

Liberal Democrats Policy Consultation

Defence

Consultation Paper 110



Background

This consultation paper is presented as the first stage in the development of new Party policy in relation to Defence. It does not represent agreed Party policy. It is designed to stimulate debate and discussion within the Party and outside; based on the response generated and on the deliberations of the working group a full policy paper will be drawn up and presented to Conference for debate.

The paper has been drawn up by a working group appointed by the Federal Policy Committee and chaired by Dr. Julie Smith. Members of the group are prepared to speak on the paper to outside bodies and to discussion meetings organised within the Party.

Comments on the paper, and requests for speakers, should be addressed to: Bess Mayhew, Defence Working Group, Policy Unit, Liberal Democrats, 8-10 Great George Street, London, SW1P 3AE. Email: Bess.Mayhew@libdems.org.uk.

Comments should reach us as soon as possible, and no later than 8 April 2013.

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Britain's Place in the World

1.1 The UK has a history as a global power, willing and able to deploy considerable military power far beyond Europe. The modern role of the UK has resulted from the end of World War 2, the subsequent Cold War and the evolution of European unity. The UK is member of the European Union (EU) and of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and plays a global military and security role as a close military and foreign policy ally of the US, with permanent overseas bases in the South and Mid Atlantic, Eastern and Western Mediterranean, as well as temporary arrangements in the Arabian Gulf. It has been actively engaged in military interventions in a range of countries over the last decade, notably Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, and could be called upon to act in Syria, the Straits of Hormuz or various parts of Africa.

1.2 The UK is, along with France, a leading defence player in the EU and one of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). It has established significant bilateral relationships with some of its EU partners, notably France, and has also maintained relations with most of its former colonial regions and its protectorates, including the Commonwealth countries, and has military alliances that include Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

1.3 The UK is thus one of a handful of countries with global military and foreign policy reach. The result is military expenditure which is the fourth largest in the world, despite the fact that the UK's economy is only the 7th largest and is in relative decline. Meanwhile, emerging powers, notably India and China, will increasingly play a global role, including militarily, and the US increasingly sees its foreign policy priorities to be towards the Pacific rather than the Atlantic.

1.4 Despite these profound changes to the security context, the UK's role in the world has barely been re-assessed since the end of the Cold War and collapse of Communism in Europe over two decades ago. Its military and foreign policy strategies and plans have evolved incrementally in response to a range of factors, domestic and international, including *inter alia* the demands of the defence industry, rather than reflecting a clear strategic vision.

1.5 Liberal Democrats believe, therefore, that the time has come to re-evaluate the UK's place in the world. In doing so, we need to consider what role the UK should seek to play and the resources it requires to play that role.

1.6 This section will address the role the UK aspires to play, while subsequent sections will consider associated issues, including alliances, bilateral and multilateral (the EU, NATO and Commonwealth), providing the context for our specific defence deliberations and policy, as our ambitions for our place in the world will affect the defence decisions we make and the budgetary options we need to consider.

1.7 In the context of defence specifically we need to consider:

Questions

1. What role should Britain play in the world? To what extent should the UK aspire to be a leading global power in line with its trade interests?
2. What is the place of military as opposed to 'soft' power in defence? How best can the UK utilise both its 'hard' and 'soft' power capabilities?
3. Under what circumstances, and on the basis of which criteria, should the UK seek to intervene either alone or with allies? Is a UN mandate always essential?
4. To what extent should the UK seek to engage in conflict prevention ahead of peace-keeping or peace-making? And what impact will this have for defence policy, force structure, capabilities and procurement?

Threats

2.1 The UK is in a stable region of the world and no longer faces an existential enemy, nor is it likely to engage in wars of survival. But it has a powerful stake in political stability in regions beyond Europe. Thus the potential threats the UK faces are wide-ranging, multi-faceted and extremely difficult to predict.

2.2 The 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) offered the following Risk Assessment of threats to the UK over the next five to 20 years, where each tier below takes account of plausibility, impact on society and immediacy.

TIER ONE

International terrorism affecting the UK or its interests, including a Chemical, Biological, Radiological or Nuclear (CBRN) attack by terrorists, and/or a significant increase in the levels of **terrorism relating to Northern Ireland**.

