK must also maintain the capability to act as the framework nation for a European or similar ad hoc operation where the US is not involved. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that any hierarchy for future contingency operations is

⁴⁰⁹ HC Deb 9 June 2008, c64W

⁴¹⁰ The Military Covenant is examined in greater detail in section II C.

⁴¹¹ HL Deb 22 November 2007, c939

likely to be predicated on this structure with more emphasis and priority given to US and NATO-led operations than those conducted under the auspices of ESDP.

The trend toward this particular hierarchy has already been evident throughout much of the previous ten years of Labour government and has very much been a reflection of the UK's close relationship with the US under Tony Blair. As outlined above, while significant British forces have been provided for operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Balkans, UK participation in ESDP and UN peacekeeping missions more generally has been relatively minimal.⁴¹²

New deployments in the last 12 months have also shown evidence of these hierarchical distinctions. Despite the nature of overstretch among the armed forces at present, as the rotating NATO Operational Reserve Force for the Balkans for the first half of 2008, the UK committed 600 troops to Kosovo in May 2008.⁴¹³ The MOD argued that as the designated ORF country the deployment was "a long-standing commitment that is being provided for within our planning assumptions".⁴¹⁴ Although the deployment was initially only for a period of one month, the possibility of extending that deployment until the end of July 2008 has not been ruled out. In response to several questions from the Conservative front bench during the defence debate on 8 May 2008 regarding the liability of the Government with respect to Kosovo the Minister for the Armed Forces, Bob Ainsworth, commented:

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) asked me several questions specifically about Kosovo. He asked about the length of the liability. The request is for a month, as reported to the House. Nobody has tried to hide the fact that the time can be extended, and we have the responsibility until the end of July and the start of August to continue that provision. We are not volunteering for it, and we have shared it with other nations. The Germans recently fulfilled a commitment there and the Italians have done so in the past. It is a relatively short-term commitment—I hope only a month, but it can be extended till the start of August.⁴¹⁵

In contrast the UK's participation in the latest ESDP operation in Chad/Central African Republic has been minimal. In total eight military officers have been assigned to the operation: four to the ESDP mission itself, two to the operational headquarters in Paris and two to the operational HQ in Chad.⁴¹⁶ Of all the UN's 22 current peacekeeping operations, the UK only currently contributes 287 military personnel (259 of which are deployed to the UN operation in Cyprus) and 62 police personnel.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹² To an extent this situation has not been overly problematic given that France has been very determined to undertake the practical logistics of ESDP operations as part of its efforts to shore up the operational side of ESDP.

⁴¹³ The UK was the ORF rotating country between 1 January and 30 June 2008.

⁴¹⁴ HC Deb 3 March 2008, c1445

⁴¹⁵ HC Deb 8 May 2008, c950

⁴¹⁶ In addition the UK has contributed £14m towards the common costs of the operation (assigned until 31 December 2008). HC Deb 7 February 2008, c1489W

⁴¹⁷ UN Peacekeeping facts and figures: <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/>

However, a number of analysts have contended that the real test of the UK's willingness to commit forces, even to US or NATO-led coalitions, will only come with a major threat to the UK's interests. Considered scenarios have included potential military action against Iran and the likelihood of stability and security in Balkans deteriorating significantly over the next few years. Some analysts have also pointed toward the potential for UK intervention in possible conflict hotspots in Africa, particularly given the emphasis that Tony Blair gave to the continent during his time in Downing Street. An article in *Jane's Defence Weekly* in May 2007 suggested:

The one foreign policy arena that has grabbed Brown's attention has been Africa as a result of his involvement in the G8 discussions over debt and HIV/AIDS relief. This has led some MOD insiders to think that Brown will want the UK to become more militarily involved in humanitarian and peace support operations in Africa.⁴¹⁸

However, the UK's track record on participation in African operations thus far, coupled with the resource and capabilities issue, casts doubt over the credibility of this proposition.

With respect to Iran, the government has, to date, adopted a relatively non-committal stance on participation in any military action. Indeed, as outlined above, the ability of the UK to engage in any such operation would be severely constrained by the lack of available resources, even more so if the level of commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan remain unchanged for the foreseeable future. However, a number of analysts have argued that the ability of the UK to militarily sit on the sidelines were the US to launch military action against Iran, would be virtually impossible given the extent of British interests in the region, including the geographical proximity of deployed British forces. In an opinion piece in *Jane's Defence Weekly* in November 2007, Tim Ripley argued:

The UK government might be able to stand back from participation in the first wave of any US campaign of air and cruise missile strikes against targets in Iran linked to the country's controversial nuclear programme or those suspected of providing support to insurgents in Iraq. However, it will be more difficult to avoid co-operating with the US military to defeat any Iranian retaliation [...]

Almost all of the possible conflict scenarios are likely to involve direct attacks on UK interests throughout the Middle East. The UK has formal defence treaties and long-standing alliances with Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman [...] British maritime trade in the region is also extensive and will require protection. More than 50,000 UK passport holders live and work in the Gulf region, so they would require protection or assistance moving to safety. The two UK sovereign bases in Cyprus are also within range of Hizbullah and Syrian missile batteries. Perhaps most vulnerable are the 5,500 UK troops in southern Iraq [...]

In such circumstances the UK government will find it very difficult to stand aside and leave defence against the Iranians to the US [...] Even if the UK armed forces were only committed to defensive operations in the Middle East, it would

⁴¹⁸ "Uncertainty awaits the UK", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 16 May 2007

be very difficult for them to try and ringfence their operations from those of the US [...] it is also doubtful whether the Iranians would understand the nuance of any such separation between the UK and US forces.⁴¹⁹

He also went on to note how any offensive action against Iran may lead to a re-evaluation of the UK's defence planning assumptions:

The force packages required to help defeat Iranian offensive operations are very different from those currently deployed in the region, including air-defence fighters; mine countermeasures vessels; airborne early warning, electronic warfare and suppression of enemy air defence aircraft; maritime patrol aircraft/helicopters and ground based air defence.

The fact that these assets have been drawn down by the UK government over the past five years might limit the ability of its armed forces to sustain a long campaign against Iran, but the prospect might also prompt a rethink of UK defence planning priorities.⁴²⁰

An issue which may also impact upon future operational commitments is the Government's current proposal to grant Parliament the general right to approve future deployments of British forces in situations of armed conflict.⁴²¹ The extent to which this or any future Parliament may support or oppose the deployment of forces is an unknown quantity, and one that is likely to reflect the national mood and the specific circumstances of the proposed deployment at the time, including the size and scope of the operation. Therefore it is worth noting that in the future the Government may not just find itself constrained by the parameters of available capabilities, but also in theory by the actions of Parliament.

C. The Military Covenant

The Military Covenant is an unwritten social and moral commitment between the State and Service personnel in the Armed Forces that has developed through long standing convention and customs. Although it has no legal basis it implies that, in return for the sacrifices that Service personnel make, the State has an obligation to recognise that contribution and retains a long term duty of care toward Service personnel and their families.

