

## **Admiral Lord West of Spithead's speech in the House of Lords, 3rd December 2015**

My Lords, it is somewhat poignant that five years ago today the newly refitted [HMS "Ark Royal"](#) entered Portsmouth harbour for the last time to pay off, accompanied by her doomed [Sea Harriers](#). It was just one of the very poor decisions in [SDSR 2010](#), which has resulted in a 30% reduction in our nation's military capability since 2010.

Turning to today, the analysis of Britain's changing strategic environment in [SDSR 2015](#) is, I believe, largely sound. However, surprisingly, it fails to point out that we are an island, which seems fairly important in grand strategic terms. But [SDSR 2015](#) remains replete with the tensions that are inherent in Britain's taut defence budget. The slightest shock and/or commitment beyond what are now very limited defence planning assumptions could bring the entire [SDSR](#) edifice crashing down. Plus, everything is predicated on the assumption that the economy will continue to grow.

Our uniformed leaders are so relieved that there were no cuts in [SDSR 2015](#) that they welcome it as a triumph. Indeed, it is their duty to do so—that is their job. But much of the trumpeted new money is existing resources re-tagged. If one compares the 2015 defence accounting model with the 2009 defence accounting model, one sees that British defence expenditure is 1.7% of [GDP](#). This is because it includes so-called other, mainly non-military, items of expenditure that are within [NATO's](#) definition of defence expenditure but not within the traditional British definition.

The much-lauded £12 billion increase in the defence equipment budget will include up to £11 billion of efficiency savings. It involves cutting 30,000 MoD civilian posts, many of which were created after [SDSR 2010](#) to replace military personnel. Presumably, that will have a considerable impact.

[SDSR 2015](#) is still clearly resource driven, rather than strategy, threat or interest driven. It makes us marginally stronger but fails to recover the capability lost since 2010. Debt reduction is clearly still more important to the Government than defence, and the Treasury's continued grip on Britain's defence strategy reinforces the "how much threat can we afford?" culture that still permeates [Whitehall](#). That is somewhat surprising when one looks at an increasingly dangerous and chaotic world and thinks of things such as the decision made in the Commons last night.

[SDSR 2015](#) imposes considerable constraints on the Royal Navy. The surface fleet is already down to 19 escorts. As I have said, that is a national disgrace. [SDSR 2015](#) claims to want to preserve that number. However, it reduces the planned [Type 26](#) frigates from 13 to eight, with five less capable

further down the track, but there are no actual orders. What is the drum-beat of ship orders to ensure stability in our shipyards? I am sure that the noble Lord, Lord Sterling, will today mention the study he put in hand showing the value of orders and the need to maintain these sorts of orders. Will we run all the OPVs? I believe that we are heading towards a two-tier Navy by default. Is that what we want? Force projection does not escape, with the disgraceful withdrawal of HMS “Ocean” at only 20 years’ life. My plea to the [Minister](#) is that we must keep her in PxO and not get rid of or scrap her. It would be a disgrace to do that at that age.

I am delighted by the commitment to the deterrent and to replacing the submarines. However, as the noble Earl, Lord Attlee, said, there is a very real risk in running these boats on to 40 years old. That is presumably why there is such an increase in cost for the deterrent replacement: running 40 year-old submarines is dangerous and very costly. If we are having to do this, there is a gap in the build programme. Let us put in another Astute class—we can effectively get one for less than £200 million. Let us think laterally; that is the sort of thing that we need to do.

Even to crew the modest planned force, the Navy needs an additional 3,000 personnel—it has only 450. So SDSR 2015 scores six out of 10 in my book and the nation needs to spend more money on defence if we are to meaningfully support international security and stability.