

Ministry of Defence Civilian Manpower

The Ministry of Defence's (MoD) budget for 2014-15 is £38 billion,¹ one of the largest on Whitehall. It accounts for more than 5 per cent of this year's Total Managed Expenditure (TME) of £732 billion² and consequently is under scrutiny.

George Osborne announced at the Spending Round in 2013 that the MoD's Capital and Resource Departmental Expenditure Limits would be frozen in cash terms for 2014-15 and 2015-16 whilst the equipment budget would rise by one 1 per cent in real terms from a 2015-16 baseline.³ Given the need to make savings and the political unpopularity of making service personnel redundant, there will have to be a substantial decrease in the number of civilian staff at the MoD if the Chancellor is to achieve his spending targets.

Indeed at the Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2010 it was announced that 25,000 civilian jobs at the MoD were to be cut by 2015.⁴

This note examines the long term trend in the number of military personnel compared to the number of civilian personnel in the UK since 1945.

A brief history of the Ministry of Defence since 1945

The MoD is a relatively new organisation that has only existed in its present form since 1971.

Between 1946 and 1964, its role was performed by 5 separate departments: the Admiralty, the War Office, the Air Ministry, the Ministry of Aviation and the Ministry of Defence. The first three and the old Ministry of Defence were merged into a new MoD in 1964. The MoD then took over the defence functions of the Ministry of Aviation (which had by then been renamed the Ministry of Aviation Supply) in 1971.⁵

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/293759/37630_Budget_2014_Web_Accessible.pdf#page=9

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/293759/37630_Budget_2014_Web_Accessible.pdf#page=9

³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209036/spending-round-2013-complete.pdf#page=44

⁴ https://www.direct.gov.uk/prod_consum_dg/groups/dg_digitalassets/@dg/@en/documents/digitalasset/dg_191634.pdf#page=33

⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49053/history_of_mod.pdf

Key findings

- After 1945, the number of full-time regular military personnel fell rapidly from almost 5 million to under 2 million in just one year. Whilst the number of civilians also began to fall, it did so at a slower rate.
- Consequently the ratio of civilian to military personnel increased sharply, almost without exception until 1962.
- The only exception was between 1950 and 1953 when the number of military personnel increased suddenly with Britain's involvement in the Korean War. The number of civilian personnel also increased during this period, but at a slower rate.
- Between 1957 and 1963 National Service was phased out.⁶ There were 45 per cent fewer military personnel in 1964 than there were in 1956, but only 13 per cent fewer civilian personnel.
- Between 1962 and 1979, the ratio of civilian to military personnel was fairly constant with an average of more than seven civilian personnel for every ten military personnel.
- In 1979 the ratio of civilian to military personnel started falling dramatically. This continued until 1988 when it started rising modestly. This continued for five years.
- Since 1997, the ratio of civilian to military personnel has been on a sharp downwards trend, interrupted only by a small increase between 2003 and 2005 at the start of British involvement in Iraq.
- The number of civilians employed by the MoD has fallen by 59 per cent since 1993 whilst the number of military personnel has fallen by 38 per cent.
- The number of civilians working for the MoD fell by 14.6 per cent between 2011 and 2012 - the biggest annual percentage decrease since 1946
- The Government looks to be on course to meet its target of reducing the number of civilians at the MoD to 60,000 by 2015.⁷

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⁶ <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C734>

⁷ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110426/text/110426w0003.htm>



Sources and Methodology

- All data is taken from Defence Analytical Services and Advice (DASA)
- Military personnel data is taken from annual and monthly personnel reports. The numbers are as at 1st April each year
- Civilian manpower data is available on the DASA website, but not going back further than 2001. This data was therefore acquired by a freedom of information request to DASA
- In 1993, the methodology used to work out the number of civilian personnel changed. Previously, civilian staffing statistics comprised only those employees directly funded by the MoD. The definition was changed to include "all civilians for whom the Secretary of State is accountable, and who have a close and long term association with the MoD."⁸
- Civilians per military full-time equivalent is calculated as the number of civilians divided by the number of military regulars.