⁴¹⁹ "Can UK stay out of war with Iran?", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 21 November 2007

⁴²⁰ "Can UK stay out of war with Iran?", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 21 November 2007

⁴²¹ This initiative was introduced by the Brown government in July 2007 as part of its wider set of measures on the Governance of Britain. Although it foresees a general right for Parliament to approve the future deployment of the Armed Forces, the government has reserved the right to exempt itself from the need to obtain Parliamentary approval in emergency situations. Further detail on these proposals is available in Library Standard Note SN/IA/4335, *Parliamentary Approval for Deployment of the Armed Forces: an Introduction to the Issues*, November 2007

Army Doctrine Publication Volume 5 sets out what the British Army considers to be the fundamental principles of the Military Covenant. It states:

The purpose and measure of the British Army is military effectiveness: success in war and on other operations. Ultimately this means that every soldier is a weapon bearer, so all must be prepared personally to make the decision to engage an enemy or to place themselves in harms way. All British soldiers share the legal right and duty to fight and if necessary, kill, according to their orders, and an unlimited liability to give their lives in doing so. This is the unique nature of soldiering.

These grave responsibilities mean that military effectiveness cannot be based on functional output alone; unless an Army is focused on higher external ethics, it risks moral bankruptcy. This is vitally important because a morally bankrupt force, even if effective, risks alienation from the community it serves. Furthermore, military success is not a simple question of victory and defeat. Soldiers operate throughout a complex spectrum which embraces conflict prevention operations, conflict itself, and post-conflict activities, all of them with joint, multi-national and inter agency dimensions, and under the scrutiny of government, society and the media at home and abroad. The country expects soldiers to be available at any time, to go anywhere and to carry out a wide variety of potential missions in support of government policy, often as the last resort. Such capability requires good equipment, organisation, training and leadership, and above all, soldiers with high degrees of personal and collective commitment, self-sacrifice, forbearance and mutual trust. Together these cement the morale and teamwork so essential for operational success. This demands hard and realistic training, the unquestioning acceptance of authority and sound discipline. In addition, soldiers have to understand and accept the political and legal responsibilities of their actions. And in all of this, conflict is still the province of chaos, danger, exhaustion, fear, loneliness and privation. Success in such a complex environment requires a moral and ethical basis which is shared and understood by all. However the societies from which the British Army recruits have increasingly diverse ethical and moral codes. Hence the Army has a fundamental duty to its soldiers, and those they serve, to articulate its common ethos and moral basis. British soldiers must know that what they are called upon to do is right as well as militarily achievable, and has the support of the nation, society and the government.

Soldiers will be called upon to make personal sacrifices - including the ultimate sacrifice - in the service of the Nation. In putting the needs of the Nation and the Army before their own, they forego some of the rights enjoyed by those outside the Armed Forces. In return, British soldiers must always be able to expect fair treatment, to be valued and respected as individuals, and that they (and their families) will be sustained and rewarded by commensurate terms and conditions of service. In the same way the unique nature of military land operations means that the Army differs from all other institutions, and must be sustained and provided for accordingly by the Nation. This mutual obligation forms the Military Covenant between the Nation, the Army and each individual soldier; an unbreakable common bond of identity, loyalty and responsibility which has sustained the Army throughout its history. It has perhaps its greatest manifestation in the annual commemoration of Armistice Day, when the Nation

keeps covenant with those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives in action.⁴²²

In the last few years various aspects of the terms and conditions of service of Armed Forces personnel have been highlighted and criticised. Among these criticisms the provision of healthcare for injured Service personnel, the poor standard of Service accommodation, the inadequacy of equipment; overstretch and the breaching of harmony guidelines, the rates of pay and allowances, compensation for injured Service personnel and the welfare support provided to their families, have been the most consistently highlighted.

Despite the fact that these issues have been longstanding concerns,⁴²³ public allegations that the Government is fundamentally breaching the Military Covenant and undermining its duty of care to Service personnel is a relatively recent development that has taken the debate one step further.

In the last year several charities, campaign groups, opposition political parties, ex-military chiefs, coroners and the media have all suggested that the Military Covenant is steadily being undermined. An article from *BBC News Online* in September 2007 summed up:

The military, and particularly the Army, is facing extreme pressures.

Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have, of course, resulted in death and injury. But they have also put a sometimes harsh spotlight on how the government supports service personnel and their families.

Bereaved families waiting years for inquests; soldiers returning from tough tours of duty to shabby accommodation; soldiers suffering post-traumatic stress disorder and feeling let down by the system; a steady flow of such stories in recent years have caused senior military commanders to wonder if the covenant is in danger of being abused.

When local residents living near a military rehabilitation centre in Surrey objected to a nearby property being converted to accommodate family members visiting injured relations, some wondered if society as a whole was in danger of turning its back on the military.⁴²⁴

⁴²² *Soldiering – The Military Covenant*, Army Doctrine Publication, Volume 5, February 2000

⁴²³ Section I E examines the discussion of these issues during the Blair premiership.

⁴²⁴ “Is Britain failing its armed forces?”, *BBC News Online*, 13 September 2007. See also “Former army chief criticises MOD”, *BBC News Online*, 7 December 2006; “The troops let down by our leaders”, *The Daily Mail*, 1 June 2007 and “One of Britain’s most distinguished Generals says the moral cowardice of our politicians and military chiefs has all but destroyed this country’s armed forces”, *The Daily Mail*, 13 April 2007

During a speech to the International Institute for Strategic Studies in September 2007, the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard Dannatt, expressed concern over what he considers to be a “growing gulf” between the Armed Forces and the general public. He stated:

I have become increasingly concerned about the growing gulf between the Army and the Nation. I am not talking about the support that we get from Her Majesty's Government and to a large extent I am not talking about public finances. Rather, I am talking about how the Nation as a whole views the Army.

The people who make up that Army are all volunteers and they fully understand that they join to fight and if necessary to put themselves in harms way to get the job done – we do not ask for sympathy when we are doing what we are paid to do. Now, a great deal has been made of the Military Covenant in recent weeks, mostly in terms of equipment and pay, but the real covenant is with the population at large – the Nation. The covenant says that we do what we do in your name; soldiers do not ask why; but they do ask for respect and honour for doing what they have been sent to do with courage and professionalism [...]

As our operational commitments have become more intense, so has the need for support from the Nation. We must move from being a society that uses the military as a political football.⁴²⁵

More recently in an interview with *The Sun* in June 2008 General Dannatt also commented:

The demands of operations, the demands being placed on the Services are that large that our ability to meet them just as we meet the needs of the individuals is that large, that's why it [the covenant] is out of kilter.

I regard what we are doing in Iraq and Afghanistan and elsewhere in the world as being non-discretionary, so we have got to do those things to make sure that we have Armed Services – in my case an Army populated by motivated and well trained people. We have got to look after their individual needs well enough so that things like housing, pay, medical welfare has got to be good. That's where I would like to see additional resources being spent and to an extent that is happening, but I would like to see it happening to a greater extent and faster.⁴²⁶

The Royal British Legion's 'Honour the Covenant' campaign which was launched in September 2007 and became the theme of the 2007 poppy appeal subsequently served to raise awareness of these issues among the wider general public. That campaign chose to highlight the scope of the armed forces compensation scheme; the healthcare and welfare support provided to serving personnel, their families and veterans; and the level of support provided to families at inquests.

