

2-10-2016

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Recommended Citation

Bert Chapman. "Geopolitics of the 2015 British Defense White Paper And Its Historical Predecessors." *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations*, 8 (2)(2016): 42-63.

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Geopolitics, History, and International Relations 8(2)
2016, pp. 42–63, ISSN 1948-9145, eISSN: 2374-4383

GEOPOLITICS OF THE 2015 BRITISH DEFENSE WHITE PAPER AND ITS HISTORICAL PREDECESSORS

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ABSTRACT. On November 23, 2015 the United Kingdom (UK) released a defense white paper detailing its national security strategic objectives. This work examines the geopolitical, economic, and strategic implications of this document and compares it with recent and historical defense white paper documents issued by the British government. It scrutinizes the text of these documents and relevant scholarly literature analyzing them while also examining the national security threats facing the UK at the time of their issuance and assesses whether the 2015 document will be supported with requisite political will, military personnel, and financial support to carry out its objectives.

Keywords: UK; defense white paper; national security strategic objective

How to cite: Chapman, Bert (2016), “Geopolitics of the 2015 British Defense White Paper and Its Historical Predecessors,” *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations* 8(2): 42–63.

*Received 16 December 2015 • Received in revised form 8 February 2016
Accepted 9 February 2016 • Available online 25 February 2016*

Introduction

Defense white papers, sometimes called national security strategy documents, are important expressions of countries national security policy goals. They describe the international security environment facing individual countries at given moments in time and how they expect to counter and defeat national enemies if resort to military force is required. The U.S. Government and military regularly issue national security policy documents such as the *National Security Strategy of the United States* issued by presidential admin-

istrations every four to five years, the congressionally mandated *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR) issued by the Department of Defense, and the *National Military Strategy of the United States*. Such documents are important assessments by governments of the day on their national and international security priorities and the financial measures they are willing to take to meet their national interests. These documents also cover economic, diplomatic, environmental, financial, and geopolitical factors influencing their ability or inability to achieve these objectives.¹

This work examines recent the defense white paper released by the United Kingdom in November 2015. It will analyze the contents of historic defense white papers produced by the UK, the geopolitical factors influencing historical and contemporary British defense white papers, and the UK's willingness and ability to carry out objectives described in these white papers given historical and current economic and security environments facing London. Such documents receive both praise and criticism from interested observers depending on their political perspectives. Research on these documents can reveal significant insights on how their governments addressed national security and economic priorities they confronted. These documents and research also demonstrate the degree of security coordination Britain has or does not have with its superpower ally the U.S.²

The UK has issued a number of defense white papers since World War II. Annual government parliamentary commissions called *Statement on Defence* and *Statement on the Defense Estimates* were issued from 1946–1996.³ The 1957 Sandys Review issued by Minister of Defense Duncan Sandys (1908–1987) during the Macmillan Government (1957–1963) was the first major post-war British defense white paper. Issued in the aftermath of the Suez debacle, this document stressed nuclear deterrence as the keystone of British defense policy recommending the abolition of compulsory military service, greater allied burden sharing with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) conventional forces, reducing overseas military forces and the number of Royal Air Force (RAF) fighters, and changing the Navy's role to emphasize relying on aircraft carriers to project power in peacetime emergencies and limited hostilities.⁴

The next British defense white papers were issued between 1965–1968 by Harold Wilson's Labour Government (1964–1970) under Minister of Defence Denis Healy (1917–2015). These documents and subsequently implemented policies involved withdrawing British military forces from east of the Suez, reducing the size of the territorial army, cancelling further construction of aircraft carriers and domestic aircraft construction, and reducing military forces deployed in Cyprus, Germany, and Malta due to financial crises forcing the pound's devaluation.⁵ A decade later, another Wilson Labour Government under Minister of Defence Roy Mason (1924–2015) issued a

defense review (1974–1975) stating that defense spending would be reduced from 5% to 4% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over ten years, that British defense spending should be harmonized with the NATO average which included 3.8% of GDP for France and 4.1% for Germany, and that London’s defense spending should be focused on the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact countries.⁶