Hostile attacks upon UK cyber space by other states and large scale cyber crime.

A **major accident or natural hazard** which requires a national response, such as severe coastal flooding affecting three or more regions of the UK, or an influenza epidemic.

An **international military crisis** between states, drawing in the UK and its allies as well as other states and non-state actors.

TIER TWO

An attack on the UK or its Overseas Territories by another state or proxy using **CBRN weapons**.

Risk of **major instability, insurgency or civil war overseas** which creates an environment that terrorists can exploit to threaten the UK.

A significant increase in the level of **organised crime** affecting the UK.

Severe **disruption to information received, transmitted or collected by satellites**, possibly as the result of a deliberate attack by another state.

TIER THREE

A large scale **conventional military attack on the UK** by another state (not involving the use of CBRN weapons) resulting in fatalities and damage to infrastructure within the UK.

A **significant increase** in the level of **terrorists, organised criminals, illegal immigrants and illicit goods trying to cross the UK border** to enter the UK.

Disruption to oil or gas supplies to the UK, or price instability, as a result of war, accident, major political upheaval or deliberate manipulation of supply by producers.

A **major release of radioactive material from a civil nuclear site** within the UK which affects one or more regions.

A **conventional attack by a state on another NATO or EU member** to which the UK would have to respond.

An **attack on a UK overseas territory** as the result of a sovereignty dispute or a wider regional conflict.

Short to medium term **disruption to international supplies of resources** (e.g. food, minerals) essential to the UK.

Source: 2010 National Security Strategy, Cabinet Office

2.3 The NSS identifies terrorism as 'the most pressing' threat to national security; not the greatest, but the most immediate. However, it fails to note that many of the identified risks are intrinsically connected – for instance, international terrorism (Tier One) is enabled in part through the cyber domain (Tier One) as is organised crime (Tier Two), and the threat of disruption to energy supplies (Tier Three) may stem from a terrorism campaign.

2.4 A look back over the last 30 years suggests that few of the international crises in which the UK has been involved were predicted. Over the next thirty years, the UK could face far greater challenges than those identified in the NSS. These could include the loss of political influence in regions from which we buy our energy and renewed military competition between the great and emerging powers, which would probably have a much longer lasting impact on British security than an IRA splinter group or Al Qaeda-inspired attack. Arguably, energy security (the price of energy and its availability) should be seen as a greater threat – not just to Britain's overall security but to our values as well as we seek energy from unstable and/or undemocratic states.

2.5 Given the UK's enduring doctrine of collective defence since the end of the WW2, it is also curious that the NSS does not examine the potential weakening of NATO, the EU or even the 'special relationship' with the US as possible threats to British security.

2.6 Finally, it is important to consider the extent to which the UK faces security threats that are not faced by our European or trans-Atlantic partners. The closer our interests are, the greater the opportunities for cooperation, role specialisation and joint procurement, albeit with the potential downside that role specialisation can lead to dependence on others who may prove not to be dependable.

Questions:

5. *What are the current and emerging threats against which the UK should be preparing? How urgent and how significant are they? Is the NSS's assessment adequate?*
6. *To what extent, if at all, does the UK face military and security challenges that are not also faced by our EU and NATO allies?*
7. *At present, UK risk assessments do not factor in its relationship with the US. Should they?*

Institutions

UK decision-making and governance in military and security matters

3.1 The UK system of governance of defence and security matters is prescribed in a set of quasi-constitutional rules and legislation, which are complex in the way they work together, and circumscribed by international treaties.

3.2 The House of Commons' Political & Constitutional Reform Committee concluded that "There is an urgent need for greater clarity on Parliament's role in decisions to commit British forces to armed conflict abroad".¹ The Committee's recommendations widened the scope of proposed reforms to include all significant military conflicts. The Committee also raised the question of the extent to which such reforms would need to be reconciled with treaty obligations in military and security matters and on democratic governance.

3.3 A further issue concerns the internal advice to Ministers from civil servants. The UK does not have a civil service law which limits the role of ministers and civil servants. A new Manual for Cabinet decision-making drafted in 2011 makes no reference to the decision to go to war.