⁴²⁵ A copy of this speech given to the International Institute for Strategic Studies on 21 September 2007 is available at:

<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/People/Speeches/ChiefStaff/20070921AddressToTheInternationalInstituteForStrategicStudies.htm>

⁴²⁶ “CGS discusses Armed Forces issues”, MOD press release, 5 June 2008

The DEMOS report *Out of Step* also focused on the Military Covenant issue and concluded:

The Military Covenant – the contract between the nation and service personnel and their families who make personal sacrifices in return for fair treatment and commensurate terms and conditions of service – has been damaged almost beyond repair. A new civil–military compact is necessary – first, to restore the Military Covenant between the Army and the nation; and second, the Military Covenant must be a tri-service (rather than Army) pledge between the government (on behalf of its citizens), the military as an employer and individual service personnel.⁴²⁷

As argued above this impetus has significantly raised the political and public profile of armed forces welfare issues and has introduced a dynamic into the political decision making of the Brown government which was largely absent from the defence brief for the majority of the time under Blair. What is also interesting is that many commentators have used this change in public perception to argue that despite increased awareness of more immediate concerns such as healthcare, the relationship between the military and society more generally has steadily been eroded over the longer term, in what General Sir Richard Dannatt has referred to as the “social gulf”.

The importance that the Brown Government has attached to welfare issues, as opposed (some would argue) to more strategic issues setting out the rationale for maintaining the UK’s armed forces, has been demonstrated by the plethora of personnel initiatives that have been announced since Brown took office. In less than a year the Government has announced more than 14 new measures to improve the terms and conditions or welfare of serving personnel and their families.⁴²⁸ Significantly the MOD announced in November 2007 that it would publish a Service personnel command paper in 2008 which would make recommendations for enhancing the future level of welfare support offered to service personnel, their families and veterans. Efforts to address the social gap between the military and the society that it serves have also been evident, most prominently with the announcement in December 2007 of the intention to conduct an independent study into the national recognition of the Armed Forces (see below).

During the defence debate on 8 May 2008 Quentin Davies MP made reference to this trend:

The second thing on which I want to congratulate the Government is quite remarkable: the number of initiatives that they have taken in the past year or two to provide material support for our troops. There has been an announcement in short order of two armed forces pay reviews, which have been accepted by the Government. I think that the results of those public sector pay reviews are the

⁴²⁷ Timothy Edmunds and Anthony Forster, *Out of Step: the case for change in the British Armed Forces*, November 2007, p.13

⁴²⁸ Including tax free payments in lieu of council tax, extensions to the Key Worker Living Scheme, increased funding for healthcare and accommodation, a childcare voucher scheme, improved retention bonuses, a pilot mortgage scheme for service personnel who are first time buyers and changes to the armed forces compensation scheme and war pensions scheme.

only ones to have been accepted. The one last year increased the pay of people in the lower ranks by 9 per cent. That is real money, frankly.

At the same time, we have had the introduction of the tax-free deployment allowance and concessions on council tax, and rightly so, but they are without precedent. Commitments have been given to spend more money on improving housing, and it is very important that that be done. I will not make a party political point by saying who is actually to blame for the present administration and ownership of military housing in this country. Instructions have been given to health authorities to do what they really should have been doing automatically since 1948 and the introduction of the health service—to give priority to patients presenting with symptoms as a result of service in our armed forces.

I have left out several things, such as the significant increase in the compensation limit. There has been an enormous number of initiatives in this field. It is a remarkable record of achievement, and as far as I can see the Government have got absolutely no credit for it whatever. I suppose that it is not surprising that they were given no credit from the Opposition Benches—party politics comes into issues even as important as this—but the media have not picked up at all on these points. However, there is no doubt that the armed forces are aware of the continuing effort.⁴²⁹

Issues relating to the RBL's Honour the Covenant campaign and the welfare and terms and conditions of service personnel more generally, including the extent of the government's recent initiatives are considered in Library Standard Note SN/IA/4495, *The Military Covenant* and are not addressed in any detail here.⁴³⁰ However, it is briefly worth examining the two main initiatives that have emerged: the Service personnel command paper and the report into national recognition of the Armed Forces.

1. Service Personnel Command Paper

On 8 November 2007 the MOD announced that it would publish a new cross-departmental strategy in the spring of 2008 setting out the Government's plans for enhancing the future level of support offered to Regular and Reservist Service personnel, their families, veterans and widows. Announcing what has essentially been regarded as a Military Covenant white paper by many commentators, Armed Forces Minister, Bob Ainsworth, stated:

We in Government have a responsibility to recognise the commitment and sacrifice our Armed Forces make for our country, and in return we must look after them and their families. To do this we need the entire Government, working together in a comprehensive and co-ordinated way. We also need to look at how we can make the best of the support offered by other organisations and charities – who make an important and much appreciated contribution.⁴³¹

⁴²⁹ HC Deb 8 May 2008, c923-4

⁴³⁰ Issues relating to Coroners are covered in more detail in Library Standard Note SN/HA/4455, *Jurisdiction for inquests of Service personnel*, February 2008.

⁴³¹ Ministry of Defence press release, 8 November 2007:
<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/NewGovernmentStrategy/WillImproveSupportToServicePersonnelAndTheirFamilies.htm>

The Chief of the Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, also commented:

I welcome this Command Paper as a timely move to co-ordinate activity across government in support of our Armed Forces. We have a Service Personnel Strategy, but many of the issues that concern our people, their families, and our veterans, go beyond the MOD. With this in mind, the Secretary of State has agreed the need for wider cross-Government approach.

We in Defence will continue to focus on personnel issues, but there is great merit in bringing the challenges more to the fore across a wider audience.⁴³²

Under the terms of reference the review will examine a wide range of issues including, albeit not limited to:

1. Accommodation, including the upgrade of single living and family accommodation and improving opportunities for home ownership.
2. Education, covering both Service children's education and the attainment of education and skills within the Service, including as part of the package of measures enabling transition into civilian life.
3. Medical care, including access by personnel and their families to primary and secondary healthcare, priority healthcare for veterans, medical care for reservists and improvements in the military managed wards concept.
4. Families, including welfare support for families while partners/spouses are deployed overseas.
5. Veterans and widows welfare, including compensation, pensions, medical care, and access to state benefits.
6. Boards of Inquiry/Inquests, specifically support for families during the inquest process.
7. Pay and allowances, including emerging outcomes from the Strategic Remuneration Review.
8. Recruitment and retention, examining current trends and future challenges.
9. Training, specifically implementation of the changes recommended by the Blake Review and the DHALI initiative.
10. Commonwealth and Gurkha personnel, including examining issues associated with naturalisation, family welfare and education.⁴³³

This study is expected to be informed by the independent study into National Recognition of the Armed Forces (see below) and the authors of the 1995 Bett Report *Managing People in Tomorrow's Armed Forces*.⁴³⁴ Consultation with Service charities, the Armed Forces family federations and other related interest groups has also been conducted.⁴³⁵

⁴³² Ministry of Defence press release, 8 November 2007:

<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/NewGovernmentStrategy/WillImproveSupportToServicePersonnelAndTheirFamilies.htm>

⁴³³ The terms of reference of the cross-departmental review are available online at: <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/WhatWeDo/Personnel/Welfare/ServicePersonnelCommandPaperTermsOfReference.htm>

⁴³⁴ A copy of the Bett report is available in the House of Commons Library (ref: SOP DEFENCE NS 15).