The next major British defense review was initiated during Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government (1979–1990) under the stewardship of Defence Minister John Nott. The Thatcher Government sought to increase defense spending and enhance British defense capabilities while recognizing the country’s significant financial constraints. Key features of the Nott Review (1981) included replacing the UK’s nuclear deterrent and rebuilding the reserve forces in order to meet the Soviet threat. The Royal Navy was injured by this review being targeted to lose nearly 20% of its destroyers and frigates, one aircraft carrier, and two amphibious ships. These plans were undermined by the Falkland Islands War in 1982 and some of the proposed naval force cuts were restored.⁷

The next British defense review *Options for Change* was issued in the Thatcher Administration’s waning months in July 1990 as the Cold War was winding down and widespread belief in a “peace dividend” allowing for reduced defense spending was prevalent. Addressing the House of Commons on July 25, 1990, Minister of Defence Tom King said the UK would retain four Trident nuclear submarines, seven air defense Tornado fighter squadrons, reduce defense spending as a share of GDP, maintain forces in Berlin as long as Soviet troops remained there, and plan for mid-1990s force level strengths of 120,000 for the Army, 60,000 for the Royal Navy/Marines, and 75,000 for the Royal Air Force representing an overall regular personnel reduction of 18%.⁸

During 1994 John Major’s Conservative government (1990–1997) undertook a *Defence Costs Study*. Findings of this work included that MOD command structures should be streamlined, that many defense support responsibilities could be privatized through a Private Finance Initiative, and that since future military operations were likely to be carried out on a joint service basis that rationalizing command, training, and support infrastructures could potentially produce enhanced operational efficiency and increased financial savings. These recommendations were intended to reduce military and civilian personnel within the armed forces by 18,700 by 2000 with the most significant cuts coming from civilian workers and the RAF.⁹

Eighteen years of Conservative governments ended with the 1997 election of Tony Blair’s Labour government (1997–2007). The first *Strategic Defense Review (SDR)* issued by this government was produced in July 1998 under Minister of Defence George Robertson. This document stressed the emerging

threats to British security from developments in the Balkans and the Middle East, emphasizing the need to develop expeditionary forces capable of collaborating jointly to carry out operations in various potential operational theaters such as non-NATO regional conflicts, while acknowledging how rapid technological changes impacted military strategy, capability, and operational effectiveness. This document saw the Royal Navy's destroyer/frigate fleet reduced from 35 to 32 ships; the attack submarine fleet reduced from 12 to 10; the anti-mine fleet reduced from 25 ships to 22; and Royal Navy manpower reduced by 1,400. RAF fast jet aircraft were reduced from 177 to 154 with the Germany-based 17th squadron being disbanded and the air defense force reduced from 100 to 87 aircraft. Territorial army size was projected to be reduced from 56,000–40,000.¹⁰

An updated version of the *SDR* was published in July 2002 and stressed changes in British defense strategy stemming from asymmetric warfare and Islamist terrorism as a result of the 911 terrorist attacks. Addressing the House of Commons on October 17, 2002, Defence Minister Geoff Hoon announced:

Across Government, we have been set new challenges by international terrorism. We have set in train work to re-examine our defence policy and plans in the light of the terrorist threat demonstrated on 11 September. We consulted widely and openly...As a result, we published a new chapter to the strategic defence review on 18 July. It shows that the strategic defence review's emphasis on expeditionary operations working with allies was right, but demonstrates – crucially – how best to use our forces against a different sort of enemy: one that is determined, well hidden and vastly different from the conventional forces that we might have expected to face in the past.¹¹

Emphases of this *New Chapter to the SDR* included using defense diplomacy measures to create stability; maintaining wide and flexible ranges of military and non-military options to deter potential terrorism; and using military means to rapidly detect and destroy potential terrorist threats. Additional foci of the *New Chapter* included developing Network Enabled Capability to facilitate rapid intelligence gathering, decision making, and using required military force within real-time; and improving homeland defense by creating 14 Civil Contingency Reaction Forces (CCRFs) from the Reserve Forces to give short-notice assistance to requests from emergency services or local authorities.¹²

