

DefenceSynergia - DS
National Defence & Strategy Research Group
Exposing the incoherence and weakness in the United Kingdom's
Defence and Security Strategies
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DS was formed ahead of the 2010 SDSR. We established our group to achieve one goal: to research and challenge weaknesses in UK's strategy and defence policy and then seek to influence better outcomes by constructive engagement with mainstream political players. All DS members are self-funding, many have served in the Armed Forces, and none is beholden to any public or commercial organisation or special interest group.

INTRODUCTION

This brief DS input for the Defence Committee inquiry into the Integrated Defence, Security and Foreign Policy Review (IDSFPR) 2020 is made in the shadow of the current Covid-19 crisis which has altered all previous fiscal/economic forecasts to such an extent that UK economic growth may decline in GDP terms if the Nation is tipped into a recession. As the DS position has always been to point out the Strategic Void at the heart of Government planning, and this position has not altered, this input will be commensurably brief.

The Chairman of the Defence Committee, Tobias Ellwood, is on record as calling for a '**national story**' to be able to tell the public. DS fully supports this view.

However, we would go further and ask that this national story should become the opening paragraphs of an articulated National Grand Strategy document that informs the public and all Departments of State where each fits into the national narrative. Additionally, the Chiefs of Staff, should provide an explanation and justification to explain why HMG funds the current order of battle. In so doing MoD must provide answers to the what, when, where and why questions that underpin the need for HM Armed Forces and fund them?

DISCUSSION

DS has asserted for many years that HMG's unwillingness to articulate and formalise a National Grand Strategy is the primary reason that all major Departments of State – not least the FCO, DfID and MoD - find themselves reacting rather than anticipating crises. Without any such Strategic objective and course to follow, government agencies feel free to pursue different and sometimes contradictory paths which then dilute or severely nullify the intended effect.

As Professor Rosa Brooks of the New America Foundation and professor at Georgetown University Law Center (sic) said in 2012 in connection with United States Strategy : "...But without some notion of where you want to go, there's no principled or consistent basis for making even the most incremental decisions, so you end up with a foreign policy at risk of appearing almost random. As they say, if you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there. It's a sentiment that may have worked fine for the Cheshire Cat, but it's not a recipe for a sound foreign policy."

"...if you don't not know where you are heading..." This is the position that the Armed Forces and the Chiefs of Staff have found themselves in since the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Over 3 decades of 'Peace Dividends' 'Efficiency Savings' and 'Equipment and Manpower Downsizing' without logical and consistent Strategic direction from the Government, has made it impossible for the Service Chiefs to put together a coherent plan. This has meant three decades in which the formerly published **Defence Planning Assumptions** (DPA) - since 2015 mysteriously classified - and the funding criteria based on the DPA, were constantly breached to allow a succession of administrations the freedom to exercise unfunded Foreign and Defence initiatives without Strategic purpose.

Rather than devise and articulate a National Strategy for Foreign, Defence and Security Policy, the government has repeatedly emphasised to the public that Defence is measured by the percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that is spent on "defence" rather than how capable our Armed Forces are at conducting the many, often unfunded, tasks expected of them – input rather than output being the management matrix for calculating success. Adherence to NATO's target to spend a minimum of 2% of GDP has resulted, over the same time frame, in a counter-intuitive hollowing out of UK Defence Capability in respect to Readiness; Responsiveness; Resilience; and Regeneration.

DS recommends that a UK Strategy must be developed to guide the IDSFPR and that the following 4 essential parameters must be included.

- 1. There must be an operational capability datum (a Joint starting point)**
- 2. The Defence contribution must be based on UK Foreign and Defence Policy requirements as a whole - not muddled and weakened by an inter-service competition for resources.**
- 3. Readiness; Responsiveness; Resilience; and Regeneration must be at the core of the defence element of the Integrated Review.**
- 4. Defined Concurrency, Duration and Rates of Effort assumptions and targets must be promulgated to allow operational audits within MOD and preferably Parliament to provide early warning to ministers and service chiefs when defence is 'running hot'.**

Conclusion

The British involvement in the 1990/91 Gulf War and in Bosnia in 1992 were justifiable within the Defence Planning guidelines then in place. They were operations sanctioned within UK's international obligations to the United Nations – albeit authorised they were not planned and, therefore, stretched HM Armed Forces. However, since 2003 HM Armed Forces have been operating in multiple theatres of combat way beyond funded concurrency, duration and rates of effort limits set against a background of ever increasing defence funding cuts without a defining and articulated Strategic *raison d'etre*.

The UK government must set a strategy which encompasses all areas of society, explain it and then develop the plans to achieve this whether it be over health, the economy or defence. Achieving this will strengthen the morale of the country. DS argues that it will be for the Chiefs of Staff to say how Strategy translates into the order of battle they require to meet the Tasks and Objectives – but it is for HMG, who set the Strategy, to fund the same.

To quote General Sir Nicholas Houghton, former Chief of the Defence Staff in an article in the Daily Telegraph on 7th April 2020: "*Morale is different. It is a far more*

fundamental quality, best defined as the ability of an institution or nation to endure in adversity. In the Armed Forces, building good morale is the work of years, not moments. It is based on spiritual, intellectual and material factors. Such things as strong but caring leadership; tradition; hard training; good kit; and, perhaps most important of all, a belief in the mission and a collective trust that the plan to achieve that mission is a good one.

“Judged against the military meaning of the term, I think the morale of our nation is fragile. In recent years, it has been seriously damaged by a combination of many things: political acrimony; the tensions within the Union; the domination of woke agendas; and the maldistribution of wealth and opportunity within society. Even the national embarrassments of our railway system and our national air carrier have had a corrosive effect.

*“Most significant of all in the context of the present crisis, however, is that it is not remotely clear that our country has a vision, or a plan to achieve it. **This absence of a collective national vision and a strategy to realise it combine to undermine our belief in ourselves.**”¹*

1 <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/04/07/britain-plucky-national-morale-low/>