

ARMY 2020 –ORAL STATEMENT

With permission Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the future structure of the British Army.

I know that I can speak for the whole House in expressing our gratitude for the superbly professional job our Armed Forces are doing in Afghanistan and around the world and in paying tribute to their courage, commitment and self-sacrifice in doing so. We have seen again this week in all too stark contrast, the risks that they take on our behalf, both in Afghanistan and at home. And the price that all too many of them pay.

The operation in Afghanistan remains MOD's top priority. But our combat role in Afghanistan is coming to an end, and with it, the predictability of the Army's main effort. Looking beyond 2014, we need to restructure to face an increasingly uncertain world: ready to intervene whenever and wherever to protect our national interest. With an ability to project force and prevent conflict

through “agile and adaptable” Armed Forces, as set out in the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review.

We also need to address the reality of the fiscal situation and to ensure that our Armed Forces are sustainable and affordable. My predecessor, my Rt Hon Friend the Member for North Somerset, announced in the House last July that, as part of the measures to bring the Defence Budget back into balance and to eliminate the £38Bn black hole we inherited from the last Government, the future strength of the Army would be around 120,000 including an integrated trained Reserve of 30,000. A total trained strength not dissimilar to the pre-SDSR level.

So this statement is not about the size of the Army – that decision has already been announced. It is about how we structure the future Army and how we support it to deliver the greatest possible military effect within the manpower envelope available.

The Chief of the General Staff could have taken the attitude that a given reduction in regular manpower must inevitably lead to a similar reduction in military capability. But he didn't. He has grasped the opportunity presented by the end of the Afghan campaign to fundamentally review the structure of the Army and its relationships with the Reserves and its commercial contractors.

A team led by Lt Gen Nick Carter has produced "Army 2020", a detailed plan for a future Army with two distinct elements: Reaction Forces and Adaptable Forces.

The Reaction Forces will generate high-readiness contingent capability, trained and equipped to undertake the full spectrum of intervention tasks, including provision of forces for the first phases of any future brigade-scale enduring operation.

The Reaction Forces will be based around 16 Air Assault Brigade and three armoured infantry brigades, and equipped with new or upgraded armoured fighting vehicles.

Given the high readiness of this force, it will be made up predominantly of regular troops. The Reaction Forces will form a powerful UK contribution to a coalition effort and act as the initial land component of a joint warfighting operation, alongside air and maritime components. At best effort, it will deliver a division into the field.

The remaining infantry and armoured units will form the Adaptable Forces - a pool of regular and reserve units, commanded by seven infantry brigade headquarters, capable of generating forces for tasks including overseas capacity building, homeland resilience, the Army's standing commitments – such as Cyprus, Brunei, the Falklands and ceremonial duties - and, when required, generating the further brigades to sustain any future enduring operation.

Over a full career, soldiers and officers in infantry and armoured units will expect to serve in both Reaction and Adaptable Forces.

Both the Reaction Forces and the Adaptable Forces will include Force Troops – the Artillery, Engineers, Signals, REME, Logistics, Intelligence, Medical and other specialist units upon which the Army in the field depends and without which it could not function.

To achieve this design while reducing the size of the regular army demands a much higher level integration of the regular and reserve components. In the past, the Reserve may have come to be seen by some as an “add-on” to the Army; in future, the Reserve will be a vital integrated component of the Army.

The requirement for greater integration was a principal conclusion of the Independent Commission set up to Review the UK’s Reserve Forces, led by the Vice Chief of Defence Staff, General Sir Nicholas Houghton. I am most grateful to the members of the Commission, including my Hon Friend the Member for Canterbury, for their work in producing this invaluable report.

I can tell the House today that we accept the thrust of the Commission's recommendations. In the interest of keeping this statement to a reasonable length, I have this morning laid a Written Ministerial Statement setting out the detail of how we intend to proceed with our plans for enhanced Reserves.

But I can tell the House that the process of reshaping the Reserves for their future role has already begun, and that I have set up an independent scrutiny team to assess its progress, led by Lieutenant General (Retired) Robin Brims, Chairman of the Council of Reserve Forces and Cadets Associations, who will make his first report in the summer of 2013.

But let me now return to the future structure of the regular Army.

In reducing the size of the regular Army in line with the announcement made last July, there must, inevitably, be a reduction in the number of units. In headline terms, there will be 17 fewer major units as a result of this

announcement. These reductions will fall across the various arms and services of the Army.

The importance of the Regimental system to the British Army and its contribution to the fighting spirit which delivers a battle-winning edge is very clear. And I understand the dismay, felt particularly by former members, at the withdrawal of units that may have illustrious histories and indeed, antecedents. I understand, too, the attachments of the regions and nations of the United Kingdom to specific units within the British Army, and their justifiable pride in those units.

In designing the new structure, the Army has sought to be sensitive to these issues.

