



House of Commons
Defence Committee

Ready for War?: Government Response to the Committee's First Report

Fourth Special Report of Session
2023–24

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The Defence Committee

The Defence Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Ministry of Defence and its associated public bodies.

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Tobias Ellwood MP, Robert Courts MP and Dave Doogan MP were also Members of the Committee during this inquiry.

Powers

The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

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Fourth Special Report

The Defence Committee published its First Report of Session 2023–24 [Ready for War?](#) (HC 26) on 4 February 2024. The Government's response was received on 8 April 2024 and is appended below.

Appendix: Government response

1. *The protection of sensitive information plays a vital role in the security of this country. However, the Ministry of Defence has become demonstrably less transparent over the past decade. The fact that the Minister and senior military personnel did not realise that information which is now classified was once widely available suggests that this trend towards greater secrecy has been either clandestine or unconscious. Other nations, facing very similar threats, provide significantly more information about readiness than the UK, both to the public and to relevant parliamentary committees.* (Paragraph 31)

In the absence of adequate official information, public and parliamentary scrutiny of and debate about UK armed forces readiness currently relies on media reporting and corridor conversations, leading to suspicion that the forces are less ready than in fact they are. It does not need to be like this. The information flow in many of our NATO allies is far franker. Our request is not for very detailed, very highly classified information, but for information that only the most naïve would think was not already in the hands of the UK's potential adversaries and their intelligence apparatus. (Paragraph 34)

In a functioning democracy, the House of Commons Defence Committee needs to be routinely informed about the planning assumptions and readiness of the nation's armed forces. We therefore recommend that—following the Minister's welcome commitment to work with us—the Government propose how we and our successors can receive at least annually a meaningfully detailed update on the readiness of the UK Armed Forces, taking account of our conclusions above. (Paragraph 35)

Today's Defence Planning Assumptions (DPAs) are not only a description of the current Force capacity; they also look forward to describe the assumed demand on the Force over a 10-year period and the resultant development of it. Given that context, preserving some strategic ambiguity in our planning is an advantage, given an increase in sophisticated state threats. There has not been a decision to withhold information, but the form and function of that information has evolved over the years, and classified DPAs have always existed, whereby the totality has not been released publicly.

However, the government recognises that the Committee should have public access to more information on planning assumptions and readiness than is currently provided. Therefore, the following headlines from current DPAs are released below. We commit to release as much as possible of the next iteration of DPAs when national and NATO planning processes have matured.

Releasable Detail from DPA23

4 x Military Outputs:

1. Strategic Resilience
2. NATO Contribution
3. Crisis Response
4. Global Competition

Redacted Non-Discretionary Tasks:

1. CASD.
2. Protect UK seas, airspace, cyberspace and outer space assets.
3. NATO commitments.
4. Warfighting in the Euro-Atlantic.
5. Operations outside the NATO Area.
6. Defence specialist capabilities for MACA.
7. Small scale crisis response.
8. Medium scale framework nation.

Redacted definitions of Small scale and Medium scale:

- Small Scale: operations to protect UK interests that are limited in scope, scale and duration. They include, for example, assured sovereign Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations, Hostage Rescue, National Strike and Humanitarian Relief. Defence will be capable of conducting concurrent small-scale crisis response operations. Forces will be held at graduated readiness and are likely to be commanded at up to 1* level. A sovereign Joint Theatre Entry capability to secure and operate the requisite number of Air and Sea Ports of Disembarkation will be maintained.
- Medium Scale: operations including limited intervention such as more complex peacekeeping, peace enforcement, or expeditionary warfighting, as part of a coalition, alliance or UN response, against an irregular, asymmetric or peer (-) adversary. Defence will be capable of contributing to, or acting as framework nation for, medium scale crisis response operations.