Questions

8. *Should the UK establish statutory rules for the governance of armed conflict?*
9. *Is there sufficient civilian control over military and security decision-making and resource management? Should decisions to go to war be debated and approved by Parliament?*
10. *Does the need for flexibility in military and security decision-making when the nation is under imminent and surprise threat, override the need for democratic control?*
11. *Is a full civil service law describing the relative roles of ministers and defence officials necessary or desirable?*

The Ministry of Defence (MOD), FCO, DfID, the Armed Forces and efficient operational structures

3.4 Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrated the need for military expertise combined with political and foreign policy expertise and development/institution-building know-how. The MOD, the Armed Forces, FCO and DfID all have distinct cultures. Working together presents challenges in communications and the establishment of common goals and compatible methods.

3.5 Within the MOD, a key institutional reform has been in centralising both back office and front-line services functions, and combining forces from the Royal Air Force (RAF), the Royal Navy and Army for deployment when fast reaction multi-service forces are needed.

3.6 Today the new Joint Forces Command nominally has 30,000 personnel, including overseas bases, training, medical, cyber operations and terrorism, Special Forces, and headquarters

¹ *Cabinet Manual* – Political and Constitutional Reform Committee Sixth Report of Session 2010-11 Vol. I – Report ordered by the House of Commons, 22 March 2011.

functions. However the extent to which forces have been combined has been less than originally planned.

Questions

12. *How could the MOD, FCO and DfID work more efficiently and effectively together? What changes would be required to bring this about?*
13. *Are internal reforms of the MOD necessary or desirable? If so, what should they include?*
14. *Given the need for more operational efficiency and the further savings measures, is the current three-service structure the best way of meeting the threats, or could the rise of joint structures offer an opportunity to reorganise our Armed Forces?*

Security, intelligence & special forces cooperation, and UK institutions

3.7 The UK has several intelligence and special operations institutions - SIS (external intelligence), SS (domestic and counter-intelligence), Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ, for global electronic intelligence), and DI (military intelligence, within the MoD). Within the SS there is the Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre (JTAC) which provides advice to the private sector and government. Within DI there is the Joint Force Intelligence Group (JFIG) which is focused on intelligence gathering.

3.8 The 1994 Intelligence Services Act put intelligence services on a formal legal footing via parliament and formalised a system of UK governance for the intelligence services, including the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), which provides executive oversight, and the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament, which provides 'democratic scrutiny'.

3.9 Liberal Democrats believe there should have been reforms in the wake of the 2003 Iraq war, including steps to ensure that UK security institutions did not appear to 'promote' war in cooperation with the US and reforms to strengthen accountability and the broad mechanisms for ensuring sound policy and objectivity, in the UK national interest.

3.10 Liberal Democrats note the increasing use of unmanned aircraft ('drones') by the US and other armed forces both for reconnaissance and for offensive action, and that the United States has engaged in the extensive use of drones in 'targeted killings', particularly in Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Yemen.

Questions

15. *Are intelligence and special operations structures in need of reform? Are there too many organisations and do they need to be streamlined?*
16. *Should there be more accountability of UK security institutions?*
17. *What safeguards should exist in the increasing practice of using intelligence subcontractors in the UK and overseas often staffed by former intelligence officers?*
18. *Under what circumstances and subject to what controls should the use of drones be permitted?*

Alliances, Bilateral and Small Group Cooperation

NATO and the Transatlantic Relationship

4.1 The UK is a key member of NATO, which has evolved into a global 'Western' organization over the last two decades. Two sets of events have changed the landscape of NATO: military intervention in Kosovo under the justification of "Responsibility to Protect", which led to the development of the EU's rapid reaction force; secondly, NATO involvement 'out of area' in Afghanistan and subsequently in Libya. Moreover, as already noted, the traditional lynchpin of NATO, the US, increasingly sees the Pacific as a greater foreign policy priority than Europe.

4.2 The US has been the UK's close global partner since 1945. Direct liaison exists at almost every level of defence between the two countries. The UK hosts the joint electronic listening facility at GCHQ, which is closely associated with the National Security Agency (NSA) in the US. The US has increasingly pursued a policy of 'full spectrum dominance' in a unipolar post-Cold War world, assisted by the UK. A key issue is the extent to which full participation in US foreign and defence policy puts the UK at particular risk compared with the risks of policy detachment from the US.

