

## WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE STRATEGIC DEFENCE AND SECURITY REVIEW

An update by the National President

Shipmates will know that a Strategic Defence and Security Review is in progress. You will probably have seen some recent alarming articles in the press- "Royal Marines to be transferred to Army operational control"; "RAF and Navy in dogfight over whether Harrier or Tornado should be scrapped"; "a Naval base to be closed". We are all concerned that this very significant Review should leave our Defence and Security safe and particularly that part of it assured by the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Royal Fleet Auxiliary. So what's happening and how might we help counter the more dangerous suggestions which might otherwise gain currency through being aired in the media?

Firstly the MoD is not in charge. It is a Strategic Defence and **Security** Review. The newly formed National Security Council chaired by the Prime Minister is in charge and the MoD is a prime contributor. Secondly it is intended to be foreign policy led ie what sort of role does the UK want to play on the world stage? What sort of Armed Forces must we maintain to protect and promote our National Interests? What are these interests? But it is also Resource informed and the resource bit may, perhaps by necessity, be steaming ahead of the policy. We all know what a fiscal mess our country is in. We have been borrowing around a quarter of what the Government has been spending. All Parties agree this has to stop sometime- the current Coalition thinks soon and their argument won most votes in the Election.

So while the National Security Council debates the policy the Treasury has instructed all Government Departments to state how they would manage with very much less money. The MoD's targets are not in fact as demanding as most others. Perhaps this is because so much of the Defence Budget is already contractually committed. Little money could be saved in the near term by cancellations. It is clearly in Defence's best interest as well as its duty to address the Treasury's remits fully. Otherwise members of the Cabinet might feel justified in accusing MoD of getting off too lightly. Consequently more than 40 "Work Strands" were instructed to work up radical proposals for detailed costing. These reports were recently submitted and before any policy baseline. Perhaps inevitably some of them have leaked or ideas which did not make it into the reports have been floated to the press by those who favoured them.

Our serving Shipmates value our commitment to the Naval Service and our national presence. We can fulfil our Royal Charter duty to support them by taking any opportunity to explain, not emotionally but rationally, the Navy's contributions to national defence. The time where such help might be most useful is during the decision making process when the policy and resource angles have to be reconciled. This must be over the next few months since the SDSR is working to an extremely demanding timescale for such hugely significant questions. I believe the aim is for announcement along with the whole Government Comprehensive Spending Review close to Trafalgar Day. The following are some of the areas of debate I judge most crucial to the Naval Service. I don't argue with any of them being raised but I would hope that the following points get a fair airing and that Shipmates will find them helpful:

### Royal Marines

- The UK has frequently needed to launch troops ashore from the sea (amphibious operations) eg in the Falklands, Sierra Leone and Gulf War 2.
- Two things are a must for success. A landing force organised, trained and equipped for amphibious operations and specialist ships able to transport, land, sustain ashore, withdraw and redeploy the landing force without any external aid in a hostile environment.

- The minimum effective size for a worthwhile landing force able to exert strategic effect is Brigade level- what we have.
- The UK has also recapitalised its specialist amphibious ships (OCEAN, BULWARK, ALBION and the 4 BAY RFAs). These will be with us beyond 2030.
- Army harmony allows more time in UK than does that for the RN which the RM follows. If they were under Army operational control time for amphibious training would wither and with it the capability.
- Amphibious operations are among the most demanding of all military endeavours. The landing force and their naval comrades must be aware from long mutual familiarisation and sympathy of each others' requirements. With it you get Quebec, the Falklands and the 2003 Iraq capture of the Al Faw peninsula. Without it Gallipoli. Our history is full of such practical examples of success and failure. This is the prime reason for the Royal Marines existence and their place in the Naval Service.
- The Royal Marines provide the Royal Navy with many other capabilities which need to be managed along with the primary amphibious role such as: maritime Special Forces, boarding parties, shore guarding of the nuclear deterrent, military training and our beloved bands.
- In the context of Special Forces from 3% of Defence manpower the RM contribute across the board such that more than 1/3 of the SBS, SAS, SF Support Group and the Recce Regiment are Royal Marines. Where else would we find such people if the ethos, training and calibre of recruit were diluted?

### Carriers

- They will be National Defence assets not purely Naval ones.
- They are the only way the UK can be sure of deploying air power (whether flown by RN, RAF or Army) anywhere without need to overfly or base in foreign countries.
- Nearly half the airpower in Afghanistan comes from Carriers.
- Wider utility was demonstrated in the Haiti earthquake relief.
- Cancelling them would save about £200M over the next 5 years- we'd still have to pay about £5B.
- At a recent Conference on Air Power the Chief of the Air Staff stated that the RAF unequivocally supported the Carrier Strike concept and its delivery.

### Harrier and Tornado

- Big potential savings in basing, training and support may dictate the necessity for the UK to remove 1 of our 3 Fast Jet aircraft types. Typhoon must stay so the choice may lie between Harrier and Tornado.
- While Tornado is currently deployed in Afghanistan, the Harrier GR9 does the job rather better- it is what it was designed for. The Tornado's more advanced reconnaissance pod will soon be replaced by UAVs (Unmanned Aerial Vehicles) which are cheaper, have greater endurance and are more expendable.
- If the Harrier is scrapped before the new Joint Combat Aircraft has replaced it then the UK will lose its current ability to deploy fast jet aircraft from our Carriers. Interventions like Sierra Leone and air support like that deployed in Bosnia will not be possible.
- The UK will lose the art of flying fast jets from Carriers. It will be very expensive, difficult and time consuming to recover it.
- The Navy will have no fixed wing, fast jet pilots where the UK's maritime expertise lies. There will be no instinctive knowledge of fast jet operations at sea within the Navy.

- Finally dispensing with Tornado would save **seven** times as much money as scrapping Harrier.

### Naval Bases

- I do not know if closing any of our present Naval Bases (Devonport, Faslane and Portsmouth) has been raised in MoD but it has in the media.
- Each provides some unique capability eg Devonport is the only place where the UK can defuel out of service nuclear submarines- a facility which will be needed for at least the next 30 years.
- The Naval Bases have been subject to significant rationalisation and cost reduction under the Maritime Change Programme which is still being implemented.
- All three are needed to support current Defence Policy. The Fleet would have to be significantly reduced in size before we could manage with two.
- In the 16 years since I first heard it debated in front of a Defence Minister I have yet to meet a politician who believed it feasible to close one of our 3 Naval Bases.