2. Readiness is about acceptable risk. The decisions on what risks to take are ultimately political (based partly on military advice) rather than solely military or parliamentary decisions. Ministers will also inevitably need to reach judgments about the availability of information regarding threats and the UK's readiness to respond to those threats, and these judgments may change as the threat landscape changes. However, Parliament's role and our role in particular is to hold Ministers to account for their actions. We cannot

fulfil this role without adequate information, along the lines that was available to our predecessors. At present there is no regular mechanism which allows us to scrutinise ministerial decisions on readiness and their impact on risk. (Paragraph 32)

The Government agrees with the Committee's conclusion there is no regular mechanism to scrutinise readiness. We would like to offer a regular annual open session for the Committee to meet with Ministers and Chiefs of the Single Services to scrutinise decisions on readiness. This will also enable the Committee to better understand how the Department manages risk in relation to readiness.

3. The Government's reaction to this specific inquiry has also been unacceptably slow and has impeded our work. Responses to our requests for written evidence have arrived many months late and contained very little useful information. We took up the Government's offer of a meeting in private to review classified information. This was both constructive and informative, but it took place 10 months after our initial request for this data, and there is no guarantee that it will be repeated in the future, which raises the concern about whether there is sufficient ministerial grip on readiness. (Paragraph 33)

The Government agrees the response time for this specific inquiry has been slow and will make every effort to ensure this is not repeated. As the Committee is aware, it took longer than we originally expected to publish the Defence Command Paper (published in July 2023), which delayed Defence's ability to update the HCDC in a timely manner. In future, the Government would like to assure the Committee the annual open session for Ministers and Chiefs with the HCDC will be prioritised by the Department and useful in substance. Releasing more detailed information, in a more regular and timely manner, than we currently do will give wider public the opportunity to see the complexity of our readiness issues, the impacts of budgets on our capabilities, and the choices the Department must make.

4. We also recommend that the Government explain why previously unclassified information about readiness is no longer published, recognise the reduction in public and parliamentary accountability that this has brought about, and seek to rectify the situation. In future, when a decision is being considered to classify previously available information, we recommend that the Government should consult the relevant House of Commons Select Committee before that decision is made. (Paragraph 36)

We note the Committee's recommendation to explain why previously unclassified information about readiness is no longer published. Since 1998, the Defence Planning Assumptions (DPAs) have continued to evolve. During the Strategic Defence Review in July 1998, the DPAs included Defence Missions, Military Tasks, definitions of small, medium, large, and full-scale operations, alongside concurrency sets were published. In 2005, the DPAs were Confidential (an obsolete classification—not for public release) and in 2015's Defence review they are not referenced explicitly, instead 'Armed Forces Missions' are listed. Classified DPAs were subsequently issued in Defence Strategic Direction (DSD) in 2016. This evolution of DPAs into a classified document happened as they are intended to describe in detail the principal assumptions upon which the Force is designed, trained, and resourced. We are sure that the Committee would agree that we must protect this information given the detail and specificity it provides.

We are now seeking to enhance the Department's transparency. We have released a version of the 2023 DPAs as shown above. The MOD remains focussed on continuously looking to further upskill and improve on how we undertake our Parliamentary and Legislative business to the highest standard—a priority for both our Perm Secs under the good to great campaign—and how we are disclosing information into the public domain is very much part of that work. In addition, the recent publication of Defence's Drone Strategy, that outlined the UK's approach to Defence's Uncrewed Systems, highlights an example of the Government's ambition to be more open.

5. *The commitments made to replenish and increase stockpiles made since the 2022 Autumn Budget have all been welcome. The question remains whether this is anywhere near enough to meet the potential threats we face. It is therefore disturbing to hear that the £1.95 billion awarded as part of the Spring 2023 Budget may instead be used to meet budget shortfalls. We recommend that the MOD reconsider further delaying its ability to regenerate warfighting resilience in this manner. We further recommend that the MOD produce a breakdown of the allocation of the awards from the Autumn 2022 and Spring 2023 Budgets to provide clarity as to how much is allocated in practice in support of replenishing and increasing stockpiles.* (Paragraph 107)

£1.95Bn was allocated in the 2023 Spring Budget to address long-standing challenges across the defence programme to improve our resilience, which will make us better able to respond to new threats. This funding is being used to build the department's munitions and medical stockpiles and support a wide range of critical activity. To date investments include support to deliver a large purchase of 155mm munitions, building storm shadow stockpiles, supply chain mapping, wargaming, enhancements to a range of critical infrastructure, and medical stockpiles.

