

Making our defence

Yesterday I defined some of our defence needs. Today we need to discuss how we carry this into effect.

Central to our defence against a major challenge lies our membership of NATO. NATO is our best protection against another world war. It was born of the experiences of the twentieth century where it took massive alliances to defeat a powerful common enemy on two occasions.

Those bitter experiences also taught us that the UK herself needs great resilience in technology and weapons production. The UK economy in both wars had to be transformed to divert massive amounts of production to the manufacture of warships and planes, weapons, ammunition, uniforms and the rest to maintain and supply mighty forces. As a major assault was made against our supply lines through submarine action, the point was reinforced that we needed to grow our own food and make our own tanks because imported ones might be sunk before arrival or would not be available from their old suppliers.

In the second world war the industrial achievement was huge. Not only did the UK have good designs of its own for some planes and ships, but it was soon able to make large quantities to replace the heavy losses of the war of the Atlantic and the battle of Britain. We also worked very closely with the USA and needed supplies to cross a dangerous Atlantic.

Today we should review our domestic capability and improve plans to scale up output at home should peril ever face us again. If you wish to defend yourself you have to allow for the loss of some allied support and capability, and need to have under your own control the crucial components and sinews of war. It is no good relying on long supply lines and imported components or ammunition should with our allies we face again a major enemy. Such a review will offer offsets to the state deficit through more employee and business taxes on the extra domestic manufacture, and will help cut the balance of trade deficit as we reduce our imports.