4.3 Defence cooperation raises a variety of issues that affect the UK's defence choices, including: inter-operability; pooling of resources; coordination of assets and the distinction between earmarking and assignment of forces; ballistic missile defence; and the interpretation in practice of Article 5 of the NATO Treaty (an attack on one is an attack on all).

Questions

19. *Is NATO fit for purpose? If not, should it be reformed, replaced or disbanded?*
20. *Should NATO concentrate more on conflict prevention?*
21. *How close should the UK be to the US on foreign policy and defence matters, including on issues like ballistic missile defence?*
22. *Given potential changes that may arise as a result of reforms to the US-UK relationship in security and military matters, should the treaties and agreements between the UK and US be reviewed by parliament?*

The UK and the United Nations

4.4 Some argue that the UK's special place in global governance as one of five permanent members of the UN Security Council (UNSC) requires global military reach and justifies our relatively large defence spending. Often the UN has been unable to act in a peace-making role due to a lack of political will and funding, as well as constraints imposed by structure and expertise.

4.5 Liberal Democrats have traditionally supported the role of the United Nations and the development of international law, for example citing the lack of a UN mandate for the Second Iraq War. How to strengthen and reform the UN generally is outside the scope of this paper, but the deployment of British forces in support of it is not.

Questions

23. *Should the UK expand its military role in UN mandates, for example in humanitarian interventions which require military assets and organization?*

The UK and the EU

[NB: This section should be considered in light of a parallel consultation paper by the Party's Europe Working Group; further discussion of the UK-EU nexus can be found in the sections on Capabilities and Procurement in this document.]

4.6 The global financial and Eurozone crises and the US's re-prioritisation to the Pacific mean it is timely for the UK to reassess its links with its European neighbours. Current policies are highly inefficient with each member pursuing an individual posture on defence and many member states simply opting out of major defence spending on the assumption that other members will shoulder the burden. The effective development of a common European defence policy, while presenting political challenges, could offer considerable advantages. What institutions, protocols, specialisms, division of labour and capabilities should we seek in the EU with respect to defence policy?

Questions

24. *Should the UK seek bilateral and multilateral agreements on defence cooperation with some EU members? Which ones?*
25. *Should a centrally funded EU military command structure with common procurement of equipment be a long term aspiration?*
26. *Should the doctrine of costs lying where they fall be reviewed?*

The Commonwealth

4.7 The UK has many less formal but strong emotional ties around the world. UK interests, as opposed to commitments, are truly worldwide. We have grown to rely on sea trade over centuries for our food, energy and our wealth. This marks out the UK from many other states which mainly rely on internal or regional trade. The Five Power Agreement is one arrangement which maintains formal military links right into the Pacific Ocean.

27. *What emphasis should the UK place on maintaining and fostering military links and mutual defence treaties with friendly commonwealth countries in order to help protect its commercial and cultural interests worldwide?*

Capabilities – Current and Required

5.1 In keeping with its policy of sustaining a leading presence in defence and security matters, the UK has sought to retain a balanced military capability able to operate across the full spectrum of envisaged operations. In particular, the UK has an 'expeditionary' capability, able to deploy significant forces overseas, by sea and/or by air in a way few other countries can.

5.2 However, the rising cost of defence and a (relatively) declining economy have resulted in the UK scaling back all three services, thereby reducing deployable capabilities. There are thus a growing number of capability gaps where varying degrees of risk are taken. Given that the UK almost invariably operates with allies, delivering the right level of interoperability with the armed forces of such allies is essential. NATO has set interoperability standards which its members strive to meet. Moreover, the policy of operating alongside the US has often compelled the UK to sustain additional levels of air and maritime interoperability to match US innovation and technological advantage. Enhanced interoperability of land forces may also be needed.

5.3 Future capability needs will clearly be driven by decisions regarding the UK's place in the world. Were the UK to opt to reduce its nuclear deterrent capability without withdrawing from its world role, a more robust conventional posture with enhanced or new capabilities might be affordable. Alternatively, a scaling back to a medium regional power posture could put more emphasis on near defence with only limited intervention capabilities. A clear view of capabilities, actual and desired, is thus essential to planning procurement.