In addition to these uplifts, we have placed almost £1Bn in contracts to replenish UK stocks of equipment and munitions already granted to Ukraine. Contracts have been placed to replenish UK stockpiles include Next Generation Light Anti-Tank Weapons; Starstreak High Velocity Missiles; Lightweight Multirole Missiles; Javelin missiles; Brimstone missiles; 155mm artillery rounds; and 5.56mm rifle rounds.

Exact stockpile holdings are held at secret and are not releasable on the grounds of national security. However, the war in Ukraine has highlighted to the UK and allies that we all need to invest more in munitions to increase stockpile levels and ensure we have the industrial base required. In response the MOD has developed a strategy for munitions, and we continue to work with allies and partners, particularly NATO, to ensure the UK and NATO has the munitions it needs.

6. *There are multiple capability shortfalls within the UK Armed Forces. For that reason, we welcome the decision to maintain the Albion-class vessels in operational service until their out of service dates in the 2030s. However, we are also increasingly concerned about the ability of the Armed Forces to attract and retain personnel. Whilst we welcome the Government's recognition that these issues require fresh solutions and look forward to reviewing plans based on recommendations from the Reserve Forces 2030 Review and the Haythornthwaite Review to alleviate the crisis in the recruitment and retention of both Regulars and Reserves, we do not believe it is being carried out at the required pace. We heard no evidence that gives us confidence that the recruitment crisis will be resolved anytime soon.* (Paragraph 108)

7. Efforts to improve the recruitment and retention of both Regulars and Reserves are currently being considered by the MOD. We therefore recommend that once decisions have been made to adopt these recommendations, an implementation timetable with measurable deliverables is produced and shared with us so that we can scrutinise the progress made by the Department. (Paragraph 109)

8. Personnel need time to recover from operations, and time to train and develop new skills. But the demand of operations makes that harder to achieve. It is unsurprising that more people are leaving the Forces than joining them. All three services have growing capability shortfalls—these have been a feature of our inquiries over the course of this Parliament. As these shortfalls increase, this places greater pressure on those who remain, leading to a vicious cycle. (Paragraph 143)

As a Government, we recognise the responsibility to ensure our Armed Forces have the right people in the right place with the right skills, both now and in the future. This is never more pressing as we face global challenges not seen since the middle of the twentieth century. Despite an ever-increasing technological landscape, we know that people continue to be a critical factor in Defence.

We are also committed to our Armed Forces remaining a career of choice for new generations. They should be attracted by modern and flexible offers which seek to reflect contemporary motivators and expectations and encourage them to remain in or contribute directly to defence throughout their military careers and beyond. Defence recognise that we must compete in a challenging labour market where there is huge demand for many of the key skills the Armed Forces needs to recruit and retain. This same challenge is faced by Armed Forces globally. We must address complex levers of retention; both positive and negative, to ensure that the best appropriate offer is available to everyone. The Armed Forces, both regular and reserve service, has been a driver of social mobility throughout history, and it is our responsibility to build on the opportunities offered to help people achieve their potential.

The Haythornthwaite Review's 67 recommendations were all accepted in the Defence Command Paper refresh in 2023 and a formal HMG response to each one of the recommendations will be published during 2024. The formal Govt. response will outline next steps for delivery and implementation for each recommendation, reflecting a broad roadmap for recruitment and retention for the short and the longer term. Key indicators will be captured regularly and reported to all stakeholders to measure progress. It will set out clear progress already made in priority areas and demonstrates how Defence is working fast to speed up recruitment, support the retention of the people we have, and build a people system that is aligned to and evolves with society. The work we are already undertaking will transform how we approach recruitment and retention, moving away from a base-fed model and one-size-fits-all culture to one based on the agility and autonomy of a mission-command approach.

