



NEWS RELEASE

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CREDIBILITY OF U.K. NUCLEAR DETERRENT COMPROMISED BY CUTS TO CONVENTIONAL FORCES

The Government is putting the credibility of Britain's nuclear deterrent in jeopardy by allowing serious gaps to open up in the nation's conventional military capabilities. This is the message from the UK National Defence Association (UKNDA), the independent group which seeks to stimulate public debate about the role of Britain's armed forces.

In the first in a new series of UKNDA commentaries, Vice-Admiral Sir Jeremy Blackham, a former Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff, argues that the Coalition Government's Strategic Defence & Security Review (SDSR) has created "highly significant capability gaps... which have unbalanced our force structure, and for which no solutions are yet fully identified, let alone funded." These weaknesses, he writes, "seriously undermine" the UK's deterrent strategy.

Whilst the Prime Minister has consistently restated the Government's commitment to nuclear deterrence, this is compromised by cuts to the manpower and equipment budgets of the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force. "To be credible, the nuclear deterrent must be underpinned by strong conventional deterrence", says Sir Jeremy.

"The Royal Navy is at its lowest level of personnel and ships for several centuries; the Army at its lowest level of manpower since the 18th Century, and the Royal Air Force personnel and aircraft are on a par with the 1920s." Military equipment today is very different from the past but British forces do not have enough. "The Type 45 Destroyer is astonishing; there are however just six of them. The Typhoon is a quantum jump in capability over its predecessors; but only some 30 could be sustained in a prolonged conflict."

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Already weakened by depleted equipment numbers and reduced manpower, any further defence cuts would have a potentially devastating effect. “The nuclear deterrent is not a substitute for conventional capabilities,” says Sir Jeremy. “The credibility of flexible response depends upon deferring any decision to use nuclear weapons until the very existence of the nation is at stake. This requirement means that conventional forces must always be of sufficient capability to deal with any lesser threat.”

If nuclear deterrence is to be “effective and credible to friend and foe alike, it must be part of a coherent overall defence strategy.” This strategy will require cross-party agreement in Parliament and the support of from all three armed services.

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Note for editors: The UK National Defence Association (UKNDA) was formed in 2007 to make the case for strong national defence and properly-resourced Armed Forces.

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