⁴³⁵ The deadline for submissions to that consultation was 31 May 2008.

The new personnel command paper is expected to be published in the summer of 2008. Detail on the main recommendations and conclusions of the study and how it relates to the Military Covenant will be set out in a forthcoming library research paper.

2. National Recognition of the Armed Forces

In December 2007 the Government announced that it had commissioned an independent study, to be led by Quentin Davies MP, into national recognition of the Armed Forces. Specifically, the review was intended to examine how a greater understanding and appreciation of the Armed Forces could be fostered among the general public. In the foreword to the report which was subsequently published in May 2008 the Prime Minister commented:

The Government is acutely aware of the debt we owe our Armed Forces, and our gratitude for the work they do in the service of our country is reflected in our recent initiatives on pay, on tax-free bonuses, on housing and on healthcare, as well as in our decision to commission a Command Paper on conditions of service and quality of life, which we will be publishing this summer.

But beyond these individual initiatives, important though they are, it is vital for our serving men and women, especially those engaged in difficult and dangerous overseas campaigns, to know that the whole of Britain understands and appreciates the work that they do in our name.⁴³⁶

Complimentary to the Government's own internal Service Personnel Command Paper, the study identified four main themes: increasing visibility, improving contact, building understanding and encouraging support. Some of the main conclusions and recommendations of that report therefore include:

1. **Wearing of uniforms** – the military should be encouraged to wear their uniforms to the fullest extent allowed by current service regulations.
2. **Legal protection for the uniform** – legislation should be introduced to make discrimination against those wearing military uniforms, by suppliers of public or commercial services, an offence. In addition in cases of abusive behaviour, threats or violence, there is a strong Public Interest consideration in favour of prosecuting individuals for any such offence against any person serving the public, including Service personnel.
3. **Homecoming parades** – such parades for units returning from combat should be encouraged.
4. **British Armed Forces and Veterans' Day** – A British Armed Forces and Veterans Day should be formally established, possibly as a public holiday at the end of June. However, it should not in any way detract from Remembrance Sunday which is a national institution.
5. **Public outreach** – Commanding officers of all military establishments should prepare an annual public outreach programme aiming, at minimum cost and diversion of resources, to maximise local familiarity and contact with the unit and

⁴³⁶ *Report of Inquiry into National Recognition of our Armed Forces, May 2008*

its activities. The reserve forces should also devote at least one of the mandatory training days per year to public outreach activities. Wherever possible outreach should also include a public open day.

6. **Dealing with Members of Parliament** – closer contact between individual military units and local MPs should be encouraged. Prior MOD consent for MPs to visit military establishments should therefore be abolished. Where a unit is operationally deployed the MOD should consider inviting the local MP to visit that unit in the field.
7. **National Curriculum** – a module on the armed forces should be included as part of the citizenship agenda and civic education in schools.
8. **Benefits and Discounts** – organisers of cultural or sporting events who wish to give a limited number of tickets to Service personnel should be encouraged to do so. The MOD should more actively advertise the existence of the Defence Discounts Directory and encourage commercial organisations to participate.

Several of those recommendations are already currently under consideration by the MOD, including the possibility of an Armed Forces Day, greater encouragement for the military to wear uniforms in public, homecoming parades and expanding combined cadet forces in schools.⁴³⁷ A detailed response to all of the recommendations in the report is expected later in 2008.⁴³⁸

On the whole the recommendations in the National Recognition report have been widely welcomed, although concerns have been expressed in some quarters over various aspects of it. The plan for an Armed Forces day has been met with particular disapproval by organisations such as the Peace Pledge Union.⁴³⁹ Cath Elliott, writing in *The Guardian*, supported this view:

It's surely no coincidence that just weeks after an internal Whitehall memo revealed that our forces are being weakened by a failure to recruit, up comes a report brimming with ideas on how to sex-up the military and give war a public seal of approval [...] Okay so I'm being a bit glib here, even cynical some might say, but that's because I'm decidedly uncomfortable with the whole idea of turning war and death into a cause for public celebration.⁴⁴⁰

The Deputy Director General of the CBI was also reported in *The Times* as commenting:

The idea of celebrating our Armed Forces is a positive one but there is no reason this couldn't be done on an existing Bank Holiday. Statutory holiday entitlement is being increased from 20 to 28 days over the next two years - a substantial cost to firms. Offering staff an extra Bank Holiday would cost the economy up to £6 billion on top.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁷ "MOD backs plan to boost recognition for the Armed Forces", MOD Press release, 19 May 2008

⁴³⁸ A copy of the full report is available online at: http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/69519F89-9630-4D5F-92CF-B834FAB0FBD2/0/recognition_of_our_armed_forces.pdf

⁴³⁹ See "Backing for Armed Forces day plan", *BBC News Online*, 19 May 2008

⁴⁴⁰ "No cause for celebration", *The Guardian*, 22 May 2008

⁴⁴¹ "New uniform offence and bank holiday to celebrate armed forces", *The Times*, 20 May 2008

UK National Defence Association spokesman Andy Smith stated:

We welcome many of the recommendations in Quentin Davies's report, especially the proposals for a national day to honour our Armed Forces and Veterans, the reinstatement of the Royal Tournament, the encouragement of home-coming parades for troops returning from active service overseas, the expansion of the Combined Cadet Force and positive promotion of the armed forces to young people. Mr Davies is also right to recommend that discrimination against armed forces personnel in military uniform should be a criminal offence.

However, the scope of this report for the Government - rather like that of the Conservative Party's Forsyth Commission - is too limited. Politicians have failed to maintain the Covenant with the armed forces. The welfare of service families has been woefully neglected, and our service personnel have been forced to take unnecessary risks by going into action without appropriate equipment. The root cause of these problems is the chronic under-funding of our armed forces - and thus far neither the Government nor the Opposition front-bench has given any indication that it is willing to address this issue, despite UKNDA's recent Parliamentary poll showing that the majority of backbench MPs on both sides of the House of Commons believe that our forces are over-stretched and need an urgent increase in funding.⁴⁴²

The importance attached to personnel issues, the Military Covenant and how the breach between the military and society can be addressed has been reflected across the political spectrum. At their respective autumn 2007 party conferences both the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats raised the issue of the Military Covenant, with proposals being put forward at the Lib Dem conference for an independent inspectorate to be established that would ensure the obligations enshrined in the Military Covenant are being upheld.⁴⁴³ Both parties have since established independent reviews into this particular aspect of policy, an interesting reflection of the priority the Government has given to these types of issues in the last year, as opposed to the broader strategic context for defence policy going forward.⁴⁴⁴ In June 2008 the Conservative's Military Covenant Commission published an interim report setting out its initial thoughts and provisional recommendations ahead of the publication of a full Commission report later in 2008.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴² http://www.uknda.org/uknda_gives_davies_report_qualified_welcome/n-97.html