9. The UK Armed Forces have sufficient Readiness for operations—they can carry out standing operations and contingent commitments. However, the breadth of their commitments is having an inevitable impact, in terms of budget requirements, subsequent constraints on training and the retention of personnel. It also appears to be delaying the development of warfighting readiness. (Paragraph 110)

10. *It is a matter of national pride that whenever the Armed Forces are asked to carry out a task, they will find a way. It is to the credit of the Armed Forces that they have sustained this effort for so long. But overtasking has both a personal cost for service personnel and an opportunity cost for the UK. The increase in global instability has coincided with a period of decreasing recruitment and reduced industrial capacity, which requires sustained, long-term investment. The Government risks being unable to build true warfighting and strategic readiness because of the sheer pace of operations, which could threaten the security of the UK.* (Paragraph 142).

On 18th July the Government published the Defence Command Paper 2023 (DCP23). The Defence Command Paper (DCP) built upon the DCP of March 2021. This mid-cycle refresh was needed given three changes in circumstance:

- i) the evolving threat picture—not least Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and China’s growing assertiveness—and the technological advances since 2021;
- ii) the increase in the MOD’s budget, now over £50 billion a year for the first time and next year we expect it to rise to around £55.6bn;
- iii) the publication in March 2023 of a refreshed Integrated Review that set out the Government’s new grand strategic aims and approach.

DCP23 articulates a new, clear purpose for Defence: to protect the nation, and to help it prosper. It sets out how we will double-down in certain areas, such as the centrality of NATO, the importance of nuclear and the strength of our alliances and partnerships. As a leading member of NATO—the most successful military alliance in history—the UK and our Allies have a competitive advantage over our adversaries through the solidarity of 32 nations and the multiplying effect of interoperable forces. In NATO, Allies do not fight alone. It is through NATO and the UK’s wider Alliances and partnerships that the UK provides a credible defence from and deterrence to the threats the country faces. The UK can draw on the capabilities of the 32 NATO Allies and not only from our own armed forces.

Through our offer to NATO, we offer the Alliance the full spectrum of defence capabilities, including by declaring our Continuous at Sea Nuclear Deterrent to the Alliance as well as our offensive cyber capabilities through the National Cyber Force. NATO has four times as many ships and three times as many submarines as Russia. The UK is the only nuclear power dedicated to supporting NATO and is key to protecting NATO’s vital Atlantic supply lines; this is a uniquely and vitally important role in the Alliance.

Re-investment in our warfighting force through the lens of its contribution principally to NATO, that force still underpins our hard-power projection in the world beyond as well. Our aircraft carriers, for example, have been both committed to NATO in the last twenty-four months as well as deployed into the Indo-Pacific to contribute to other UK foreign policy aims in that region.

The UK already has a significant recapitalisation programme underway across all domains. Defence has new platforms that are in service, or are coming into service, which will completely transform the Armed Forces’ capability. Through commitments made in DCP23, Defence is prioritising the things that will make those capabilities more lethal and ready, such as stockpiles, munitions, and enablers including storage facilities and our

transformed partnership with industry, where we will engage much earlier in strategic conversations to create a more resilient, reliable, and adaptable industrial base. This will not only bolster UK industry and diplomatic influence, but also helps sustain Ukraine in the fight in 2024 and develops its economy beyond.

This is highlighted in the new Integrated Procurement Model—a system that will see earlier expert assurance of future military programmes to ensure they will deliver for UK forces on the frontline. The reforms will look to avoid previous challenges where programmes have been over-complex, over-budget, and over time. The reforms will see greater empowerment of subject matter experts across the defence enterprise including Dstl scientists, government export leads, finance experts and industry partners to challenge and shape proposals before they receive the go-ahead. Driving pace is key to the overall reforms and the concept of ‘spiral’ development will be at the forefront as new programmes are initiated, avoiding capabilities that are not adaptable to the changing environment or are overly complex and too bespoke to export.