5.4 It may be that there is little appetite in the UK to engage in another Afghanistan-type mission, but current defence plans mean the UK could be ill-equipped for such a mission in any case. Much new equipment would have to be (re-)acquired and skills re-learned if we were to conduct another counter-insurgency campaign.

5.5 Turning to force structures, the rise of joint organisations has significantly recast the organisational landscape, yet the single services continue to dominate career patterns and tribal allegiances are often cited as causes of friction and inefficiency.

5.6 The Territorial Army (TA) is a large organisation of 30,000. It has enough infantry battalions, armoured reconnaissance regiments and artillery units to furnish three or four brigades. However, they are not deployed in this role. Instead, thanks to their professionalism and commitment, increasing numbers of individuals within our reserves play a full part in the defence of the nation, serving alongside regulars on deployment to places such as Iraq and Afghanistan in accordance with the One Army concept. In the field, TA soldiers are soon indistinguishable from the regulars. TA Field Hospitals have been part of the rotation for Afghanistan for some time. These units are the lead unit in the hospital when on tour, and most of the field hospitals have now done more than one tour. In 2011 the Government announced that an extra £1.5bn was to be spent on the reserves, spread over 10 years and increasing the TA budget from £450m to £600m pa. Nonetheless the TA will comprise 25% of the Army's manpower but will still receive only about 5% of its budget.

Questions

28. *Are the military tasks and defence planning assumptions as set out in the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) appropriate?*
29. *To what extent should Britain aspire to having 'full-spectrum' conventional military capabilities versus role-specialisation with other countries?*
30. *How would capability requirements change if the UK opted to withdraw from its global role and reconfigure for near defence with a minimalist intervention posture?*
31. *Do the Armed Forces have the right mix of capabilities to execute their defence tasks?*
32. *What capability gaps do UK forces currently face?*
33. *How closely should the UK shadow US interoperability requirements? Should NATO interoperability standards be the goal? What is the optimal scale and division of capabilities for NATO members in the 21st Century?*
34. *How might reserves (including RAF and Navy reserves) be better utilised within the Armed Forces? Can they reliably substitute for depleted numbers of regular forces? Should we invest more in the Territorial Army?*

Trident

6.1 The UK is one of the world's few declared nuclear powers. The British nuclear deterrent system consists of four Vanguard submarines on 24 hour patrol, each carrying no more than eight Trident D-5 missiles armed with a total of 40 nuclear warheads. The overall nuclear stockpile consists of no more than 180 weapons, of which no more than two-thirds are 'operationally available'. Of all nuclear powers, the UK is unique in that it only has one (sea-borne) method of delivery.

6.2 Given that the 2010 National Security Strategy deemed state-on-state nuclear war a 'Tier Two' threat, it is timely to re-assess whether the Trident-based nuclear weapons system is either necessary or appropriate, and certainly whether it merits a seemingly 'Tier One' level of ideological and financial commitment. Even if the decision is to retain Trident, there are questions surrounding the appropriate capabilities, including whether the UK should continue to operate at high readiness with boats on patrol continuously.

6.3 Current Liberal Democrat policy is to oppose like-for-like replacement of Trident, the final 'Main Gate' decision for which will be made in 2016. We secured a Cabinet Office review of alternatives in the Coalition Agreement. This work is due to be completed in the first half of 2013 and the Defence Working Group will consider its findings in the later stages of our work.

Questions

35. *Threats: what are the credible threats to the UK (over the next 50 years, say) that a nuclear deterrent might counter?*
36. *Should the UK continue to be a nuclear power? What advantages come from maintaining a nuclear deterrent? What geopolitical calculations inform arguments for maintaining or downgrading the UK's current nuclear deterrent?*
37. *Is the current Trident-based system appropriate for the 21st century?*
38. *Should the UK scale down the nuclear deterrent, or disarm completely? What are the associated advantages and disadvantages?*

Defence Expenditure and Procurement

7.1 Defence expenditure was cut in the UK as in many other states at the end of the Cold War, and is currently about 2% of GDP. As we reconsider the UK's role in the world, it is timely to reflect on the total defence expenditure as well as the type of capabilities we possess. We may wish to keep total defence spending at 2% of GDP but review our capabilities if we engage in role specialisation or cut spending levels and capabilities, and much will depend on the final decision on Trident alternatives. Beyond this lies a politically and financially sensitive set of questions regarding the sectors for which we believe the UK should retain onshore industrial capability and what we are happy to source from the global market. There is a complex trade-off between domestic economy, value-for-money in defence procurement and access to technology. We also need to consider whether we can access industrial capacity through closer cooperation with close allies, notably within the EU, through joint procurement, although this does not inevitably ensure lower costs. Alternatively, the pooling and sharing concept espoused by the EU in the Ghent Initiative could offer a way of reducing costs and enhancing aggregate defence capabilities in Europe, as well as enhancing inter-operability.