⁴⁴³ See "Lib Dems condemn treatment of military personnel", *The Guardian*, 20 September 2007 and the speech by Dr Liam Fox to the Conservative Party Annual Conference, 2 October 2007 at: http://www.conservatives.com/tile.do?def=news.story.page&obj_id=139226&speeches=1

⁴⁴⁴ The Liberal Democrat review being led by Sir Menzies Campbell is based on an earlier document published in December 2007 and entitled, *Our nation's Duty*. A copy is available online at: http://www.libdems.org.uk/media/documents/parliament/Our_Nations_Duty_Dec07.pdf. Further information on the Military Covenant Commission which was established by the Conservative Leader, David Cameron in March 2008 is available online at: <http://www.militarycovenantcommission.com/>

⁴⁴⁵ A copy of that report is available online at: http://conservativehome.blogs.com/torydiary/files/3838_military_covenant_a4_ol.pdf

D. Future Defence Spending

In the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) Chancellor Alistair Darling announced that the defence budget would rise to £36.9bn by 2010-11, representing 1.5% average annual real growth over the three year CSR period. This is calculated from a baseline figure for Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL) in 2007-08 of £32.6bn, which excludes the cost of operations met from the Reserve, since this is not included in the CSR plans.

2007 Comprehensive Spending Review
£ million

	Baseline	New Plans			Annual average real growth
	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	
Resource DEL	32,618	33,579	35,142	36,679	1.3%
<i>o/w depreciation and impairments</i>	<i>7,443</i>	<i>7,416</i>	<i>7,987</i>	<i>8,660</i>	
Capital DEL	7,404	7,871	8,187	8,871	3.4%
Total DEL	32,579	34,034	35,342	36,890	1.5%

Notes:

The 1.5% average annual real terms increase is against our CSR baseline, excluding the costs of operations met from the Reserve and the time-limited Defence Modernisation Fund.

Total DEL comprises near cash Resource and Capital DEL, plus the cost of capital, which is a non-cash charge. This is consistent with Government Accounting.

Source: Ministry of Defence

In announcing its expenditure plans the Treasury suggested:

Taken together with the last three Spending Reviews, in 2000, 2002 and 2004, this represents a decade of sustained real growth in planned defence expenditure – making it the longest period of steadily increasing planned defence spending since the end of the Cold War.⁴⁴⁶

Some of these resources are to be allocated to areas such as improving military housing, but a significant proportion remains committed to new equipment programmes, including the Navy's two new large carriers and a replacement for Trident. The CSR stated that the 1.5% average annual real growth in the defence budget, along with value for money reforms generating annual net savings of £2.7 billion by 2010-11,⁴⁴⁷ would enable the MoD to:

- Enhance conventional capability across the Armed Forces, including two new aircraft carriers for the Royal Navy, protected vehicles for the Army, and further Air Transport capability for the RAF;
- Fund the renewal of Britain's nuclear deterrent while ensuring that this does not come at the expense of the conventional capability our Armed Forces need; and

⁴⁴⁶ Budget 2008, HM Treasury, HC 388, Session 2007-08

⁴⁴⁷ The MOD is committed to making value for money savings worth £2.7bn over the three year CSR period to reinvest in defence. Initiatives to achieve these savings include the continued simplification of single service budgetary and headquarters structures including the merger of Land Command and the Adjutant General's command and a 5% year-on-year reduction of administrative overheads, including a 25% saving in MOD Main Building.

- Invest £550 million in new and refurbished accommodation for servicemen and women and their families, drawing on anticipated receipts from the sale of Chelsea barracks.⁴⁴⁸

As outlined above the defence budget has been placed under increasing strain due to rising costs of operations, equipment and personnel. While the average annual 1.5% increase in defence spending up to 2010-11 has been welcomed, it has been widely considered to be insufficient to meet the future funding commitments of the Department, given the argument that cost pressures have not been matched by sufficient increases in the defence budget in recent years. In January 2008 the Defence Select Committee expressed its concern that:

the defence budget will be under substantial pressure in the period covered by the 2007 Spending Review, given that several funding commitments, such as the future carrier programme, a pay increase for the Armed Forces, and further investment in accommodation for Service personnel, have been announced. These will need to be met from the average annual 1.5% real terms increase and the cumulative efficiency savings.⁴⁴⁹

In November 2007 several ex-Service chiefs and members of the House of Lords also expressed their concerns. Lord Bramall commented:

Nor is it any good, as the noble Lord, Lord King, made clear, for Ministers continually to shelter behind claims of sustained growth. The figure of 1.5 per cent growth in real terms that is promised for the next three years, but which is more like 0.9 per cent in practice, starts from the lowest possible baseline after 15 years decline and represents 2.5 per cent of GDP. It is nowhere near enough [...] to compete with inherent defence inflation. The previous period of sustained growth, which the Government likes to use as a comparison, was for nine years, from 1979 to 1988. It started with the Callaghan government and was consistently at 3 per cent in real terms, representing 5.5 per cent of GDP. I know what I am talking about because I was on the Chiefs of Staff Committee for seven of those nine years.⁴⁵⁰

Lord Boyce also noted:

The so-called year-on-year increases that the Government continue to boast about have first to be measured against initial underfunding of the defence aspirations set out in the Strategic Defence Review. It is an absolute fact that none of the year-on-year increases has closed that initial gap, let alone provided for the concomitant rise needed to match the soaring levels of activity which are taking a matching toll on man and machine.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁸ 2007 Pre-Budget Report and Comprehensive Spending Review, HM Treasury, Cm 7227.

⁴⁴⁹ Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2006-07, Commons Defence Committee Fifth Report of Session 2007-08, HC 61

⁴⁵⁰ HL Deb 22 November 2007, c957

⁴⁵¹ HL Deb 22 November 2007, c950

He also went on to argue that once the cost of the replacement of the nuclear deterrent and funds for the plethora of recently announced welfare measures had been subtracted from the 2007 CSR settlement:

The core defence programme has had no effective budget rise at all. If one could cut to the truth [...] we would find that it is in fact negative [...] The negative budget is why, if you go to the Ministry of Defence today, you will find blood on the floor as the system slashes the defence programme to meet what is a desperate funding situation.⁴⁵²

Indeed, on the back of concerns over the nature of the defence budget, the UK National Defence Association was established in 2007 in order to raise awareness of the situation facing the armed forces and lobby for expenditure to be increased. The UKNDA cites as its main objective:

To campaign for sufficient, appropriate and fully funded Armed Forces that the United Kingdom needs to defend effectively this Country, its people, their vital interests and security at home and throughout the world

In order to achieve this, the UKNDA urges:

politicians of all parties and persuasions to support an immediate and sustained real increase in the percentage of GDP allocated annually for "Defence and the Armed Forces" to at least 3%; this would represent an increase of 35-40% over present levels of funding.⁴⁵³

Responding to these criticisms the MOD has sought to reiterate that defence spending has increased in real terms since 2000. It stated:

The recent Comprehensive Spending Review settlement means an additional £7.7 billion for Defence by 2011 – continuing the longest period of sustained real growth in planned defence spending since the 1980s. It is evidence of the Government's commitment to defence and to the men and women who serve with the utmost bravery in our Armed Forces.