Our programme of modernisation and mobilisation of conventional forces is addressing shortfalls in capabilities where we cannot continue to maintain risk. Beyond the significant upgrading of our Nuclear Systems, with Dreadnought on track to deliver in the 2030s, Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) capabilities, as well as Electronic Warfare capabilities, signals intelligence and cyber, will grow in importance. The lethality of our Forces will be enhanced; The Royal Navy continues to develop lethality to complement its carrier and amphibious strike capabilities. It has bought the Naval Strike Missile capability at pace allowing precision strike on land and at sea. The Army is enhancing its deep fire capabilities, to counter and hit precise deeper targets. The RAF is continuing to evolve and innovate, including counter-UAS technology and initial Swarming Drones capabilities. We have published our drone strategy. And MOD is doing more to increase operational productivity by rebalancing investment in capabilities’ availability and sustainment. But Defence must continue to do more.

We are prioritising transforming the Department’s workforce model to attract and retain the talent needed to operate those capabilities. All three services continue to have the personnel needed to meet their front-line operational commitments, but we are not shying away from this challenge. Increasing recruitment and improving retention are absolute priorities, including improved career opportunities and making it easier for people to re-join, on top of the largest pay increase in more than 20 years. Last year, we laid out pay increases for Armed Forces personnel that will see the highest pay increase targeted towards junior service personnel, providing up to 9.7% for junior ranks and 5.8% for officers.

The Haythornthwaite Review and Defence Command Paper 2023 set out measures to address future staffing challenges, such as a changing labour market, with a comprehensive approach. This ranges from zig-zag careers where people can leave and re-join the Armed Forces, through to reviews of pay and progression. Defence has now stood up a new Transformation Directorate which is driving delivery and building a clear plan to create a people system that constantly evolves to compete in an agile and aggressive labour market.

11. Despite the Secretary of State’s insistence that the UK Armed Forces still have sufficient capacity to deploy in response to world events, we remain to be convinced. We are concerned that the breadth of ministerial requirements is in danger of pushing

the Armed Forces far beyond what is sustainable. We recommend that either a budget uplift or a (strictly adhered to) prioritisation ranking is introduced. Any prioritisation ranking adopted needs to be drawn up within the National Security Council to ensure agreement amongst the Prime Minister, Treasury and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, given that all of those Departments play a role in determining and enabling the deployment of UK Armed Forces. (Paragraph 111)

Defence must prioritise resources to support both future modernisation and current readiness. We do this in concert with our Allies through NATO, continuously reviewing our priorities and capability plans to address shortfalls we have identified.

As an example, the lessons from the Russia-Ukraine War have led to a re-evaluation of previous assumptions around capabilities and readiness. Until now the demands on the Department have allowed for the Global Operate programme to continue at pace. However, given the threat to Euro-Atlantic has increased, and the Department must now be more focused on warfighting readiness. The Department is taking forward work on balancing the Global Operate programme with delivery of the Priority Outcomes as detailed in the Defence Command Paper 23.

In terms of readiness, the single Services classify military forces as being held at different levels of preparedness to respond to short- and long-term needs. At the heart of this work is the continuing evolution of the Capability Readiness Assessment Framework (CRAF). The CRAF process is intended to inform key 3* decision making forums and it should be optimised to support Balance of Investment work, informing options to prioritise spend and optimise capability in the 1–2 year horizon; support the Operational Policy and Requirements Group, informing options to rescope Defence ambition or change Defence priorities in the 0–1 year horizon; support the delivery of the Global Operate Programme, including the delivery of routine military strategic balance assessments and support the staffing of Defence Board Risks.

In tandem, Defence Design is undertaking a review of our Defence Operating Model, one aspiration for this is for the Department to be better able to achieve the outcomes we have prioritised.

