



House of Commons
Defence Committee

Defence Diplomacy: A softer side of UK Defence: Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report

Seventh Special Report of Session
2022–23

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The Defence Committee

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Seventh Special Report

The Defence Committee published its Seventh Report of Session 2022–23 [Defence Diplomacy: A softer side of UK Defence](#) (HC 792) on 23 May 2023. The Government's response was received on 21 July 2023 and is appended below.

Appendix: Government Response

Introduction

1. The Ministry of Defence (MOD), in collaboration with the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) has put together the following response to the comprehensive and instructive report on Defence Diplomacy from the House of Commons Defence Sub-Committee (HCDC). The MOD and the FCDO thank the Committee members for the time and care they have taken in crafting the report and look forward to subsequent opportunities to discuss the ongoing transformation of Defence Diplomacy as a result of the 2023 refresh of the Integrated Review and its associated Defence Command Plan.

Soft Power

HCDC Recommendation 1: The Joint Doctrine Note on Defence Engagement was last updated in August 2015, and has been overtaken by recent events (such as the growth of the UK's Defence Network and the invasion of Ukraine) and publications such as the 2021 Integrated Review, 2021 Defence Command paper, and the 2023 Integrated Review Refresh. After the publication of the forthcoming refresh of the Defence Command Paper, the MoD should seek to update the Joint Doctrine Note on Defence Engagement.

2. **Government response:** Defence diplomacy is an integral lever at the disposal of the Department. Further detail related to how Defence will use the levers of soft power and defence diplomacy to continue to project our interests globally, build influential relationships and maintain engagement and access are given in outline in the update to the Defence Command Paper, and specific policy changes and updates to the related sub-strategies that guide the delivery of defence diplomacy will be refreshed over the following 12 months.

HCDC Recommendation 2: The Ministry of Defence and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office should set out how it measures the value of soft power and defence diplomacy, and against what objectives.

3. **Government response:** The 2021 Integrated Review highlighted the importance of soft power, took stock of the UK's strengths across sport, culture, education and media, and set out the Government's overarching approach. It said we should make thoughtful investment that enables our activity to thrive in the long term; use our assets, such as the diplomatic network and aid spend, to help create goodwill towards the UK; and create an enabling environment in which independent UK organisations and networks can flourish.

4. The 2023 Integrated Review Refresh framed UK soft power assets within efforts to generate strategic influence, highlighting specific strengths, such as the BBC, the British Council and the Premier League, our creative industries, and our extensive people-to-people links; and recognised that these sectors were among the identifiable national strengths through which we can forge strong, reciprocal relationships with countries around the world.

5. The MOD through its Defence Attaché (DA) network has found that the network offers an effective conduit for continuing dialogue with military counterparts in host countries when similar dialogue may be elusive at other levels. We are therefore directly able to measure that engagement by the extent to which we build both MOD activity and closer relationships with the host country manifest by visits, MOD activity, MOD UK education offer, Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) or strategic defence dialogues. In countries where UK engagement is less challenging, we can deliver all of the above with the aggregate clout made possible by our diplomatic presence and UK trade input where measurement of that combined endeavour will be self-evident from tangible outcomes.

6. The FCDO funds a number of organisations and programmes that contribute to UK soft power, and the impact of these are monitored and evaluated separately rather than by a single metric:

- a) BBC World Service. The BBC delivers the World Service under its Charter commitment to reflect the United Kingdom, its culture and values to the World. The Foreign Secretary has overall responsibility for the performance of the World Service, including through agreeing its Objectives, Priorities and Targets. As the world's most trusted international broadcaster, it is a vital tool in providing accurate and impartial news, analysis and discussion in 42 languages to 365 million people around the world each week. In March this year, through the refresh of the Integrated Review, the FCDO were pleased to announce an uplift of £20 million to the BBC World Service, in recognition of the crucial role it plays in supporting UK soft power, projecting UK culture and values overseas, and in countering harmful disinformation. This additional funding over the next two years will protect all 42 World Service language services it provides, support English language broadcasting and counter disinformation.
- b) British Council. The Integrated Review referred to the British Council as one of the 'vital instruments of our influence overseas'. It has been a trusted partner for more than 85 years. It works on the ground in more than 100 countries and reached 650 million people in 2021–22. The British Council plays a leading role in furthering Global Britain and promoting UK values and interests through its work in arts and culture, education, and the English language. In partnership with the Ukrainian Institute, the British Council has recently delivered the UK-Ukraine Season of Culture, enabling Ukrainian artists and creatives to build new connections with the UK and for their voices to be heard internationally.
- c) Marshall Scholarship. This programme is principally funded by the British Government, but also benefits from generous support through partnership arrangements with world-leading British academic institutions, the British Schools and University Foundation, and the Association of Marshall Scholars, allowing winners to pursue graduate degrees in almost any academic subject

