

Global Britain and the security review

The Prime Minister's statement yesterday renewed attention to an increase in spending on defence, including the renewal of the deterrent, an expansion of counter action in cyberspace and improved equipment for all three services. He confirmed the reduction of overseas aid spending, called China a challenge and proposed an Indo Pacific tilt to future policy. The UK is joining the South East Asian nations as a dialogue partner and applying to join the trade Agreement called Trans Pacific Partnership.

The policy takes a more realistic view of threats and challenges worldwide, and proposes strengthening the UK's response. The aircraft carrier Queen Elizabeth will lead a carrier force to reinforce the UK commitment to open sea lanes around the world. A cyber force will be available to retaliate against criminal gangs and state actors attacking our systems. UK networks and utilities will be better protected.

There are various ways in which I want this approach to be strengthened. As I have set out before, a country cannot guarantee its own defence unless it controls central technologies and designs that enable it to roll out sufficient defensive weapons should war arise. A country dependent on seaborne trade needs both to be able to protect convoys at sea and to reduce its reliance on imported raw materials, food and crucial products to reduce the risk of shortages should we face another attempt to dominate us by strangling our imports. Seapower and more recently its modern air arm have been needed in the past to prevent blockade and invasion.

There remain some unanswered questions that next week should be clarified when we hear from the Defence Secretary. How many troops will the army retain? How many seagoing warships? How quickly will the role of drones, smart weapons, unmanned aircraft and missiles increase and what numbers will be involved? What if any global defence tasks should we take on, given our presence in Estonia for NATO and our enduring commitments in places like Cyprus and Gibraltar? What more action is going to be taken to strengthen national resilience and self sufficiency?