

### **Written evidence submitted by the Ministry of Defence.**

The Government welcomes the Committee's decision to open this inquiry. Given the nature of the inquiry, there will be areas where operational security will need to come first and the information the committee seeks will be classified. Some of this information can and will, however, be shared in a private session.

As the 2023 IR Refresh (IRR) set out, in the last two years, the world has changed – geopolitically, technologically, economically. The threats and challenges the UK faces have evolved. An environment of global competition has shifted to one of contestation.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was not just an assault on a proud, sovereign, democratic nation; it was also an assault on our values, on European security, and on the open international order on which stability and prosperity have relied since the end of the Second World War. Defence recognised a need to learn lessons from the war in Ukraine – including in relation to readiness - and adapt now.

Readiness is how Defence measures the value of its assets in productivity and output terms. It is defined as a product of Availability, Capability and Sustainment, and it describes how the MOD holds its military forces at varying levels of preparedness to respond to emerging and planned operations. Although it is difficult to compare readiness between different force elements and strategic assets, the Department is working hard to develop the metrics and tracking that will provide the meaningful analysis and assessment that will support decision-making on readiness across the Services.

Defence took a 'Just In Time' approach to logistics over the last thirty years, which was the right approach during the campaigns in Iraq, Afghanistan and other counter-insurgency deployments. Indeed, previous PAC and HCDC hearings from the 1990s noted that Defence was spending too much money on stockpiles and enablers that were no longer needed after the end of the Cold War. However, those Cold War enablers were there for a reason: they underpinned the deployability and readiness of the force. Whilst technological advances mean that not all Cold War logistics and enablers need to be restored, many do, as the UK faces a renewed challenge from state actors.

An increased investment of £5 billion over two years was announced at the Spring Budget for bolstering stockpiles and investments in the nuclear enterprise. Defence's budget is now – for the first time – over £50 billion a year. The Prime Minister has also set a new aspiration over the longer term to invest 2.5% of GDP in defence, as the fiscal and economic circumstances allow. As with the rest of Government, fiscal pressures, in particular due to inflation, are having an impact in the short term and the MOD will continue its programmes to increase efficiencies and maximise productivity.

That is why on 18 July the Government published the Defence Command Paper 2023 (DCP23). Defence has the opportunity to do things differently: to adapt to the threats, learn lessons from Ukraine, and champion closer integration with allies and partners. Defence will deliver a force that is credible at deterring threats, defending

the homeland and our Allies, and fighting and winning if needed, as well as taking a campaigning approach to global competition.

**Q: Are the armed forces sufficiently capable, resourced and ready to protect the UK and our allies?**

As set out in DCP23, the UK's commitment to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, backed up by modern, credible forces, is the most powerful deterrent against aggression. 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 31 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 31 NATO Allies and not only from our own armed forces.

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, and transforming the Department's workforce model to attract and retain the talent needed to operate those capabilities. The MOD is doing more to increase operational productivity by rebalancing investment in capabilities' availability and sustainment, but Defence must continue to do more.

The UK is facing increasing challenges and State-based threats. Given this constantly evolving picture, 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. Defence will invest in deeper munitions stockpiles, enhance enabling capabilities such as medical capacity, and develop options to counter new battlefield threats such as Uncrewed Aerial Systems, as well as addressing the infrastructure and industrial capacity required to sustain military operations. Importantly, the Ukraine War has shown Defence is able to protect the UK, contribute to NATO deterrence and support a key partner at the same time.

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. The department uses a number of different tools to assess and analyse readiness, including the Capability Readiness Assessment Framework (CRAF) and the Defence Capability Assessment Register (DCAR).

An outline of some of the gaps in capability and readiness can be found in the answer to the following question. Specific capability and readiness challenges –

particularly around people, infrastructure, and enablers – are classified and can be covered in the private briefing.

**Q: What are the main gaps in capability and/or readiness, and what will it take to fill these gaps?**

Much of this is classified and will need to be covered in the private briefing. While all three Services continue to have sufficient numbers of trained personnel to meet their operational commitments, Defence is experiencing skills and capability shortages in critical areas and enabling functions such as digital, medical, and project management. Internal reporting in the MOD in April this year identified over 250 pinch points, at different levels of criticality, covering the Armed Forces and the MOD civilian workforce. Of these, there are 36 pinch points in the Armed Forces and 34 in the MOD civilian workforce at the highest level of criticality. Whilst the MOD has recovery plans in place to reduce the pinch points, it is imperative to guard against over-optimism, as only through sustained effort from both the single Services and the MOD can these targets be achieved.

The introduction of new platforms has increased the requirement for personnel trained to operate and maintain them. Defence is focused on getting more out of these capabilities by rebalancing investment in their availability and sustainment. The Increasing Defence Outputs initiative - outlined in DCP23 - is dedicated to growing Defence's operational productivity across the enterprise, focusing on military platforms, force elements and strategic assets.

