

Defending our nation

The world has been mercifully short of wars for NATO in the last few years. Mr Trump's decision to disengage from hot war in the Middle East has made a difference to the demands on our armed forces, after years of war in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and the wider Middle East. This does not mean the world has suddenly got less hostile, or we can afford to relax our guard and save our money on defence.

At the end of the Cold War the UK and other allies did cut budgets substantially because the threat of a possible major conflict in Europe against the USSR (Russia) reduced. Today we do not seek or anticipate conflict against Russia or China, but have to acknowledge that both those relationships can be testing. Needs may arise that require the West to show resolve to defend itself and its allies were the peace of the world to be threatened somewhere by some nation.

There are state and serious organised crime actors in today's digital world regularly testing our ability to defend and secure our systems, with challenges to data and phone networks and utility networks coming from afar. We need to spend enough to stay ahead in the cyber world, capable of defending our position and probing hostile systems.

As a believer in free trade and a leading member of the WTO the UK needs to make her contribution to keeping the shipping and air lanes of the globe free for legal commerce. There are pirates and terrorist forces to tackle and possible hostile state actors to impress with our intent and ability to keep international waters and airspace free. The U.K. also needs to understand other countries in the world may seek to exploit our belief in free trade and democracy for their own advancement. We should not be naive or one sided free traders.

As a maritime country with an important fishery we need vessels and aircraft to police and protect our fishing grounds and to prevent smuggling and people trafficking through our waters.

We do need to spend enough on our own protection. I will be developing how in future blogs.