The Defence budget has been rising steadily at a rate above inflation since 2000 – by 2010/11, the Defence Budget will have been increasing in real terms for a decade. This is the longest period of sustained real growth in Defence spending for over 30 years.

The Treasury Reserve has provided some £6.6 billion of new money over and above the core Defence budget from 2001 to ensure that our Forces are properly trained, equipped and supported for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. We have always made it clear that the MoD and wider Government is committed to providing all the resources commanders need to achieve operational success.

⁴⁵² HL Deb 22 November 2007, c950

⁴⁵³ Manifesto of the United Kingdom National Defence Association. Further information on the UKNDA is available at: <http://www.uknda.org/>

The cost of operations includes additional equipment procured through the Urgent Operational Requirements process.⁴⁵⁴

1. Operations

As examined above, the UK's overseas commitments are putting an increasing strain on defence spending and will continue to do so in the future if the Government's defence planning assumptions are not amended.

In its 2007-2008 Spring Supplementary Estimate, the MOD forecast the net additional cost of operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Balkans in 2007/08 at £3.3bn, an increase of 90% over the outturn costs of these operations in 2006/07. As in previous years there have been significant increases in the MoD's forecast costs over the course of the financial year. For 2007/08, the department's estimate of the total additional cost of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan rose by 73% between its Winter and Spring Supplementary Estimates. These increases are largely due to the fact that the MoD does not forecast indirect resource costs until the Spring Supplementary Estimate. However, even stripping out these indirect resource costs, total cost forecasts still rose by 52% for Iraq and 48% for Afghanistan between the two estimates.⁴⁵⁵

Alistair Darling announced in his 2008 Budget speech that the Government also expects to spend over £2bn supporting operations in Iraq and Afghanistan this year, including around £900 million on military equipment.⁴⁵⁶

These costs will continue to be financed out of Treasury Reserves, and not the MoD's main budget.

a. *The effect of operations*

The continued strain placed on Britain's armed forces by the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan has had a big impact on equipment procurement, forcing ministers to focus on immediate needs rather than forming longer-term plans. Within the last year Urgent Operational Requirements (UORs) have been used extensively to supplement equipment on the ground in both Iraq and Afghanistan, which have continued to be met from the Treasury reserve. As of March 2008, the total value of UORs approved for Iraq and Afghanistan was in excess of £3.5 billion.⁴⁵⁷

On 22 November 2007, the Minister for Defence Procurement, Baroness Taylor, announced a change in the funding of UORs. She acknowledged that when UK Armed Forces were deployed on operations, they faced challenges that "could not have been anticipated in the initial planning" and in those situations it was necessary to procure equipment quickly, utilising the UOR process, to counter those challenges. However, she said that:

⁴⁵⁴ http://www.blogs.mod.uk/defence_news/2007/week47/index.html

⁴⁵⁵ *Operational costs in Iraq and Afghanistan: Spring Supplementary Estimate 2007-08*, House of Commons Defence Committee, HC 400

⁴⁵⁶ Chancellor of the Exchequer's Budget statement, 12 March 2008

⁴⁵⁷ HC Deb 27 March 2008 c348W

much of the new equipment that we have developed because of problems in the theatre will be incorporated into mainstream planning. That is normal and right... The new approach with the Treasury means that, in the three years of the Comprehensive Spending Review, the reserve will continue to pay all additional costs of operations up front and will pay outright for UORs up to a mutually agreed total. Beyond that, the MoD and the Treasury will split the cost 50:50, with the MoD having to repay its share two years later, by which time there could have been adjustments in the programme. The Treasury will give an extra £200 million in 2010-11 to ensure that the new arrangements are cost-neutral to defence.⁴⁵⁸

The criteria for what qualifies as a UOR remain unchanged. The new funding arrangements are as follows:

- The MoD and the Treasury will agree a forecast of UOR expenditure for the following year (e.g. for 2008-09, decided in 2007-08).
- The Reserve will continue to pay for all UORs when the procurement costs are incurred.
- The Treasury will pay 100% of an agreed proportion of these costs; the MoD and the Treasury will share the costs of the remaining amount 50/50 and the MoD will repay the Reserve its 50% share two years later. For example, any costs incurred in 2008-09 will be repaid in 2010-11.
- HM Treasury has added £200 million to the Defence Budget in 2010-11 to mitigate the effect of the repayments.⁴⁵⁹

Despite the fact that the arrangements are designed to be cost-neutral to defence over the three-year CSR period, this is a complicated arrangement and it is not yet clear how it will affect future MoD budgets. In response to the Defence Committee's concerns that the new funding arrangement may undermine the success of the UOR process seen to date, the MoD replied:

Support to current operations remains our highest priority, and the revised funding arrangement will not affect the speed and agility of the UOR process. We remain committed to ensuring that it continues to deliver theatre-specific, battle-winning capabilities to the Armed Forces at the front line.⁴⁶⁰

2. Implications for Force Structure and the Forward Equipment Programme

The MOD's forward equipment plan for 2008-2015 far exceeds available funding, in what industry commentators have termed the "procurement bow wave". Indeed The National Audit Office's *Major Projects Report 2007* found that:

The current total forecast cost for the 19 largest projects is £28 billion, an increase of 11 per cent compared with the 'most likely' (budgeted) cost when the main investment decision was taken.

⁴⁵⁸ HL Deb 22 November 2007 c997

⁴⁵⁹ House of Commons Defence Committee *Report on Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2006-07*, HC 61, 28 January 2008

⁴⁶⁰ Ministry of Defence Annual Report and Accounts 2006-07: Government Response to the Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2007-08, HC 468

However, estimating the overall cost of the current equipment plan is slightly more complex. The cost implications of legacy programmes such as the Nimrod MRA4,⁴⁶¹ the impact of defence inflation, the unavailability of some data for reasons of commercial confidentiality⁴⁶² and the absence of projected through-life costs, which are often larger than the original procurement cost, makes providing reasonable cost estimates difficult. In addition, the MoD has been criticised for transferring budgets and reducing quantities and specifications to achieve reported cost savings. The National Audit Office's *Major Projects Report 2007* stated that 62 percent of all cost reductions were achieved by transferring the costs to other projects or budget lines where these can be more effectively managed. While the NAO said that "Re-allocating expenditure where appropriate is justified and results in savings to the individual projects, although does not necessarily represent a saving to the Department as a whole", it also added: "We would not expect to see this level of re-allocation in existing projects in future reports".

The report also noted that the Department made additional savings by reducing quantities and deferring delivery of equipment and associated training and infrastructure:

The Department will achieve cost savings of £81 million having re-evaluated the quantities of equipment required and re-assessed project requirements. For example on the Type 45 Destroyer project the quantity of Principal Anti-Air Missiles being procured has been reduced, resulting in a £30 million decrease to the forecast costs [...]