On top of the Department's existing Equipment programme, which has committed investment of £242 billion over a decade to transform the Armed Forces, DCP23 outlines how the Department will invest an additional £2.5 billion in munitions and stockpiles, building on the increased investments committed at the Autumn Statement and Spring Budget. Defence will invest in capabilities such as complex weapons, general munitions, and operational spares stocks to meet the needs of sustained operations. These investments will go some way to addressing a number of known issues highlighted through the DCAR and recent internal audits. These can be discussed in more detail in the closed session.

Some specific examples of readiness and resilience funding areas include:

- Defence rail outload theatre capability
- Infrastructure and warehousing munitions
- Infrastructure at key ports and airbases
- Operational medical capacity
- Armoured vehicle equipment support
- Interim and future strategic lift concept phase

To address these capability and readiness gaps, Defence is investing in innovative ways to increase the generation of force elements to deliver strategic effect around the world, at the right time, at the right intensity and for as long as is needed. Within the military Commands, there are teams identifying the most significant barriers to readiness and then applying focused levels of effort to overcome them. The aim is to increase key measures of productivity by 30% within a tight 24-month timeframe –

despite having started earlier this year, the early opportunities include a potential 20% increase in Typhoon availability.

In support of Department-wide work to increase Defence outputs, the Defence Equipment & Support Operating Model aims to create a structure that will enable the Department to deliver at the right time, in the right place so that the armed forces can meet the challenges facing the UK in today's uncertain international climate and in the future. A key enabler is the development of a Defence Availability Control Centre (DACC), based at Abbey Wood Bristol, which aims to harness the power of data to ensure the Department can maximise the availability of its existing equipment and develop insights for its future equipment.

**Q: Are the UK armed forces a 'tier one fighting force'? Do they need to be?**

The UK remains a world-leading military power: a leading member of NATO; a member of the UN's P5; the linchpin in securing support for Ukraine after Russia's invasion (as well as leading on Granting in Kind the equipment that the Ukrainians need to fight Russia); and recognised globally as a convening power. Defence fuses hard and soft power to strategic advantage, and working with allies and partners has a compounding effect on what can be delivered.

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. The Department will embed 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 focus will be on the lethality, availability and readiness of capabilities to meet the threat picture.

To achieve these aims and deliver a credible Armed Forces, DCP23 sets out the following:

- Commitment to a one-in-two generations programme of modernisation of the UK's nuclear forces, underpinned by long-term investment.
- Re-emphasis on the UK's commitment to playing a leading role in NATO, including through a comprehensive force commitment to the Alliance.
- Recognising the indivisibility of theatres in today's world, which means Defence is taking a global campaigning approach against the threats from state and non-state actors – wherever they manifest in the world.
- The most urgent priority in the Euro-Atlantic is to support Ukraine to reassert its sovereignty. The UK will stand by Ukraine for the long haul. In total, the UK has spent £2.3 billion on support to Ukraine between April 2022 and March 2023. As a leading international donor of military aid to Ukraine, the UK is second only to the United States.
- The UK will embody a fully integrated approach to deterrence and defence, including across all domains, across government by exploiting all the levers of state power, and with allies and partners. DCP23 reaffirms that alliances and partnerships are critical to the UK's security and prosperity – whether through sharing intelligence, operating alongside one another, or building the next generation of capabilities.

**Q: What are the consequences of the army having been “hollowed out and underfunded”? Which of these consequences needs to be addressed most urgently?**

Three decades of a peacetime dividend following the end of the Cold War allowed Defence not to prioritise the critical enabling capabilities that underpin the credibility of the force. It is clear this era is over, which is why Defence has taken the steps to regrow these. Defence is learning critical lessons from the war in Ukraine and investing in resilience. As outlined above, DCP23 sets out where funding for strategic enablers is increasing, and how to get more out of existing assets.

Competing effectively in a more contested world means Defence must deliver more, at a faster pace. As budgets are finite, this can only be achieved by aggressively driving productivity in people and equipment. Defence has already made material changes, including to the way the MOD’s Head Office operates and removing organisational and bureaucratic layers that are no longer fit for purpose. Productivity is also about minimising time when assets are unavailable, including through better equipment support and data exploitation, reinforced by a new alliance with industry.

**Q: Are the Government’s plans sufficient to address any shortfalls?**

To deter the threats we will face today and tomorrow, a credible force is needed that can sustain the fight. With a shift in Defence’s mindset, and through investment, prioritisation, and focus, DCP23 sets out Defence’s determination to deliver a credible warfighting force, generated and employed to protect the nation and help it prosper now and in the years to come.

***21<sup>st</sup> November 2023***