7.2 Overseas sales of defence equipment not only help to offset the capital cost of development, but also generate economies of scale which reduce unit costs in the UK. However, while the UK has done much in recent years to improve its record on arms sales, concerns persist about the ultimate end use of equipment, components, spares and training especially in the Middle East. Additionally issues continue about linkages between arms sales and UK aid, for example in India. Further progress by the UK government on the Arms Trade Treaty is expected but continued monitoring is required in areas of concern such as the sale of equipment for torture and for execution. A truly ethical policy may need the appointment of an independent reviewer to oversee the operation of the export licensing system.

7.3 In recent years, defence procurement has been synonymous with cost overruns and late or non-delivery of major projects. The 2009 Gray report said: "The Ministry of Defence has a substantially overheated equipment programme, with too many types of equipment being ordered for too large a range of tasks at too high a specification. This programme is unaffordable on any likely projection of future budgets. Effective forums do not currently exist to allow top down guidance to control the evolution of the equipment programme."

7.4 Despite some improvements in procurement practice, the legacy of past decisions will impact defence capability for decades to come. The SDSR has balanced the procurement programme in the short term, partly by accepting gaps in certain capabilities, but the lack of change in the scope and scale of commitment to military tasks means that budgetary problems in the medium and long term remain.

7.5 Large scale defence procurement projects require complex processes and strong leadership. Problems arise from lack of suitably-qualified staff in Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S), the influence of (and rivalry between) the forces, secrecy/'commercial confidentiality', the influence of the domestic and foreign defence manufacturing sectors, pressure from military partners such as the USA, and the tendency for 'monopolistic' suppliers to hold the government

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over a barrel. These points of influence and their ability to create divergence from the national interest should be factored in to any well-managed procurement process and system.

7.6 Political and military priorities may differ. In hard times governments may seek cuts in defence by delaying in-service dates and spreading expenditure over more years, which in turn can increase costs. The Treasury may call for a whole project to be resubmitted and the cycle can start again. The increasing need for software based systems also presents a significant challenge for current procurement processes

7.7 The success of procurement reform is mixed. There is an unresolved tension between, on the one hand, a drive to reduce costs through open procurement, with increased buying off the shelf and the resulting reliance on overseas technology and, on the other hand, the desire to maintain UK-based industry, including the associated research and development (R&D) expenditure, for strategic and economic reasons. Underlying this quandary is the fact that the UK defence market is too small to sustain an indigenous manufacturing capability without some form of subsidy. This could be addressed by an increase in multi-national procurement, but this presents significant difficulties.

7.8 The Levene reforms currently being implemented may provide greater clarity of authority and responsibility at the expense of strengthening the influence of individual Services on procurement, which in turn may weaken coherent defence procurement. Potential conversion of DE&S into a government-owned, contractor-operated entity (GOCO), a policy supported by Liberal Democrats, has the potential to solve the skills problem and improve some business processes, but other structural problems may remain.

7.9 The Gray report recommended a Strategic Defence Review be held in the first session of a new Parliament with the reviews enshrined in statute, the output published, fully costed and audited, and to include 10-year defence and 20-year equipment budgets. Also a rolling 10 year budget should be agreed for the MoD to be enshrined in law.