This *New Chapter* was followed up in a December 2003 defense white paper presented to Parliament by Hoon. Key features of this document included stressing that:

- The UK not being able to militarily contribute in every international crisis and that its participation will generally be in coalitions.
- That proactive engagement in conflict prevention, short-notice peace support, and counter-terrorist operations will be likely in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Persian Gulf.
- That British Armed Forces must be more prepared for asymmetric attacks by state and non-state actors including the use of Weapons of Mass Destruction; and
- UK forces need to be capable of executing demanding one-time large-scale operations while also executing a simple small-scale peace support operation.¹³

This was followed up with a July 2004 defense white paper specifying force structure changes including increasing special forces numbers and equipment capabilities without providing quantitative details; retaining naval carrier strike and expeditionary force capabilities, decreasing the number of Nimrod surveillance aircraft from 21 to 16; restructuring the Army to facilitate brigade level operations; reducing the number of Challenger 2 armored squadrons; building future combat aircraft around multirole Typhoon and Joint Combat aircraft capable of delivering offensive air and air defense capabilities; and spending approximately £3 billion (\$4.467 billion) to upgrade helicopter combat platforms over the next ten years.¹⁴

These capabilities and charges of insufficient funding for them was made in a May 2004 *RUSI Journal* article which charged that the UK could no longer slice capabilities thinner; that some major procurement capabilities must be reexamined if current essential capabilities are to be sustained; and that the defense budget faces crisis due to flagship projects such as the Nimrod maritime reconnaissance aircraft, Eurofighter jet fighter, Astute submarine, and Brimstone anti-armor missile reaching cost overruns of £3 billion (\$4.467 billion).¹⁵

Continuing national British fiscal problems and the costs of funding military spending for emerging national and international security problems facing the United Kingdom would be felt particularly strongly in the 2010 *Strategic Defense and Security Review* (SDSR). Issued by the newly elected Conservative-Liberal Democratic coalition government of Prime Minister David Cameron (CON-Witney) and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg (LIB-Sheffield Hallam), the *SDSR* sought to integrate British national security policy beyond focusing on defense and military matters to include international aid and diplomacy, border and cyber security, and homeland defense looking ahead to the 2015 time frame.¹⁶

Upon entering office in May 2010, this government faced acute economic problems including a current budget deficit of £14.1 billion (\$21 billion), a monthly net borrowing deficit of £16 billion (\$23.827 billion), and net debt

of £903 billion (\$1.344 trillion).¹⁷ The *SDSR* was published in October 2010 with the influence of Secretary of State for Defence Liam Fox and it and an accompanying *National Security Strategy* emphasizing the need for additional economies and including the following five items as key priorities:

- The pre-eminence of the UK's defense and security relationship with the U.S.
- Developing new models of practical bilateral defense and security cooperation with various allies and partners.
- An effective and reformed United Nations.
- NATO serving as the keystone of the UK's defense.
- An outward-looking European Union promoting security and prosperity.¹⁸

Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review

 HM Government

Source: UK Ministry of Defence

This document noted that operations in Afghanistan were to remain a priority until 2015, that it is impossible to predict the nature of warfare in 2020 and beyond, and that it was vital for the UK to maintain capabilities enabling it to react to the demands of a changing environment. The UK's strained finances made it necessary to make significant changes to service force structure with the most important being:

