

Strategic thinking for defence

As the UK moves on from substantial military interventions in the Middle East we need a new statement of why we have armed forces and how we wish to use them. Past Secretaries of State for defence have tended to be preoccupied with day to day battles over budgets, with defence reviews that have been budget exercises in the main, and until recently with a series of difficult interventions in Middle Eastern wars alongside our allies. They have not set out clearly what our longer term aims as a country are and how well trained and equipped forces can help us achieve them. It would be a good task for the relatively new Secretary of State to set out what our forces should be and what they can do in the years ahead.

We need to look to history to see what we have needed in the past. The UK has been an active and engaged country with interests around the world. We have used our forces to back up our trade and diplomacy. We have stood in recent years for democracy, freedom and self determination of peoples, intervening against aggressors in places like Kuwait and the Falklands.

Today we do not see any threat of invasion and are enjoying a peace which has been long and enduring with our nearest neighbours. Over the longer haul we have stood against any single dominant military power emerging on the continent, where such a dominant power proceeds by conquest and eclipses liberties and self determination for smaller countries. This has required substantial forces to overcome Spanish aggression in the sixteenth century, French aggression in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and German aggression in the twentieth. We had to defeat a seaborne armada that got close to our coasts in 1588 from Spain, had to defeat the combined Spanish and French fleets at Trafalgar to prevent their seizing the channel to allow an invasion to cross the narrow seas, and had to win the battle of Britain in the air in 1940 to avoid a German invasion. Defence of the home base mainly required seapower, boosted by airpower in 1940. Control of the Channel was a successful first line of defence in each case. Only once since 1066 have we been successfully invaded. This was in 1688 by the Dutch when much of the British establishment welcomed the invading force and accepted William and Mary's claim to the throne.

The first duty of our defence forces must be to prevent invasion of our home islands, Fortunately we live in an age when a planned invasion from a nearby continental European country looks impossible. This should not, however, lead to complacency as history has taught us that a threat can emerge swiftly and needs countering and in a mobile age can come from further afield.

History also shows us that the UK has in the past intervened in large wars with land forces. Here our experiences have been more mixed and often marred by bitter and large loss. Usually government commits the country to a war which our available forces cannot possibly win as they are too small. During the war there has to be a massive investment in personnel and weaponry to scale the forces to the task in hand. In 1914 a small highly professional army was committed to the continent ill prepared for contemporary trench and

machine gun warfare, only to lose a large proportion of the force. The next four years were spent recruiting a massive citizens army and training it to modern realities to go on to win with our allies. After the US joined in 1917 the mass killing stalemate at last started to move in the direction of an Allies win. In 1939 again a small professional force was committed to the continent, only to be forced into rapid and dangerous retreat, losing much of its equipment and requiring the miracle evacuation of Dunkirk to save most of the people. Thereafter a larger army was recruited and the continent successfully retaken once the US and other forces joined the cause. We should learn from this experience that we need enormous flexibility of supply and recruitment should a national emergency arise.

The second duty of our forces is to be available to handle any national emergency where they can assist the civil power. Great Britain has a long tradition of not wanting a standing army, and resisting interference from the military in politics. Today we have a very professional army that keeps to its clearly understood constitutional role, and is available and willing to help in flood relief or disaster response if needed. As the armed forces have heavy lift helicopters, other military vehicles, and fit and well trained personnel available it makes sense in extreme conditions to ask them support the civilian services that normally handle these matters.

The third duty of our forces is to be available for intervention abroad. If a dependent territory or ally needs military help, or if we need to contribute to a UN mission as members of the Security Council, we need to have flexible and responsive forces that can be taken to a trouble spot or war promptly and effectively. To do this we need the ability to project force by air and sea, and the capacity to lift troops and equipment quickly to where they are needed. This requires carrier groups of ships, air cover and air attack capacity, and heavy lift to take battalions and their vehicles and equipment over long distances.

[The Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust to receive additional funds to help deliver improvements to A & E](#)

Dear John,

The Secretary of State has written to me advising that the Government has allocated £1.6 million to the Royal Berkshire NHS Trust as part of a scheme to help deliver improvements to A & E services this winter. With the cold weather approaching this extra investment will be welcome.

Improved emergency care, new beds, and enhanced equipment as part of major funding boost for hospitals ahead of winter

To make sure the NHS performs as well as it possibly can this winter we are funding hospitals to deliver improvements in their A&E performance.

