

UK DEFENCE POLICY

RE-STRUCTURING THE ARMED FORCES FOR THE CHALLENGES OF THE FUTURE

The increase to public spending on defence announced by the UK Government in November 2020 is a critical investment following years of under resourcing of the military framework by successive governments. The initial premise of this Thought Piece is that the current structure of the UK Armed Forces remains outdated, however, and unsuitable for the challenges it will undoubtedly face in the contemporary – and the future – operating environment.

The new spending commitments now provide an opportunity to impose far reaching restructuring to make the military as relevant as it possibly can be, whilst being positioned to spend the new money wisely and effectively (military procurement being historically woeful and wasteful of taxpayer's money).

As this is a Thought Piece, principally designed to encourage debate, we have not looked in depth at every section of the Armed Forces, but have chosen to explain the future structure in outline whilst picking out some areas to develop further. A further paper early in 2021 will expand upon the organisational and technical specifics as well as examining the finances. What we have tried to achieve is to outline a considerably more capable force, able to project the UK's global interests whilst being capable of meaningful contribution at home. Although we do not specifically focus on the finances in this document the implication throughout is financial efficiency.

Nuclear

In headline, we propose not renewing Trident. We are not stating that the UK nuclear capability be scrapped. Trident should be continued until it is no longer fit for service, at least until the end of the decade. The replacement should then be a smaller, tactical capability with warheads carried by cruise missiles principally on board a larger fleet of Astute class submarines, as well as some capable of being launched from destroyers, some from on land and others by air, therefore creating a triad of delivery options.

Organisation

We also propose removing the distinctions of the Army, the Royal Navy (Including the Royal Marines) and the Royal Airforce. In their place we suggest creating a new, combined component organisation, with some similarities to the spectrum of roles embraced by the United States Marine Corps. This new, overall structure will avoid duplication of posts and competencies; create quicker lines of communication; standardisation of training and ethos; reduce the number and size of phase one, officer and staff training establishments; save money.

Maritime

The Navy will be at the forefront of deployments and force projection with the following core of ships in its fleet. (NB This list is not a complete inventory of naval and auxiliary forces):

- a. 3 Aircraft Carriers - 36 x F35B and 4 x helo, 250 marines - up from 2 carriers
- b. 3 Helicopter Carriers/troop carrier - replacement for HMS Ocean – 18 assorted helo, 750 marines (1000 overloaded), 50 vehicles – up from no helo carriers
- c. 18 Type 45 Destroyers – up from 12
- d. 18 Type 26 Frigates – up from 8
- e. 12 Astute Class Submarines – up from 7
- f. 3 LPD (replacement for 2 x Albion Class) – 80 assorted vehicles, 4 x helo, 750 marines (1000 overloaded)
- g. 12 River Class Patrol Vessels – an increase from 8
- h. 6 Minehunters – as now

Land

Land Forces will be restricted to nothing larger than 30 tonnes. With the majority being 10 tonnes. Brigades will be abolished and the following units will be created with 2 star divisional headquarters. Total size including the marines will be under 80,000 but not less than 75,000.

- a. Marine Division - 11000
- b. Airborne Division - 11000
- c. Medium Division - 30 tonnes – 7-8000
- d. Civil Division – 7-8000
- e. Special Forces - 2000
- f. London District - 2000
- g. Gurkha Force (Light Role) – 5000

Air

After the F35 we advise not acquiring or designing or manufacturing another manned fighter aircraft. Air forces will consist of both fixed and rotary. It is not ideal that we have acquired the F35B (as opposed to A and C variants) but now we have we propose sticking with the one variant for consistency of pilot training, spares and maintenance and general fleet management.

- a. 180 x F35B in 18 operational squadrons able to work from land or carrier
- b. 120 x C130J (some rolled as gunships and capable of launching a cruise missile)
- c. 24 x assorted A330 MRTT
- d. 60 x Bell Invictus or LM Raider X coaxial (apache replacement)
- e. 12 x V22 Osprey
- f. 120 x Chinook (or equivalent replacement)
- g. 45 x Predator replacements
- h. Various intelligence, training and other platforms

Special Operations

The recent announcement of the creation of an active cyber warfare unit is a move in the right direction. Command should not, however, be under either the current military nor CCHQ but a new organisation based on a re-establishment of the Special Operations Organisation. As well as conducting cyber operations, the organisation will be staffed, trained and equipped to conduct operations overseas in pursuit of UK interests and influence.