at any university in the UK. Since 1953 the British Government has provided scholarships to over 2,200 Americans, many of whom have gone on to play leading roles in addressing global challenges facing society. This year's class includes representatives from the US Military Academy and US Air Force Academy who will resume active-duty service roles upon completion of their studies.

- d) GREAT Challenge Fund (GCF). The GCF works with the FCDO overseas network to deliver GREAT programme activity across the globe with the primary objective of encouraging people to trade, invest, visit and study in the UK. The GCF enables our overseas Posts to develop bespoke soft power initiatives that strengthen the UK's key messages and influence in countries across the world, specially tailored to meet local priorities through formal partnerships, MOUs or specific agreements/commitments signatures. In recent years, over fifty soft power projects have been supported through the Challenge Fund and the ultimate measurement of the GCF is its return on investment via activity generating export wins (in 21/22 our Return On Investment (ROI) was 35:1).

Utilisation of Assets

HCDC Recommendation 3: The Ministry of Defence should maximise the soft power value of Royal Navy visits to foreign ports. The Ministry of Defence should set out in response to this report how it currently uses Royal Navy assets to further diplomacy, and how other Government Departments such as the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Department for Business and Trade use the asset for diplomatic and trade purposes.

7. **Government response:** Royal Navy (RN) vessels offer a persistent presence around the globe. Examples include forward-deployed Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs) that service routine defence outputs, and the deployment of Carrier and Littoral Strike Groups that can enhance NATO partnerships and provide a visible deterrent to competitors. Alongside these operational outputs, RN vessels provide the ability to conduct routine Defence Engagement, offering support and a platform to reinforce HMG messaging and in-country outputs across defence and security, trade and diplomacy. This can be achieved on a small-scale platform through, for example, port visits enabling hosting events on board ship or joint exercises with foreign Armed Forces, or by providing support to large-scale events such as the occasion when HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH (QEC) provided a platform in New York harbour to host the Atlantic Future Forum (AFF). The AFF was led by the Department for International Trade (DIT) and brought together industry and defence partners from the US and Europe to discuss current security challenges and how they might be overcome. Use of the QEC provided a visible demonstration of UK carrier potency and capability, as well as supplying a unique and impressive conference space that magnified the effect of the AFF.

8. The Royal Marines Band Service (RMBS) can be used to support a variety of international commitments. For example, in 2022 the RMBS supported 15 international events spanning four continents, with combinations ranging from the deployment of individual Buglers to the provision of large marching bands. In Europe, the RMBS performed in France and the Netherlands in acts of remembrance, they performed at

concerts in support of the First Sea Lord for Lithuania's Navy Days and for community engagement at the Naval Outdoor Centre Germany (NOCG) in Bavaria. Most recently, they performed in Rome to mark the Port Visit OP ACHILLEAN. The RMBS travelled to the USA for the AAF in New York, and a Short-Term Training team was deployed to Algiers to deliver training to military musicians alongside Queen's Birthday Party celebrations at the British Embassy. Band support also augmented the RN and Defence Secretary presence at the Indian Defence Expo and the end of Ex MILAN.

9. The deployment of the Carrier Strike Group in 2021 ('CSG21' or Operation FORTIS) was heavily based around RN and Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) ships and a squadron of F-35 jets, but it also brought together elements of all three UK Armed Services, as well as other government departments (especially DIT and the FCDO) and international partners to provide a demonstration of the means by which defence engagement and defence diplomacy can be used to achieve national objectives. Although the deployment was constrained by the impact of Covid it was still able to successfully:

- a) operate and demonstrate UK military capabilities;
- b) exercise and operate with international military partners;
- c) champion UK prosperity and the 'Global Britain' campaign across several of the largest and most significant international markets;
- d) act as a platform for international diplomacy; and
- e) present a physical UK commitment in support of international order to meet the goals of the deployment.