12. We understand the financial implications of retaining capabilities after they have been retired but we question whether the MOD have considered all the options. We accept that maintaining equipment comes at significant cost but argue that such platforms do not need to be fully maintained—in a war of existence, a platform which is even halfway viable for regeneration is better than none at all. Given the long lead times to build complex platforms (such as warships, tanks or combat aircraft) combined with the importance of mass and resilience on the battlefield (as demonstrated on both sides of the war in Ukraine), we question whether less expensive alternative storage solutions could be sought, for example through access to US desert facilities. In this context it is worth noting that the United States, China and Russia have for many decades had a policy for mothballing warfighting equipment, whereas the UK policy has been to dispose of it—often at a fraction of its original acquisition cost. Russia has been able to draw on these reserves to add to its capacity to fight in Ukraine. (Paragraph 112)

The decision as to what happens to equipment when it reaches its Out of Service date sits with the relevant Front-Line Commands. Invariably this is because we are replacing the

capability with a modern more capable system that is more economic to support. A range of options will be fully considered for each equipment type, including storage against future contingency, sale or gifting to Allies to help with collective Defence.

One of the key factors in the decision-making process is obsolescence: much of the equipment which reaches its Out of Service Date is by definition old and consequently unsupportable through a lack of spares inventory, its material condition and/or excessively priced overhaul costs. Often, long-term storage is not a viable option as not only can this be extremely costly (even with a reduced maintenance schedule) but it is highly likely that the maintenance support and spares would not be available in the future. It would also not be possible to maintain a force of suitably qualified individuals to either maintain or, more importantly, operate the equipment into the future. In all cases, the decision is considered in the round, taking a number of factors into account, including long term financial value to the taxpayer as well as short term affordability.

For the disposal of all ships, Navy Command has established a formal Disposal and Exports Programme to manage the effective disposal of assets in accordance with the Defence Plan, ensuring Value for Money and the most appropriate outcome for the present day and future Defence. Aircraft are generally retired when it is no longer cost effective to maintain them, due to either significant obsolescence or regulatory compliance costs, or the amount of work which would be required to extend structural airframe life (which may indeed not be possible). Frequently, ongoing maintenance of the remaining fleet is dependent upon the 'reduce to produce' premise, wherein components are removed from retired aircraft to maintain the operational fleet: this is the case for both Hawk and Typhoon Tranche 1.

For land vehicles of all kinds, the Department has robust fleet management policies and procedures in place, including for the management of vehicle disposals. The relevant Service will engage with the Defence Equipment Sales Authority, on the potential disposal opportunities, to determine the most appropriate course of action. Again, a range of factors are considered when decisions are made whether to dispose of vehicles, including operational implications, costs of repair and the availability of spares. A vehicle will be considered for disposal if it is surplus to defence requirements if the estimated costs of repair exceed the authorised repair limit or if the vehicle has reached its end of life.

13. We welcome the Government's decision to assess what the country would need to do to maintain a warfighting effort. However, it is worrying that this work had not already been undertaken. The national defence plan is still a work in progress, but we intend to maintain ongoing scrutiny of the Government's developing plans to ensure warfighting and strategic readiness. (Paragraph 138)

The MOD has always maintained a set of plans to defend the UK and our interests. Recently MOD consolidated its contribution to national defence with policy development, and improvements to command and control and operational planning. Additionally, it is considering capability options including our ability to sustain warfighting with support from defence industries and the Reserves. MOD works with the Cabinet Office and other government departments to develop its plans. The changes in geostrategic risk, the threats seen across Europe and the rapid technological advancement have required a renewed and intensified focus on these efforts. Continued scrutiny of our warfighting and strategic readiness is therefore welcome.

14. *The Government's approach to procurement reform is not yet finalised and we have heard many promises of change before. The MOD has shown willing to engage with us as it finalises this approach. We welcome this engagement but are not yet in a position to reach a view on the appropriateness or effectiveness of the likely policy changes—which we very much hope will be announced to the House prior to the Easter recess, in late March 2024.* (Paragraph 139)

The department is reforming the defence acquisition system to address the challenges identified in this report and in the Defence Sub-Committee's 2023 report on Defence Equipment and Support. Details of the new Integrated Procurement Model were set out in an [oral statement by the Minister for Defence Procurement](#) on 28 February 2024 and a supporting document is available at [20240228_Integrated_Procurement_Model \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#).