The Department has achieved further small cost reductions of £7 million on four projects by delaying delivery of equipments and their associated training and infrastructure. For example, the National Training Facility for the A400M aircraft has been deferred by two years, saving £2 million.⁴⁶³

In its March 2008 report on Defence Equipment, the Defence Select Committee also expressed its concern over this approach.⁴⁶⁴ The Chairman of the Committee, James Arbuthnot, argued:

For too long the MoD has had an unaffordable equipment programme and needs to confront the problem rather than giving the usual response of salami slicing and moving programmes to the right.⁴⁶⁵

The RUSI Acquisition Focus Group also noted in Spring 2007 that:

[The] shortfall represents more than 20% of the total equipment spend over the next ten years, so it cannot be made good by continued salami slicing and the

⁴⁶¹ As of November 2007 this programme £687m over budget (National Audit office, *Major Projects Report 2007*, HC 98-II, session 2007-08)

⁴⁶² For example the cost forecasts for the Eurofighter Typhoon have been omitted from the NAO Major Projects Report for the last three years on this basis.

⁴⁶³ MoD Major Projects Report 2007, National Audit Office, HC 98-I Session 2007-2008, 30 November 2007

⁴⁶⁴ Defence Committee, Tenth Report of Session 2007-08, *Defence Equipment 2008*, HC 295

⁴⁶⁵ Reported in "MPs query need for new aircraft carriers", *The Daily Telegraph*, 27 March 2008

sliding of programmes to the right. The shortfall can only be resolved by major surgery.⁴⁶⁶

As a result of these significant cost pressures and budget restrictions, further delays and cuts in MoD forward equipment programme are considered inevitable. In its response to the CSR settlement the Defence Select Committee observed:

The increase is to be welcomed, but cuts in the defence programme, including the equipment programme, are likely to be announced in the coming months. We look to the MoD to be realistic about the number of equipment programmes, the number of platforms within equipment programmes, and the phasing of equipment programmes, that can be funded.⁴⁶⁷

When asked by the Committee whether the MoD would have to delay or cut some major programmes, Chief of Defence Materiel, General Sir Kevin O'Donoghue, replied "I suspect we will have to".⁴⁶⁸

In May 2008 the MOD committed itself to undertaking a three month review of its equipment plan, following an agreement by the Treasury to change its main accounting rules in order to free up £200m from within the longer term defence budget to enable contracts for the £3.9bn future carrier programme to be signed.⁴⁶⁹ In undertaking this review the MoD has reiterated its intention to better prioritise its spending plans:

We are undertaking an examination of our planning assumptions for equipment over the next 10 years, with a view to bearing down on cost increases to equipment programmes and shifting the overall balance of defence procurement to the support of operations. We hope to complete the examination in the summer, and it will provide an important input to our next planning round.⁴⁷⁰

Industry figures have expressed concern that the review will result in wholesale cuts of programmes or reductions in required numbers for items already in the procurement plan. The RAF's Future Lynx programme, tranche 3 of Eurofighter, and further orders for the Type 45 destroyer and the Astute-class submarine had all been touted as potential losers.⁴⁷¹ Indeed on 19 June 2008 the MOD confirmed that the remaining two vessels in the Type-45 class would no longer be ordered and that the overall number of vessels in that class would be six.⁴⁷² In response to that announcement, Shadow defence Minister Gerald Howarth commented:

The Minister has told us the pretty desperate news—albeit something that we had expected all along—that the Type 7 and 8 ships of the Type 45 class are to be

⁴⁶⁶ RUSI Acquisition Focus, 'The Underfunded Equipment Programme – Where Now?', *RUSI Defence Systems*, Spring 2007, p25

⁴⁶⁷ Defence Committee, Tenth Report of Session 2007-08, *Defence Equipment 2008*, HC 295

⁴⁶⁸ Defence Committee, Tenth Report of Session 2007-08, *Defence Equipment 2008*, HC 295

⁴⁶⁹ Under the accounting changes, defence officials will be able to move some funds between the three years of the Comprehensive Spending Review and use money allocated for annual capital spending for resource spending.

⁴⁷⁰ HC Deb 2 June 2008, c689W

⁴⁷¹ "Defence review looks to shorter term", *The Financial Times*, 16 May 2008

⁴⁷² The original Type-45 requirement was for a class of 12. That requirement was cut in 2004 to eight.

cancelled. I think that the House will want absolutely cast-iron assurances today— *[Interruption.]* The Minister for the Armed Forces says “They were never ordered”, but they were all part of the strategic defence review and, still more important, they were a key component in the whole carrier force. Unlike the current class of pocket carriers, if I may call them that, which have heretofore had the protection afforded by the Sea Harrier, those carriers have no on-board protection against air attack. That is what the Type 45 is designed to provide. What the House and the Royal Navy will want today is an assurance from the Secretary of State that there is sufficient protection in six ships to look after two aircraft carriers at any one time. Without that assurance, I am bound to say that the entire project encapsulated in the strategic defence review will be put at risk.⁴⁷³

Further cuts to the number of ships and aircraft in the UK inventory as a means of making up the shortfall has been regarded by some as the one of the most likely outcomes going forward.⁴⁷⁴ The Royal Navy in particular is considered to be potentially the biggest loser given the emphasis that the 2003 White Paper and the 2008-2012 Defence Plan gave to NEC and the idea that fewer, technologically more capable, platforms would be required in order to deliver intended effect. Yet this premise that quantity as a measure of military effectiveness is no longer useful is increasingly being questioned. In the House of Lords debate on 22 November 2007 Lord Boyce stated:

I hope that the Minister can assure us that the Ministry of Defence is still not clinging to the strategically illiterate opinion that network enabled capability allows for a reduction in basic force numbers. Such a theory [...] has been comprehensively trashed by experience in Iraq and Afghanistan. Network enabled capability and force reduction certainly do not apply in the maritime domain where I remain to be convinced that the Ministry of Defence has woken up to the fact that a ship cannot be in two places at the same time, and that the importance of presence, which is so fundamental to conflict prevention, demands more and not fewer hulls.⁴⁷⁵

The Royal Navy Publication *Broadsheet 2007* has argued:

We are entering an era where high intensity conflict demands a defined number of highly capable platforms, yet global instability requires that higher levels of routine global presence be maintained, with the capability to surge as events dictate. Consequently, we could be approaching a “tipping point” where further reductions in hull numbers, capability or logistic support could have a disproportionate impact on the effectiveness of the fleet to support government policy in the round [...] the age old debate over capability versus numbers remains as intractable as ever.⁴⁷⁶

Shadow Secretary of State for Defence, Liam Fox, also suggested that “any reduction in our forces’ size at present would be insane, given our unsafe world and the level of our

⁴⁷³ HC Deb 19 June 2008, c1134

⁴⁷⁴ See “£3bn hole in budget may lead to defence cuts”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 March 2008, “Navy is sinking under strain of ship and staff cuts, says chief”, *The Times*, 13 November 2007 and “Labour’s secret plans to slash the Navy”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 2007

⁴⁷⁵ HL Deb 22 November 2007, c951

⁴⁷⁶ “Striding towards the future navy”, *Broadsheet 2007*

current deployments".⁴⁷⁷ In an interview with *The Times* in November 2007 the First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Jonathan Band was also reported to have warned that "the fleet would lose its flexibility if the Government cut back too far on warships and manpower" and that "if the Government wanted the White Ensign to be flown around the world, the issue of the number of destroyers and frigates available, particularly frigates was crucial".⁴⁷⁸

Whether programmes that have been supplemented by recent UOR purchases for Iraq and Afghanistan, such as the FRES armoured vehicle programme, and the Watchkeeper UAV, will see reductions in requirement also remains to be seen. A number of analysts have argued that this general COTS approach should be adopted by the UK across the board, if considerable savings in the forward equipment plan are to be made.