10. Recent OPV visits across the Indo-Pacific region have been an unmitigated success. The creative, virtual engagement by the QEC during CSG21 and persistent presence has contributed to deepened defence ties with non-traditional security partners. These actions undoubtedly made possible HMS SPEY's visit to Cambodia earlier this year, our most significant naval engagement there for thirty years and the first visit by a Royal Navy vessel to the country in sixty-five years.

11. The deployment of HMS SPEY also contributed to ongoing Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Management (HADR) in Vanuatu, delivering much needed supplies. HMS TAMAR was given a warm reception in Bangladesh that highlighted our commitment to the rules based international system in the Bay of Bengal through discussions on countering piracy, people smuggling and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. The visit also offered a boost for potential ship sales.

12. The benefits to using RN assets are wide-ranging – with clear evidence of activity enhancing diplomatic engagement and strengthening political relationships at all levels, and acting as a mechanism through which to amplify our strategic messaging. These deployments have also showcased the best of our values, capabilities and people: the RN's trademark 'can do' attitude has been regularly praised as has our nimble, targeted approach.

13. Defence Engagement has reinforced the UK's commitment to the Indo-Pacific region, including on engaging with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) through our Dialogue Partner Status. We will continue to work with ASEAN partners on an ambitious package of maritime security capacity building and training.

HCDC Recommendation 4: The Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo is an exceptional event that showcases some of the best of the UK. The Tattoo also provides excellent opportunities to further relationships and diplomatic aims. The UK Government should do more to leverage the opportunities it presents by ensuring that the Ministry of Defence sends a Minister each year to curate the guest list to enhance relationships, including potentially with those states that it might not usually engage with.

14. **Government response:** For the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo (REMT), all Defence Ministers are invited to attend across evenings hosted by the Royal Navy, Army, and Royal Air Force. This enables relationships to be fostered between Ministers and those identified by the Armed Forces as the people and organisations with whom we would like to build good relationships. The REMT frequently hosts foreign royalty and Heads of State, as well as senior military and UK leaders from across a broad spectrum. Ministerial attendance assists in meeting the strategic engagement objectives of that host's party, which are carefully planned around Defence and wider HMG priorities.

15. As an example, the Royal Navy's approach is to identify Salute Takers from foreign Navies, and this year we hope to welcome Japan, Sweden, Finland and Germany, as well as Joint Force Command Naples. As lead Service in 2023, the Royal Air Force is working with Minister (Lords) who will have a great opportunity to shape the REMT event that she is attending. The British Army is hosting strategic decision makers from government, civil society and the private sector in line with themes that include Mobilise and Modernise.

16. Between Office of the Secretary of State for Scotland (OSSS) and the single Service Leads, significant local knowledge already exists to identify and cohere invitations. Specific expertise and assistance can be sought from OSSS by Defence to augment this if required.

HCDC Recommendation 5: The FCDO's GREAT campaign (the Government's mechanism for promoting the UK abroad) can be difficult to navigate. A single point of contact should be created within the FCDO's GREAT campaign to ensure that the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo, and other similar organisations, faces fewer barriers to its overseas activities.

17. **Government response:** The Government agrees with the HCDC recommendation and will take steps to ensure a single point of contact within the GREAT campaign HQ for the Royal Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

Global Defence Network

HCDC Recommendation 6: We welcome the professionalisation of the Global Defence Network and commend the Ministry of Defence on the work that has been carried out so far. The appointment of a director for the Global Defence Network is an important step in the right direction. The UK's Defence Attaché network is critical to the UK's influence around the world and it is right that the Ministry should focus on developing

more attractive and rewarding career paths in defence diplomacy. Defence Attachés across the world should be proud of the work they are carrying out on behalf of the Chief of the Defence Staff and the UK Armed Forces.

18. **Government response:** The recent creation of a new MOD Directorate – the Global Defence Network (GDN) – and the appointment of Air Vice Marshall Mick Smeath CBE at its head, has given the MOD an opportunity to re-focus and re-energise a network which has, in recent years, been hard pushed to resource the level of demand placed upon it. With clear direction from both SofS and Comd UKStratCom to professionalise and increase the size of the global network, the GDN will work with a vision which underpins a series of concurrent projects on the path to improvement.