15. *Under a national defence plan, each relevant Government Department would have its own responsibilities. We recommend that these responsibilities are published as far as possible, and—if any responsibilities cannot be published for national security reasons—these should be provided in confidence to the relevant select committee. We also recommend that, for each Department, its role in the national defence plan should be added to the list of responsibilities of a named Minister.* (Paragraph 140)

In the published National Risk Register, the Government has declassified more risk information than ever before, adopting a transparent by default approach to the NRR, so that risk practitioners can see more clearly how the government identifies and assesses risks. Only in a small number of cases has highly sensitive information not been included, for national security or commercial reasons. Details around Departmental Responsibilities in national defence planning will be as transparent as possible and will follow the approach set by the Resilience Directorate in the Cabinet Office on [the role of lead government departments in planning for risks with the support of other departments and bodies](#).

16. *Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has fundamentally changed the threat—demonstrating that Russia has both the capability and intent to prosecute a war in Europe. This requires a wholesale shift in approach towards warfighting resilience both in the UK and Allies.* (Paragraph 141)

17. *The Government must act to break this cycle, and do so swiftly, to ensure that the UK is ready not only to face the challenges of today, but also to face the storm clouds on the horizon.* (Paragraph 144)

The Government agrees with the Committee's assertion that the full-scale invasion of Ukraine has fundamentally changed the threat. In the last two years, the world has changed—geopolitically, technologically, economically. The threats and challenges we face have evolved. An environment of global competition has shifted to one of contestation.

That is why the update to the Defence Command Paper in 2023 underlined Defence's two clear ambitions: to protect the nation and help it prosper. To compete effectively against the threats and adversaries facing the UK, Defence must be optimised to fight, whilst able to operate in lower-intensity scenarios. That is why the Department is embedding a sustained, campaigning approach that keeps pace with the evolving threat context. In line with the IRR, this means 'think long-term; act now'.

The UK, our territories and our Allies and partners depend on us to provide the first and last line of defence. Our Armed Forces continue to meet all their operational commitments, including participating in every single NATO mission, supporting Ukraine, and tackling Houthi shipping attacks in the Red Sea.

The lessons that Defence is learning from Ukraine have led to a re-evaluation of our assumptions around capabilities and readiness. The £1.95bn for resilience and readiness will be spent in full on measures to address gaps in our capabilities. That is not just about new investments and new equipment. It will also be used to address long standing challenges across the defence programme, which will make us better able to respond to the threats of today and tomorrow. We must address the totality of this from within the funding provided to us at the Spring Budget 23.

The Euro-Atlantic remains the UK's priority theatre of focus. NATO will remain the cornerstone of UK security. The UK has committed almost all our Armed Forces and military capabilities to NATO under the new NATO Force Model—our strongest ever force commitment to the Alliance. 20,000 service personnel from the Royal Navy, the British Army, and the Royal Air Force have deployed across Europe to take part in Exercise Steadfast Defender 24. The Royal Navy has now deployed nine warships and more than 2,000 sailors. 16,000 troops from the British Army will be deployed across eastern Europe from February to June 2024, taking with them tanks, artillery, helicopters, and parachutes. The RAF will be making use of some of its most cutting-edge aircraft, including F35B Lightning attack aircraft and Poseidon P8 surveillance aircraft.

Our strategic resilience draws also from our ability to mobilise at scale our military resources in a time of crisis in response to threats to our homeland. Our Reserves, with specialist skills and unique connections, will be at the heart of this effort, forming the core of the second- and third echelon forces that will reinforce and sustain warfighting capabilities and protect the homeland. The Strategic Reserve—built around the ex-regular reserve forces—will add further depth of capability, able to generate previously unassigned surge capacity and wider access to expertise in time of crisis or national emergencies.

On Civil Contingencies, the UK's Armed Forces continue to form an integral part of the Government's effort to counter the threat from terrorism and other emergent crises—at home as well as overseas. We will continue to support the civil authorities more generally and will hold forces at high levels of readiness to respond to a wide range of national events and crises.