But I am also very clear that the Army that emerges from this process must be a forward-looking, modern fighting-machine, remaining best of its class. Respecting the past and honouring its proud history, but looking resolutely to the future. With its principal focus the brave

men and women currently serving, and the units in which they serve.

The Army has approached this task methodically, carefully redesigning the way it delivers force support; building up a “whole force concept” that not only gives effect to the integration of the Reserves, but also the greater use of contractors (sometimes using sponsored Reserves), to support operations. Maximising the combat effect of the Regular manpower available.

I should emphasise to the House that the withdrawal or merger of units is completely separate from the redundancy process. An individual in a unit which is withdrawn or merged is no more or less likely than any other individual with similar skills and service record to be selected for future redundancy. When units are withdrawn, their personnel are reassigned to other units, where possible within the same regiment.

Nor does anything that I shall announce today prejudice the Basing Review which is looking at the optimum

future basing pattern for our Armed Forces units around the United Kingdom.

Mr Speaker, I will list the changes to individual units, starting with the Force troops.

39 Regiment Royal Artillery, 24 Commando Engineer Regiment, 28 Engineer Regiment and 67 Works Group will be withdrawn.

In the Army Air Corps, 1 Regiment and 9 Regiment will merge in preparation for equipping with the new Wildcat helicopters.

In the Royal Logistics Corps, 1 & 2 Logistics Support Regiments will be withdrawn and 23 Pioneer Regiment disbanded, with its functions assumed by other units.

101 Force Support Battalion REME, and 5 Regiment Royal Military Police will also be withdrawn, with 101 becoming a reserve unit.

Army 2020 calls for a greater focus on mobility and the ability to mount expeditionary warfare – based around the air-assault and armoured infantry brigades of the Reaction Forces. This evolution of our posture still further away from the Cold-War lay-down inevitably means a reduction in the size of the Armoured Corps, from eleven units to nine.

After careful consideration of all the factors, including regional distribution and the requirement for a balance of capability, the Army has decided that this will be achieved by an amalgamation of the Queen's Royal Lancers with the 9th/12th Royal Lancers and a merger between the 1st and 2nd Royal Tank Regiments.

Turning to the infantry, I can confirm that no current Regimental names or cap badges will be lost as a consequence of the changes I am announcing today. Five infantry battalions will be withdrawn from the Army's Order of Battle – all of them from multi-battalion Regiments.

In selecting battalions for withdrawal, the Army has focussed on the major recruiting challenges it faces in the infantry. It has looked carefully at recruiting performance, not just at a point in time, but over the last decade; at recruiting catchment areas and at demographic projections for the age cohort from which infantry recruits are drawn. It has also considered regional and national affiliations, the merger and disbandment history of individual battalions and existing commitments of battalions to future operations. The overriding objective has been to arrive at a solution which those currently serving in the Army will see as fair and equitable.

Mr Speaker, the conclusion of this process has been that:

2nd Battalion the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers;

2nd Battalion the Yorkshire Regiment;

3rd Battalion the Mercian Regiment; and

2nd Battalion the Royal Welsh will be withdrawn from the Order of Battle.

In addition, the Royal Regiment of Scotland will see one battalion reduced to a single company. Ministers have agreed with the Chief of the General Staff that, in order to raise the profile of the Royal Regiment of Scotland, and of the Army, in Scotland, a Public Duties Company will be created, returning sentries to Edinburgh Castle and the Palace of Holyroodhouse on a permanent basis for the first time in years.

Accordingly, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 5th Battalion, the Royal Regiment of Scotland, will be re-rolled as a Public Duties Company.

These withdrawals and mergers, unwelcome as I know they will be in the units affected, are fair and balanced and have been carefully structured to minimise the impact of the regular manpower reduction and maximise the military effectiveness of the Army. The reduction in Regular forces will be offset by the enhanced role of the Reserves and the “whole force” concept which optimises

the use of contractors in both peacetime and on operations.

The Chief of the General Staff and his team assess that this configuration will mean that “Army 2020” can deliver the level of capability agreed in the SDSR. That is an excellent outcome, given the appalling state of our inheritance at MOD, and I am extremely grateful to the Chief of the General Staff and the senior leadership of the Army for the constructive and intelligent way in which they have managed this process.

What I have announced today, while difficult and challenging for those directly affected, represents a vision for the future; a vision of a balanced, capable and adaptable British Army that will remain “best in class”.

Mr Speaker, the British Army has seen several transformations since the end of World War II: from wartime structure to Cold War; from conscription to professional force; and the downsizing at the end of the

Cold War in Options for Change and Frontline First. And now it is embarking on another.

The values of the Army have endured through previous transformations; they have sustained it through a decade of continuous campaigns.

And those same values – courage, discipline, respect, integrity, loyalty, selflessness – will sustain it through this transformation.

And, no doubt, through many further iterations in the decades and centuries ahead as this most enduring of British institutions looks confidently to a future in which it continues to adapt to an ever-changing world.

I commend this statement to the House.