19. In pursuit of wider utility for our already globally renowned network, three distinct workstreams have been set in motion:

- a) Further operationalisation of the existing network focusing on the delivery of enhanced Sense, Understand and Influence functions, including a review of the current British Defence Staff (BDS) regional footprint;
- b) DA cadre professionalisation, including development of enhanced Defence Diplomacy training both bespoke to the MOD and in conjunction with other partners across government, and a review of the necessary adjustments to Military Career Management to ensure that Defence Diplomacy is an attractive and valued career option;
- c) A Defence Diplomacy Finance and Governance review which seeks to ensure that the GDN has the money available to do all that is asked of it, and that its activity is properly coordinated across all of the relevant government stakeholders.

HCDC Recommendation 7: It appears that there is currently little thought given to talent management or strategic goals in Defence Attachés' career paths. It is wasteful for someone who has built up knowledge, contacts and experience of a country and region to be moved to a role unconnected with that region. In response to this report, the Ministry of Defence should set out what work the Director of the Global Defence Network is doing to create a development and rotation plan to ensure the knowledge, contacts and experience built up by Defence Attachés is utilised within central Government.

20. **Government response:** Prospective DAs presently receive training ranging from 24 to 80 weeks depending on the country to which they are assigned, its cultural requirements and the likely level of threat that might be encountered there. These training packages include modules on Defence Engagement strategy, cultural awareness, prosperity agenda, advanced driving, intelligence and security, as well as numerous visits to develop relationships with other military, civilian and cross-government organisations. These packages are considered world-class but far exceed the training time offered by the majority of other countries. By dint of their long military experience most Defence Attachés will have attended Advanced Staff Training (either in the UK or overseas) and some will have also attended Higher Staff Training.

21. Following the Secretary of State's endorsed vision for DAs, and in line with the House of Commons Defence Committee's recommendation, there is clear direction to

significantly enhance the prestige and content of DA training and to professionalise the cadre. The modular training package is being reshaped to enhance the attractiveness of Defence Engagement and will assist in attracting more of the best candidates to enter DA training.

22. A professionalised career path, beginning much earlier than the current model allows, would potentially offer modular progress in Defence Diplomacy training over a decade or more. This means that the final training pathway from selection to deployment as a DA becomes much shorter in the latter stages of a career, particularly if the process of regional specialisation begins early and focuses on language acquisition for that region. Genuine subject matter experts in Defence Diplomacy and in their region would offer our GDN enhanced credibility. The spread of the training pathway over a longer period would also enable the use of the skills attained in a wider group of military roles; the expectation is that the utility of Defence Engagement training and subsequent experience will have significant utility in a wide variety of additional military roles both leading up to and on completion of a DA deployment.

23. Nonetheless, the MOD recognises that to build a profession, functional development must be generated. A competency-based approach works particularly well with other professions in Government, and it is possible that Defence Engagement would benefit from a similar adoption. As part of the ongoing review of training and professionalisation of the network, a full training needs analysis (TNA) is underway, and the option of a new competency framework for Defence Engagement is being considered.

HCDC Recommendation 8: The Government's current provisions for language training appear to be disjointed, with different provisions across Government. The Government should consider consolidating language training provision. This could streamline the process, whilst also enabling people to make valuable contacts with colleagues. Given the importance of language skills, the Ministry of Defence should place a particular emphasis on its uptake for those Defence Attachés that are taking up posts in non-English speaking countries.

24. **Government response:** The Government's differing language provision stems from wide divergence in the end-user requirement of the training audience. The operational language acquisition required by soldiers operating with other military actors across the world is quite distinct from the usual diplomatic language needed in the world's capitals. Nonetheless, in the case of language acquisition for Defence Diplomats there is a much larger cross-over with the language requirement delivered to the FCDO. Under these circumstances it is entirely foreseeable that better use of joint language training between the MOD and the FCDO diplomatic cohorts should be considered. Wider use of the FCDO facilities for the preparation of its diplomatic cadre are being investigated by the GDN as part of the 'professionalisation' work strand outlined above.

25. Particular emphasis has, for many years, been placed on the development of language for Defence Diplomats in advance of their assignments abroad. The single largest determining factor in the length of DA training is the amount of time required to dedicate to language acquisition, particularly for those approaching a complex language for the first time. The potential for modular Defence Engagement training, beginning early in a military career, would help to offset the length of this training and spread it over a number of years rather than requiring an extended training pipeline which slows down

GDN resource agility. This approach also allows for the skills to be used in more than one role, which increases the value for money as a result of the investment in language acquisition over time.