As a result of budgetary pressures the MOD is also considering introducing an annual budget cycle as opposed to the current two-year planning round, just four years after its introduction. In April 2008 the MOD acknowledged:

The MOD is currently considering whether to launch a budget planning round in 2009. The Department has traditionally planned on an annual basis though we began to experiment with biannual spending rounds some years ago. We are still in the process of concluding the current planning round.⁴⁷⁹

Defence industry executives have, however, argued that this would effectively abandon part of the Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS), which was introduced by former procurement minister Lord Drayson to bring 'greater stability and discipline' to the process of planning an equipment budget, thereby helping the MoD to build long-term partnerships with industry on key programmes. The reversion to one-year planning is also expected to add further uncertainty to the procurement process and increase the MOD's flexibility to cut, change or delay deals, in the face of an estimated £2bn defence equipment budget shortfall.⁴⁸⁰ In response to this potential change Liam Fox, commented that "long-term planning has been abandoned in a panic attempt to plug the gaping hole in the defence budget".⁴⁸¹

An updated version of the Defence Industrial Strategy, DIS 2.0, is expected to be published later in 2008 to reflect the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review".⁴⁸² The conclusions of the equipment review and any decision on annual planning are considered likely to be incorporated into the conclusions and recommendations of that document.

⁴⁷⁷ "Labour's secret plans to slash the navy", *The Daily Telegraph*, 1 October 2007

⁴⁷⁸ "Navy is sinking under strain of ship and staff cuts, says chief", *The Times*, 13 November 2007

⁴⁷⁹ Official news blog of the Ministry of Defence, 14 April 2008:

http://www.blogs.mod.uk/defence_news/2008/week16/index.html

⁴⁸⁰ "Government to scrap two-year defence budgets", *The Financial Times*, 14 April 2008

⁴⁸¹ "Government 'panic' after £200m freed up for defence spending", *The Times*, 17 May 2008

⁴⁸² Ministry of Defence, *Defence Plan, including the Government's expenditure Plans 2008-2012*, Cm7385, June 2008

3. Personnel

While the 2007 CSR included spending amounting to £550m on improving Service accommodation, in addition to a pay rise for armed forces personnel, it has been argued that this does not go far enough to enable the military to recruit and retain vital manpower to sustain the current level of commitments and address the welfare issues arising out of the debate on the military covenant.

Lord Boyce commented in November 2007:

We need to recruit soldiers, sailors and airmen and we need to retain them when they come in. If people are seeing that the government is not prepared to support them properly then we're not going to get those recruits, we're not going to be able to retain people and we're not going to be able to deliver the commitment we should be giving to Afghanistan and indeed Iraq.⁴⁸³

Edmunds and Forster in their November 2007 DEMOS report also argue:

Defence planners have been preoccupied with the acquisition of expensive, high-tech military equipment, which has diverted resources away from where they are really needed in the defence structure – specifically in areas such as pay and terms and conditions of service, recruitment and training, and the welfare support (including housing) of the armed forces. Without service men and women who are well trained, highly motivated and willing to serve, there is no future for our armed forces. We believe that while high-tech equipment is important more attention and resources should be channelled to the human dimension of armed forces.⁴⁸⁴

Given the profile of the military covenant debate and the present political and public focus on the welfare of Service personnel, pressure for further funding to be allocated to Service accommodation, pay and allowances, compensation and healthcare is likely to continue. The outcome of the Service Personnel Command Paper and the review of the Reserves are also likely to shape this debate. How the MOD intends to fund any new initiatives announced as part of the recommendations of both those reviews remains to be seen.

In an interview in June 2008 the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard Dannatt, called for better pay for Service personnel, commenting:

If you compare a traffic warden and a police constable on overtime I think you will find that an individual serviceman gets paid quite a lot less.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸³ "Ex-chiefs demand more forces cash", *BBC News Online*, 8 November 2007

⁴⁸⁴ Tim Edmunds and Anthony Forster, *Out of Step: the case for change in the British Armed Forces*, November 2007, p.14

⁴⁸⁵ MoD defence news website:

<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/DefencePolicyAndBusiness/CgsDiscussesArmedForcesIssues.htm>

4. Prospects

Despite the considerable cost pressures identified above, and the extent of criticism levelled at the Government from the ex-Service chiefs, welfare organisations, coroners and the media, the overall prospect for greater spending on defence going forward would appear to be severely limited.

The current political climate is not considered conducive to significant increases in the defence budget. As noted by Professor Keith Hartley, historically in the UK “substantial and sustained increase in defence spending...can usually only occur in response to significant threat, eg rearmament prior to World War II and the Korean War”.⁴⁸⁶ An article in *The Times* in June 2008 also subscribed to this view:

During the Cold War a very direct relationship could be drawn between the threat posed by the Soviet Union and its allies and the security of the British homeland. The armed forces’ tasks in the contemporary security environment are generally more indirect or long term. In this context, the principle of self-defence as a determinant for legitimating military action is more difficult to establish than in the past...societal support for the armed forces’ operational deployments or for higher levels of defence spending may be harder to sustain.⁴⁸⁷

Public opinion is also not currently in favour of increasing spending on defence, with an IPSOS MORI poll showing that 33% of the British public think that the UK spends too little on defence, while 45% believe the current defence budget is the ‘right amount’ and 8% think it is too much. Increasing spending on other areas is considered of higher priority, particularly in relation to the NHS, education and schools, the police and even development aid for third world countries.⁴⁸⁸

Furthermore, the overall direction of government policy under Gordon Brown is to reduce public sector spending. Conservative Shadow Chancellor George Osborne has pledged that his party would match Labour’s overall spending limits until 2010-11. Arguably therefore the political will to pay is therefore lacking on both sides.

Prospects for significant increases in defence spending going forward, therefore, appear highly unrealistic. As Tim Edmunds and Anthony Forster have commented:

solutions will require a fundamental reassessment of what the armed forces are for, how they are organised and how they are best equipped for their mission.⁴⁸⁹

Yet an article in *Strategic Comments* recently concluded:

The strains resulting from the high level of operational commitments suggest that a defence budget higher than the UK’s current annual spend of £30bn could be

⁴⁸⁶ Professor Keith Hartley, “Defence industrial policy in a military alliance”, *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 43, No. 4, 2006

⁴⁸⁷ Timothy Edmunds & Anthony Forster, *Out of Step: the case for change in the British armed forces*, DEMOS, November 2007

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid

required if the capabilities demanded by successive policy statements are to be achieved and sustained, and if Britain is to maintain an interventionist foreign policy.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁹⁰ “British defence policy: a pivotal moment”, *Strategic Comments*, April 2007