Questions

39. *In light of our membership of NATO and other international commitments, should the UK maintain defence expenditure at 2% of GDP?*
40. *How do we better ensure that the capabilities demanded by contemporary operations are brought into mainstream programming?*
41. *Is the UK getting the best value for money in its defence expenditure? What changes are required to improve delivery and reduce cost over-runs?*
42. *How can we ensure that DE&S has sufficient staff with the skills necessary to do the job?*
43. *What scope is there for 'pooling and sharing' and joint procurement with EU or other states?*
44. *How far should the UK take human rights considerations into account before exporting defence products?*
45. *What processes should the UK be putting in place to ensure transparency of the export licensing system?*
46. *What is the best approach to identifying the need for equipment and to procuring and/or decommissioning it?*
47. *How can we reconcile short-term political and economic policies with the need for long-term planning in procurement?*

Forces' Welfare Issues

8.1 The men and women who choose to serve our country in our Armed Forces are the backbone of British defence. They are ready to put their lives on the line for the sake of their fellow citizens. It is upon their bravery, commitment and resourcefulness that the defence of our nation rests. We ask a huge amount of those who serve and it is right that we reward them properly for the work they do and continue to support them once they leave the services. Liberal Democrats have been firm advocates of the Military Covenant, now enshrined in law as the Armed Forces Covenant. We now need to consider the practical policies we should adopt to ensure we deliver on our commitments.

8.2 In recent years, criticisms has been raised that our military personnel have not been properly rewarded with the pay and conditions they deserve; that they have had to put up with sub-standard housing; that they have been over-stretched by rotating into conflict zones too often; that there is insufficient support given to those service personnel seeking to leave the forces; and that support for veterans' welfare is often left to charities rather than the Government. These issues have been compounded in recent years by anxiety about cuts in the numbers of service personnel, including cases of redundancies very shortly before due retirement dates, raising particular concerns about disparity in the way different members of the Armed Forces and veterans may be treated.

8.3 Liberal Democrats believe that the welfare of the men and women of our armed forces should be a high priority and recognise the importance of ensuring that they are properly manned and equipped and that the Services are stable.

Questions

48. *How effective is the Armed Forces Pay Review Body, which is the independent organisation that reviews and decides the pay bands of service personnel?*
49. *How many deployments of up to six months' duration into conflict zones should we expect of our service personnel within any two-year period?*
50. *What can be done to support individuals as they make the transition from the military to civilian life?*

The Armed Forces Covenant

8.4 The core principle of the Armed Forces Covenant that 'members of the Armed Forces Community do not suffer disadvantages as a result of their service and that they receive special treatment as appropriate' has been enshrined in law as part of the Armed Forces Act. This recognises the moral obligation of the Nation to the wider Service family, embracing the involvement of Government together with voluntary and private sector organisations. It ensures a regular review of government policies through the presentation of an annual report to Parliament providing an opportunity for detailed scrutiny and greater public transparency of any failure to deliver.

8.5 This is a significant achievement by the Coalition Government. However, it is only the core principles that are enshrined in statutory legislation; the specific standards of the Covenant in

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respect of terms and conditions of service, healthcare, housing, education and other welfare objectives are not.

51. Should additional legislation be introduced in respect of safeguarding specific areas such as health support and housing?

Veterans and representation of the wider Service family

8.6 Veteran groups continue to experience difficulty in getting their voice heard. There is a lack of co-ordination across ministerial departments in addressing the myriad of outstanding welfare issues and a lack of co-ordination and prioritisation between Service Charities. Veterans' groups thus believe that the MOD in particular requires more independent scrutiny in respect of how it addresses such issues. A Veterans' Tsar, Lord Ashcroft, was appointed in summer 2012 but it is not clear that he will coordinate these competing groups and issues.

8.7 When personnel end their careers, either through a planned end of service or prematurely through illness, injury, disciplinary or other reasons, their healthcare passes over to the NHS. There is no resettlement provision for those who have served for four years or fewer, so some of these veterans end up homeless, jobless or in the criminal justice system. For those who need access to healthcare, there is priority service only to secondary care, and often only lip service is paid to this. Veterans requiring access to specialist mental health services encounter a patchwork of services, varying in quality and appropriateness.

Questions

52. How best can we ensure adequate provision of specialist veterans' services throughout the United Kingdom?

53. Should a distinguished and well-respected figure, a 'Veterans' Tsar', be appointed to champion and co-ordinate the issues of those who have served, their families and next of kin, or is some other body more appropriate?