HCDC Recommendation 9: The UK's educational institutions, including military colleges, are world renowned, and an important tool in the UK's soft power. The Ministry of Defence should conduct a review into how Sandhurst and other military educational institutions can be better used to further defence diplomacy and set out a strategy for doing this.

26. **Government response:** We note the recommendation and share the Committee's assessment. Our Military Academies play a central role in delivering world-class defence education. Military Academies in particular play a central role in building and strengthening partnerships, delivering world-class defence education that results in long-lasting relationships and better operational integration.

27. The provision of Professional Defence and Security Education through renowned UK military institutions, such as the UK Defence Academy, plays a significant role in 'soft power', enhancing access and influence while delivering highly valued training and education to our international partners. The MOD's contribution compliments other Government higher education outreach endeavours, like the Chevening Scholarship programme.

28. Places on residential courses at the UK Defence Academy remain highly sought after amongst international partners. The MOD's Forward Allocation Baseline process prioritises places on the Defence Academy premier (tier 1) courses to meet Defence priorities. This process is also used to allocate international places at the single Service establishments at the Britannia Royal Naval College, the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst and the Royal Air Force College Cranwell. For the more senior Defence Academy command and staff courses (mid-career), the ratios of international to UK members are high. For example, 40% of Advanced Command and Staff Course and 60% of Royal College of Defence Studies members are international. While these premier courses have the greatest international participation, many other courses, across the Defence Academy and wider Defence, include international students. This level of international participation brings huge richness of different experiences and perspectives to these courses, bringing valuable challenge to UK member's assumptions and biases, resulting in a far better appreciation of the global challenges studied. It also creates an invaluable global network of alumni, hopefully well-disposed to the UK, but certainly with an enhanced understanding of the UK's value, culture and institutions. The Defence Academy and Royal College of Defence Studies are launching a new alumni platform in the Spring, as a means to more actively remain engaged with this network for the benefit of Defence, DAs and wider Government.

29. The Defence Academy and other Defence training and education establishments also provide certain courses 'in country' on request, where capacity exists. These courses include senior leadership courses and more bespoke and tailored Short-term Training Teams (STTTs). With over 50 countries with members attending courses at the Defence Academy and Royal College of Defence Studies every year, these 'export' courses bring the number of countries receiving training and educational support to over 100 countries every year, a significant contribution to the UK's soft power. Additionally, since 2021, the Defence Academy has instigated regional 'Counsels of Commandants', an initiative to

bring together senior Professional Military Education professionals from across a region to discuss mutual challenges and opportunities. This has proven to be a highly valuable investment enhancing sharing between partners, strengthening relationships and networks, and providing positive Defence Engagement effect for local UK DAs. To date, the Defence Academy has co-hosted Councils of Commandants in South Asia and South-East Asia, with participants from a total of 16 nations. The Counsel of Commandants model is now being extended to the Gulf Region.

30. In terms of preparing the GDN, the Defence Academy provides education to DAs, Advisors and Loan Service personnel, including the dedicated DAs Foundation and Consolidation courses, as part of their professional training pipeline. This DA specific training and education is currently under review through a Training Needs Analysis to ascertain whether there is a gap between the current model and Defence requirements, which will result in recommendations for enhancements or changes if required. Additionally, most DAs will already be graduates of the year-long Advanced Command and Staff College, and some will also have completed the Royal College of Defence Studies, Global Strategy Programme.

Conclusion

31. The extent of the UK's current Defence Engagement effort should not be underestimated. The MOD provides a very significant slice of the overall diplomatic effect delivered by the 'one HMG' platform. DAs and their staffs around the world offer unique access into host nation understanding, and the work of our deployed military assets and professional military education establishments further enhance the UK's credibility on the world stage. The improvements to the network are not starting from bare foundations but further polishing a jewel in the Defence crown.

32. The ongoing transformation of Defence Diplomacy under the direction of the new HQ GDN is both deep and wide as result of the Secretary of State's vision and the guidance received from the House of Commons Defence Sub-Committee. The response to the HCDC recommendations in this note show that remarkable effort is being delivered in order to further enhance the UK's reputation worldwide, and to ensure that Defence Diplomats play the fullest part in a combined Government effort to sustain and improve UK influence, and, by inference, prosperity and security, around the globe.