A total of 81 new schemes, totalling £145 million of capital investment, have been prioritised from within the Department's capital budget for hospitals across the country to help staff prepare ahead of winter.

This funding will enable the NHS to deliver additional beds, redevelop A&E units and upgrade wards, enhance bed management systems, and improve 'same-day' emergency care.

I am delighted to inform you that your local NHS trust will benefit from this funding as part of the action the Government is taking in advance of winter. Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust has identified a scheme that can help with its bed capacity, and has been allocated £1.6m.

Last winter was challenging, but thanks to the efforts and dedication of hard working frontline staff, over 500 more people were seen in A&E and admitted or discharged within four hours every day. This further investment in the NHS will help those staff to deliver the best possible care for patients this winter.

Yours ever,

MATT HANCOCK

[Exiting the EU – some factual background to where we now are](#)

If nothing else is approved by Parliament we will leave the EU on 29 March 2019 with no Withdrawal Agreement or Future Partnership Agreement. If the government does wish to sign such Agreements it will need primary legislation to endorse them and to provide the large sums of money to pay for them . Those of you who want Brexit and are very critical of what has happened should study this carefully, as it shows a lot has been achieved to complete all the legal processes for exit next March. The present rows are about whether effective exit should be delayed and whether we should re-enter parts of the EU that otherwise we will simply leave next year. All the spin based on Project Fear Mark 2 gets in the way of a clear understanding of how we leave the EU, and what Parliament has so far decided.

EXITING THE EUROPEAN UNION

Referendum 23 June 2016 17.4 million vote to leave the EU, 16.1m vote to remain in EU

Told by government in a letter to all households that voters would decide and Parliament would carry out the decision.

16 March 2017 Royal assent to EU(Notification of Withdrawal) Act
Gained 3rd reading in Commons by 494 votes to 122
Given 3rd reading in Lords unopposed
This fulfils all international and EU law requirements to leave on 29 March 2019, with or without additional Agreements.

6 June 2017 UK General election. 83.3% vote for parties promising to implement Brexit
7.4% vote Lib Dem and 3% vote SNP pledging second referendum on terms of exit

EU Withdrawal Act royal assent 26 June 2018
Passed 3rd reading in Commons 324-295
Given 3rd reading in Lords unopposed
This means that from the date specified in the Act, 29 March 2019, the UK ceases to be a member of the EU and the jurisdiction of the EU and its Court ceases in the UK. All current EU law at that date becomes good UK law, subject to any future amendment or repeal the UK may wish to undertake.

Taxation (Cross border trade) Bill passes Commons July 2018
Amended to prevent UK levying customs for EU or other foreign country unless they levy customs for us on a reciprocal basis. Amended to require primary legislation before re entering EU customs union. Amended to prevent UK staying in EU VAT system. This is now in its Lords stages, but as it is a Tax/money Bill they cannot block the will of the Commons.

Currently in negotiation are

Draft Withdrawal Agreement containing a 21 month Transitional period, additional UK financial contributions after March 2019, reassurances to citizens living in each other's territory

A possible political Agreement about good intentions to negotiate an Association Agreement between UK and EU governing a future partnership. This could include a free trade agreement, a defence and security partnership, data sharing, criminal justice co-operation and much else. Thea UK insists on linkage between the two possible Agreements. Both sides say nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. Both sides need Parliamentary approval.

The so called Chequers compromise is the current UK offer to the EU over the future partnership. The EU has stated it cannot agree the idea of partial membership of the single market, nor the proposals on common customs and tariffs between UK and EU.

The EU has in the past implied that a Canada style free trade deal with fewer tariffs and more service provision than the EU Canada Agreement is on offer, but only for Great Britain. There remains a substantial disagreement between various parties on the issue of the Northern Ireland/Republic of Ireland border. The UK refuses to split the treatment of Northern Ireland from the rest of the UK, which is important to the DUP members of the Coalition in particular.

The Lib Dems stake out the undemocratic extreme

“Demand better” says the boomerang Lib Dem slogan. That’s good advice when the Lib Dems come round with their proposal to block the wishes of the people and try to overturn the results of the 2016 referendum. Standing on a clear ticket for delay, watering down of Brexit and even a second referendum on terms, they slumped to just 7.4% of the vote in the 2017 election. They had not found the moderate middle, the friendly centre of gravity of the UK electorate as they claim. Their views were far from democratic, as they railed against the decision of the UK voters in 2016. Nor were they very liberal, as they dreamt up another Manifesto of regulations, higher taxes and exhortations to all of us to change the way we live our lives.