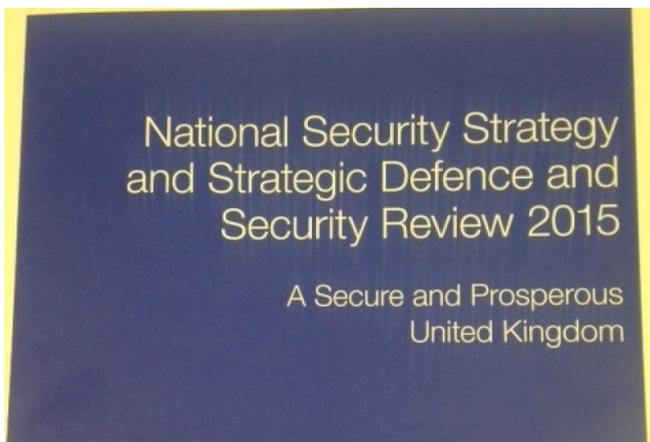
- Decommissioning aircraft carriers and Harrier aircraft creating a 10 year gap in carrier strike capability.
- Continue purchasing the Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carrier and the carrier version of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.
- Withdrawing all British forces from Germany by 2020.
- Immediately canceling the Nimrod aircraft surveillance program.
- Reducing the surface fleet from 23 destroyers and frigates to 19.

- Reducing the armed forces by 17,000 personnel with 7,000 coming from the Army, and 5,000 each from the Royal Navy and RAF.
- Considering the implications of returning forces from Germany prior to decisions on closing the RAF Kinloss base and two other RAF bases identified as superfluous.¹⁹

The 2010 *SDSR* was complimented and criticized from many quarters. One analysis praised it for stressing the importance of reserve forces in British military operations.²⁰ However, it was described as being seriously flawed and dying over Libya during NATO military operations against the Qaddafi regime due to this operation being in conflict with *SDSR* recommendations favoring Britain place greater emphasis on conflict prevention;²¹ that it was likely to fail like previous defense white papers due to mismatches between strategic objectives and budget realities and failing to identify and anticipate national security challenges as they evolve;²² and that non-British observers must recognize that British policymakers still consider themselves an internationally influential geopolitical and strategic player even with reduced financial capabilities when Whitehall formulates these documents.²³

Cameron's Conservatives were reelected with a parliamentary majority victory in the May 2015 which reduced their former coalition partners to a rump minority.²⁴ The five years since the 2010 *SDSR* have produced significant changes in Britain's security position due to the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Russian annexation of Crimea and military intervention into eastern Ukraine, increasing public concerns over stagnating European economic growth, skepticism over Britain's membership in the European Union, and the ability and willingness of Muslim immigrants to assimilate into the UK and other European countries.²⁵

All of these factors coalesced to enable Cameron's government to release a new national security strategy on November 23, 2015.



Courtesy: UK Ministry of Defence

This document, with the influence of Secretary of State for Defence Michael Fallon (CON-Sevenoaks), began by referring to the economic advances Cameron's government contended it had accomplished by achieving greater economic growth and reducing the budget deficit. It also stressed that the Great Britain was the only major country in the world meeting the NATO target of spending 2% of its GDP on defense and the United Nations target of 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) on international development. The *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defense and Security Review* emphasizes that Britain could not choose between conventional defenses against state-based threats and the need to counter threats transcending national borders. It went on to mention that during the upcoming Parliament Britain must deter state-based threats, tackle terrorism, remain a global cyber security leader, and be able to respond rapidly to emerging crises.²⁶

Specific force structure components advocated in the 2015 SDSR include:

- Establishing two additional RAF Typhoon squadrons and an additional F-35 Lightning carrier based squadron, buying nine new Maritime Patrol Aircraft based in Scotland to defend the nuclear deterrent, hunting down hostile submarines, and enhancing maritime search and rescue.
- Expanding expeditionary forces from 30,000 in 2010 to 50,000 in 2025, doubling Special Forces spending, replacing four nuclear ballistic missile submarines to retain a Continuous at Sea Nuclear Deterrent, and increasing the Royal Navy's frigate fleet.
- Increase intelligence spending by £2.5 billion (\$3.725 billion), employing over 1,900 additional staff, strengthening the network of counter-terrorism experts in the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa, increase counter-terrorism police investment, and more than doubling global aviation security spending.
- Using the Diplomatic Service to promote national interests and influence, using the development budget to support fragile and broken states, promoting the rule of law, and responding rapidly to emerging crises overseas threatening domestic security.
- Working together with allies to deal with common threats such as terrorism and climactic change.²⁷