Health Support

8.8 There is agreement across political parties that the Armed Forces should enjoy the same standard of access to healthcare as that received by any UK citizen. Personnel injured on operations should be treated in conditions which recognise the specific needs of Service personnel. The families of Service personnel should retain their relative position on any NHS waiting list if moved around the UK due to the Service individual being posted. Veterans should receive priority treatment within the NHS, in both primary and secondary care, where it relates to a condition resulting from their Service, subject to clinical need. Those injured in Service, whether physically or mentally, should be cared for in a way that reflects the Nation's obligation to them, while respecting that individual's wishes.

8.9 The establishment of the Naval Service Recovery Pathway and the Army Recovery Capability Personnel Units have been successful in enabling the return of injured service personnel

back to duty or the transition to civilian life. These organisations are joint ventures between the MOD, Help for Heroes and the Royal British Legion. However, concerns have been raised about the extent to which charitable organisations are being relied upon. This is an area that may become more apparent once withdrawal of combat forces from Afghanistan has been achieved, expected to be in 2014.

8.10 Deployed troops need to be fit for task, both physically and mentally. At present there is no mental health screening for personnel joining any of the branches of the military, neither is there routine mental health screening before or after deployment. This policy is at odds with virtually all our NATO and PfP (Partnership for Peace) allies. A recent development, following the 2010 'Fighting Fit' paper by Conservative MP and now Defence Minister Andrew Murrison, is the introduction of a brief enhanced mental health assessment at key stages in the career of service personnel, although this is somewhat controversial. The US are currently funding a small study of post-deployment screening which is due to report next year

8.11 Currently, all serving personnel can access an occupational mental health service, provided by the military and located in all the major Navy bases, Army garrisons and RAF stations, although there is no 24-hour service apart from the 24-hour Combat Stress helpline (operated by Rethink) and access to the 'Big White Wall'. Secondary mental health care is currently provided through a MoD contract with a civilian network of eight NHS Trusts around the country.

Questions

54. *How can adequate provision of health care for those who serve, their families and those who have served best be delivered?*
55. *Should there be realignment in respect of the provision of support for injured service personnel and veterans?*
56. *How can we best ensure proper care for serving personnel and veterans with mental health problems related to their service? Should there be routine mental health screening of all recruits on initial entry into the Armed Forces and at regular periods thereafter right through a servicewoman's or serviceman's career?*
57. *Should there be 24-hour military mental health provision and access to military owned, managed and staffed units, for both physical and mental health care?*
58. *What should be the limit of the role of charities in providing care for injured service personnel?*

Housing

8.12 There is a commitment under the Armed Forces Covenant that entitled serving personnel should receive good quality, affordable and suitably located accommodation. Defence Estates have been delivering top-notch single living accommodation blocks with state-of-the-art services. Brand new family homes fit for the 21st century are also being completed. However, the difficult financial climate and delayed budgets have seen the roll out of the modernisation programme being affected resulting in many single soldiers and married families continuing to live in sub-standard accommodation. The introduction of the 'New Employment Model' may see married military personnel losing their entitlement to service accommodation after eight years' service and being required to privately rent or buy property near to their bases.

Defence

8.13 The draw-down of service personnel and their families from Germany is likely to cause significant pressure on the MOD to provide suitable accommodation provision and create problems of employment for service wives and dependents, children's education and integration into civilian communities. In addition, despite the ability to be placed on the register prior to leaving the Services there are concerns about the difficulties of service personnel reaching the top of priority points-based Council Housing Registers, which regulate the offer of accommodation.

Questions

59. *What should the minimum standard of accommodation be for our service personnel, whether single or with dependents?*
60. *Should a housing relocation package be introduced for those families and single soldiers who leave the Services regardless of length of service completed?*
61. *Should legislation be introduced which enables service families to apply for registration on a Council's Housing Register where they have connections to that area that facilitates a priority for housing allocation on leaving the Forces?*
62. *Should a new building and infrastructure programme be introduced as part of Government plans for greater capital expenditure?*

Education

8.14 The practical measures advocated by the Coalition Government work on the assumption that children of members of the Armed Forces should have the same standard of, and access to, education as any other UK citizen, and it has introduced the Pupil Premium for the children of service personnel. However, there are issues surrounding access to schools if a place is required part way through an academic year as a consequence of posting.

Question

63. *How can we ensure appropriate provision of education to the children of service personnel?*