It’s a crowded space, this search for the so called moderate centre ground. It is defined as going back to Brussels, saying we are sorry for ever thinking of leaving, and accepting the full swathe of laws, taxes, budgets and common policies that characterise the modern EU. What ever is either moderate or democratic about such an agenda? How is it democratic for more and more laws to be made behind closed doors, drafted by officials we cannot sack or make accountable, and approved by Ministers from 27 countries under pressure not to rock the boat? What is liberal about the austerity policies of the EU’s budget controls, requiring higher taxes, lower spending and lower deficits from countries mired in unemployment in the south and west of the EU? How is the EU’s policy of helping pay for Turkey’s heavily defended borders with the Middle East moderate? What is green about the fishing discard policy or the dash for diesel and the reliance on coal for power by Germany? Why does everything proposed by the EU get through without a whisper of criticism? When will they apologise for the huge damage the Exchange Rate Mechanism did to the livelihoods and businesses of many in the UK, or for the revenge the Euro crisis visited on Cyprus, Greece, Ireland and Spain?

The outgoing Leader of the Lib Dems cannot make up his mind exactly when he will leave his job. Maybe he should hold a party referendum on the topic. Nor does he have any confidence in his fellow MPs, saying that they need to open up the contest for a new Leader to people not in Parliament. I guess as he believes laws should be made in Brussels and more control pass to the EU there is a kind of logic to not bothering whether a party leader can argue, question and vote on what we do here at home in our own legislature. It is a further sign of his insouciance towards UK democracy. Into this private debate with a few voters has intruded Tony Blair. A man who did well out of leading the Labour party, he has gone as far as he dare to say his own party under new leadership cannot win an election, and maybe Labour members like him should look around for a new party. Perhaps he has in mind a Social Democrat pro EU break away from Labour, rather like in the 1980s. They would doubtless need to join up with the Lib Dems.

Others looking at this crowded postage stamp of a political position include the hard line group of pro EU Labour MPs who call themselves moderates and who spend most of their time disagreeing with the electors when they are not disagreeing with their own Leader over most things. All of them suffer from the same underlying problem. There has never been a large market for a pro EU party in the UK. When John Stevens set up the pro Euro Conservatives it gained just 1.4% of the vote in the European elections. It peaked at under 4% in the Kensington and Chelsea by election to Parliament and was disbanded owing to a lack of voter support shortly afterwards. I doubt there would be much of a market on the left for a pro EU Labour party that made its peace with the Establishment on a number of issues where Corbyn is more radical. The pro EU Social Democrats never won new seats in a General Election. The Lib Dem result last time should be a warning to them all that trying to stop Brexit gets you to a very poor third place.

What they seek is no moderate centre they can capture. Supporting a new sell out to the EU is far from being a moderate position to adopt.

Spending priorities

The government is conducting a spending review, to come up with 3 year spending plans from 2019-2020 until 2021-2. They have already announced substantial increases for the NHS budget and are currently consulting on what other changes should be made.

It is important that priority areas like the NHS, schools and social care receive increases to meet demand and costs. It is also important that action is taken to offset some of these increases through spending changes elsewhere, to avoid tax rate rises and to keep borrowing to low levels.

Leaving the EU without signing the Withdrawal Agreement would be a good start to the spending review, giving the government the best part of £39bn over two years to allocate to other priorities. Cancelling HS2 would also free considerable sums of capital, allowing spending on increasing rail capacity substantially to the Midlands and the North by investing in smart signalling and leaving money over for other purposes. If the government does not wish to revisit HS2, it could at least examine how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Network Rail spending and borrowing which remain at high levels.

The government should also review its spending on Overseas Aid. More of the budget should be allocated to the first year costs of migrants coming to the UK, as the rules allow. More should be used to construct the ships we need to provide humanitarian aid and support in disaster torn areas. This would relieve those budgets. This Parliament would not want to repeal the 0.7% Aid target so it is important to look at how it is spent.

Where budgets are being increased the government needs to ensure that the extra money is being routed into improving the volume and quality of service being provided. The departments need to bid for the extra money with costed plans for improvement. In the case of social care the money needs to go into more provision for social care support for individuals in their own homes, and into providing more good quality care home places. In the NHS there needs to be an expansion of capacity for the GP service and for the hospital service, to cut waiting times and to make the NHS more accessible to users.

What would your priorities be, both for more spending, and for reductions?