⁸ <http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN02183.pdf>

Year	Military (FTE, Regulars)	Civilians (old)	Civilians (new)	Civilians per military FTE (old)	Civilians per military FTE (new)	Conflicts
1945	4,906,400	445,000	-	0.091	-	WW2, , Palestine/Israel, Indonesia
1946	1,937,800	359,000	-	0.185	-	Palestine/Israel, Vietnam, Indonesia
1947	1,255,000	309,000	-	0.246	-	Palestine/Israel, Vietnam, Indonesia
1948	830,000	297,000	-	0.358	-	Palestine/Israel, Vietnam, Indonesia
1949	759,500	302,000	-	0.398	-	Malaya, Indonesia
1950	696,400	297,000	-	0.426	-	Korea, Malaya
1951	823,800	305,000	-	0.370	-	Korea, Malaya
1952	871,700	321,000	-	0.368	-	Korea, Malaya, Kenya
1953	868,000	324,000	-	0.373	-	Korea, Malaya, Kenya
1954	840,100	330,000	-	0.393	-	Malaya, Kenya
1955	804,700	329,000	-	0.409	-	Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus
1956	762,300	327,000	-	0.429	-	Suez, Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus
1957	703,900	320,000	-	0.455	-	Suez, Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus
1958	615,500	303,000	-	0.492	-	Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus
1959	566,500	289,000	-	0.510	-	Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus
1960	521,100	322,000	-	0.618	-	Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus
1961	457,500	326,000	-	0.713	-	-
1962	434,000	326,000	-	0.751	-	Malaysia, Oman
1963	417,500	290,000	-	0.695	-	Aden, Malaysia, Oman
1964	416,700	285,000	-	0.684	-	Aden, Malaysia, Oman
1965	414,600	277,000	-	0.668	-	Aden, Malaysia, Oman
1966	409,500	275,000	-	0.672	-	Aden, Malaysia, Oman
1967	406,600	275,000	-	0.676	-	Aden, Malaysia, Oman

Year	Military (FTE, Regulars)	Civilians (old)	Civilians (new)	Civilians per military FTE (old)	Civilians per military FTE (new)	Conflicts
1968	395,800	273,000	-	0.690	-	Northern Ireland, Oman
1969	383,000	263,000	-	0.687	-	Northern Ireland, Oman
1970	373,000	258,000	-	0.692	-	Northern Ireland, Oman
1971	368,000	282,000	-	0.766	-	Northern Ireland, Oman
1972	371,400	275,000	-	0.740	-	Northern Ireland, Oman
1973	367,000	273,000	-	0.744	-	Northern Ireland, Oman
1974	349,300	249,000	-	0.713	-	Northern Ireland, Oman
1975	338,400	248,000	-	0.733	-	Northern Ireland, Oman
1976	336,600	245,000	-	0.728	-	Northern Ireland, Oman
1977	330,500	237,000	-	0.717	-	Northern Ireland
1978	320,700	228,000	-	0.711	-	Northern Ireland
1979	315,000	225,000	-	0.714	-	Northern Ireland
1980	320,600	218,000	-	0.680	-	Northern Ireland
1981	333,800	209,000	-	0.626	-	Northern Ireland
1982	327,600	197,000	-	0.601	-	Falklands, Northern Ireland
1983	320,600	190,000	-	0.593	-	Northern Ireland
1984	325,900	181,000	-	0.555	-	Northern Ireland
1985	326,200	174,000	-	0.533	-	Northern Ireland
1986	322,500	169,000	-	0.524	-	Northern Ireland
1987	319,800	164,000	-	0.513	-	Northern Ireland
1988	316,900	143,000	-	0.451	-	Northern Ireland
1989	311,600	141,000	-	0.453	-	Northern Ireland
1990	305,800	141,000	-	0.461	-	Northern Ireland
1991	298,100	140,000	-	0.470	-	Gulf War, Northern Ireland
1992	293,400	139,000	-	0.474	-	Bosnia, Northern Ireland

Year	Military (FTE, Regulars)	Civilians (old)	Civilians (new)	Civilians per military FTE (old)	Civilians per military FTE (new)	Conflicts
1993	274,800	129,000	159,600	0.469	0.581	Bosnia, Northern Ireland
1994	254,500	122,000	150,800	0.479	0.593	Bosnia, Northern Ireland
1995	233,300	116,000	141,300	0.497	0.606	Bosnia, Northern Ireland
1996	221,900	110,000	135,400	0.496	0.610	Bosnia, Northern Ireland
1997	210,800	109,000	133,300	0.517	0.632	Northern Ireland
1998	210,100	104,000	126,300	0.495	0.601	Kosovo, Northern Ireland
1999	208,600	101,000	123,000	0.484	0.590	Kosovo
2000	207,600	100,000	121,300	0.482	0.584	Sierra Leone
2001	205,600	-	118,200	-	0.575	Sierra Leone, Afghanistan
2002	204,700	-	110,100	-	0.538	Sierra Leone
2003	206,900	-	107,600	-	0.520	Iraq
2004	207,000	-	109,000	-	0.527	Iraq
2005	201,100	-	108,500	-	0.540	Iraq
2006	195,900	-	103,400	-	0.528	Iraq, Afghanistan
2007	190,400	-	97,700	-	0.513	Iraq, Afghanistan
2008	187,100	-	89,500	-	0.478	Iraq, Afghanistan
2009	188,400	-	86,600	-	0.460	Iraq, Afghanistan
2010	191,710	-	85,800	-	0.448	Afghanistan
2011	186,360	-	83,100	-	0.446	Afghanistan
2012	179,800	-	71,000	-	0.395	Afghanistan
2013	170,710	-	65,400	-	0.383	Afghanistan