

Patrons.

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Defence UK is an independent pressure group that campaigns for a strong and well resourced Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force to ensure the security of the United Kingdom, her sovereign territories, trade and commerce, and to protect her citizens wherever they may be. We also call for a greater commitment by the UK Government to the nation's defence industries, and to non military services such as the Merchant Navy, Coastguard, Border Control and Homeland Security that are essential to the defence of the realm.

### Submission to the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy by Defence UK

After years of underfunding Defence, this Review offers a golden opportunity for Britain to press the re-set button and ensure that the Defence of the Realm returns to its central position in public policy and spending commitments.

It should be clear to everyone now that we have, as a nation, neglected our Armed Forces and accordingly have lost much of our global influence as well as our capacity to provide effective security for the UK homeland, our trade and energy supply routes and our worldwide economic interests. The current Review is vital in reshaping our Defence policy and rebuilding our military capabilities; it can enable us to move our Armed Forces back to the top of the list of budget priorities.

However, it is worrying that indications are coming from within the Government that appear to suggest the primary goal of the Review is to overhaul the Ministry of Defence and to restructure the Civil Service at the MOD. If this is indeed the case then the Government is barking up the wrong tree. The weakness of UK Defence is down to years of funding cuts by HM Treasury which have squeezed our Forces and removed essential military capabilities.

We call on the Prime Minister and the Defence Secretary to give a firm assurance that the Review will lead to an increase in funding for Britain's Armed Forces, not further cuts or pointless and counterproductive tinkering with MOD administration. At present, funding is based on 2% of GDP. This is an arbitrary figure which was the highest NATO members could agree to. It is an unsatisfactory measure of spending but it seems to have become ingrained in defence thinking. The essential point is that 2% is not enough and should stand at 3% at the very least.

This appeal comes at a time of enormous financial upheaval and calls on the public purse caused by the Corona Virus, but it is at times like this that we have to reiterate the fundamental truth that without defence and security we have nothing. They must remain the first duty of the government come what may, something which the Prime Minister confirmed during the recent election campaign.

Five years ago the leading historian and Defence UK Vice President, Professor Andrew Roberts, gave a lecture entitled: "*Why Our Wars Are Never the Ones We Think They're Going to Be*". His words are as relevant today as then. We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past. The defence budget cannot be treated as something which can be cut to subsidise other government spending. Nor can we afford to reduce capability in one area simply to fund other areas which are considered to counter more likely threats.

Those conducting the review would do well to heed Professor Roberts when he said: "The only thing that is predictable in warfare is its unpredictability. As soon as experts, general staffs and politicians decide what they believe will be the nature of the next war in order to prepare for it properly, an entirely different kind of conflict develops. The witness of history is so uniform in this regard that it needs to become a general law of warfare. The war we expect and plan for is almost never the one we're called upon to fight. For all we know today, drones and satellites and cyber might be the Zeppelins or crossbows of the future, wildly overstated as war-winning weapons."

Our Patron, Lord West of Spithead, agreed when he recently observed that whilst our leading politicians recite the rubric that their greatest responsibility is the defence and security of the nation and its people worldwide, their actions belie this; some of them seem to imagine that future wars will be fought solely in cyberspace and that there's no need for military equipment. He considers that is dangerous nonsense, and we agree.

The immense growth in threats from cyber attack in our increasingly digitised world must definitely be confronted, but as an addition to our capability, not instead of it.

The country needs the hard power to back up our soft power. This includes nuclear weapons; a globally deployable military capability, world-class intelligence services, and membership of military alliances.

There have been poor procurement decisions resulting in financial waste. The reason for this must be investigated but reducing capability to pay for past errors is sheer folly when it affects the nation's security. Some of these problems stem from procurement decisions being made for political reasons rather than seeking out good quality and value for money. A good example of this is the recent procurement of the Forth Class offshore patrol vessels. Appledore Shipyards built similar ships for the Irish Navy for about one third the price the MOD paid BAE Systems for ships at least one of which needed immediate rectification of defects once completed. The order was needed by BAE Systems to try and ensure their shipyard stayed in business. This may, or may not, be disputed but if orders are going to be placed for political reasons, the extra cost should not be a burden on the defence budget.

Our armed forces are deservedly famous for their humanitarian work around the world, whether it be during medical emergencies or natural disasters. It has been suggested that the cost of this should fall on the International Aid budget, something which Defence UK would support.

We were late in responding to Iranian action in the Straits of Hormuz. The subsequent force deployed is insufficient. We need more than two ships constantly on patrol in the Straits to avert another attack on one of our tankers. In 1998 it was decided that 32 escort ships were needed by the Royal Navy, and that figure was considered too low by most. We now have 17, possibly dropping to 15 if rumoured delays to the new frigates are true.

This is far too small a number as is being proved on an almost daily basis. In addition the building of the new aircraft carriers, and their retention, has been wrongly criticised.

“It is unfortunate that the term Strike Carrier is now being used to describe vessels that were previously called Fleet Carriers. As a part of a balanced fleet they are so much more than a strike machine. They are a convenient airfield that, when required, can be used to support Britain's new Strike Brigades when they are deployed to foreign parts while, at the same time, providing a safe haven to which those forces can be evacuated, should the need arise.” (Defence UK Director, Fred Dupuy, from ‘Utility of the Carrier’ [www.defenceuk.org](http://www.defenceuk.org))

We do not want it thought that we are only concerned about the Royal Navy, but in debates about expenditure it tends to loom large because of the cost of equipment and the time taken to build the ships required.

What happens when equipment for the Army is not updated was tragically shown when they and the Royal Marines were sent to Afghanistan with vehicles which were not up to the job. Similarly, the Royal Air Force lost the capability to patrol the oceans for over 10 years and is only now, and too slowly, receiving the new planes it needs. They have recently been conducting operations in the Middle East flying 40 year old aircraft.

Defence UK has expressed grave concern about Armed Forces numbers following press reports of planned cuts and speculation in the media that the British Army, already its smallest in 200 years, could be squeezed even further to just 60,000 personnel.

If these leaks from the MOD are accurate, it is alarming that anyone in government is even remotely contemplating these crippling reductions in the size of the Army. In an increasingly dangerous world situation, in which our security is directly threatened by a variety of rogue states, terrorist networks, and piracy on the high seas, it is vital that we boost all three of our Armed Services.

Cutting back on either the Royal Navy, the Army or the Royal Air Force at this time would be the height of folly. Numbers are important and at present our forces are all chronically undermanned and under-resourced. The absolute focus of the MOD at this time should be on recruiting, training and retaining people in our Armed Forces, not on finding areas of the defence budget to trim.

The Conservative party Manifesto at the General Election stressed that: “The Security of our Nation comes First”. Defence UK naturally agrees with this and what we have laid out in this submission is a broad outline of what we think should underlie the government’s attitude to the defence of the realm.

David J Wedgwood

Chairman, Defence UK, on behalf of the Board of Directors

([www.defenceuk.org](http://www.defenceuk.org))