Parliamentary Reaction

The *SDSR* was presented to the House of Commons on November 23, 2015, with Cameron concluding his remarks on this document stating:

History teaches us that no Government can predict the future. We have no way of knowing precisely what course events will take over the next five years; we must expect the unexpected. But we

can make sure that we have the versatility and the means to respond to new risks and threats to our security as they arise. Our armed forces, police, and security and intelligence services are the pride of our country. They are the finest in the world, and this Government will ensure they stay that way. Using our renewed economic strength, we will help them to keep us safe for generations to come. I commend this statement to the House.²⁸

Opposition Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn (LAB-Islington North) replied by saying his party supported increased government spending to deter terrorism. He went on to criticize what he saw as cuts to front line police spending in this document, that the *SDSR* had “insufficient analysis” of inequality, poverty, diseases, human rights abuses, climate change, and water and food security. He went on to stress concern about Afghanistan’s ability to maintain its security, and said arms sales to regimes linked to funding terrorism should also be questioned.²⁹

Former Minister of Defence Liam Fox (CON-North Somerset) also noted that the 2010 Nimrod cancellation occurred due to Labour program mismanagement and asked Cameron the impact of manning two aircraft carriers would have on naval personnel numbers. Cameron replied that Royal Navy personnel would increase by 400.³⁰

Scottish National Party (SNP) MP Angus Robertson (SNP-Moray) expressed his party’s support for many *SDSR* provisions while expressing concern that insufficient air and naval assets were being provided by the military to monitor Russian incursions in the Greenland-Iceland-UK Gap in the North Atlantic. Cameron responded by announcing that the number of aircraft in that region will be increasing and that in 2016 the government would publish a shipbuilding strategy paper and that many newly built ships will be produced in Scotland.³¹

Parliamentary Perspectives

Parliamentary committees began analyzing and conducting oversight of the 2015 *SDSR* prior to its publication. On March 24, 2015 the House of Commons Defence Select Committee published the report *Re-Thinking Defence to Meet New Threats*, which addressed topics such as the state of British military forces since the 2010 *SDSR*, the emerging Russian threat, rebuilding conventional military capability to deter advanced nation threats in areas such as ballistic missile defense, weapons of mass destruction, maritime surveillance, and next generation warfare arenas including cyberwarfare, intelligence, and strategic communications.³²

A Houses of Commons and Lords Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy existed in the 2005–2010 and 2010–2015 parliamentary

sessions³³ and was reappointed for the 2015–2020 parliament by the House of Commons on November 30, 2015 and by the House of Lords on December 3, 2015.³⁴ This joint committee published a report on March 3, 2015 detailing British security policy developments since the 2010 *SDSR* and presenting recommendations to the government including acknowledging the increasing likelihood of existential security threats within the next five years, advocating more strategic focus in the next *SDSR*, urging the government to make clearer statements on geopolitical priorities as part of the next security review, and the government clearly establishing resource priorities with risk assessments.³⁵

The Commons Defence Select Committee published a report on November 21, 2015 listing potential threat areas it believed the forthcoming *SDSR* should address including cyberwar and espionage, increasing instability in the Middle East and North Africa, non-state actors and hybrid warfare undermining the international rules-based order, conflict potential in the South and East China Seas, the potential for Russian aggression in Europe and the Arctic, and possible reduction in support for NATO's Article 5 commitment to defend other members if attacked. This report also expressed the committee's belief that Britain needs to address general security vulnerabilities including economic dependence on unreliable partners, an inability to react to sub-conventional threats, insufficient training opportunities for UK armed forces along with insufficient manpower and capabilities gaps within these forces, and insufficient areas of Whitehall expertise including language skills, local knowledge, deficient analytical capabilities about international crisis areas and insufficient consultation with UK subject experts in these fields and geographic regions.³⁶

This committee also gathered evidence and conducted a hearing on the *SDSR* on November 24, 2015. Witnesses presenting evidence included Dr. David Blagden and Professor Patrick Porter of Exeter University's Security and Strategy Institute; Professor John Gearson and Dr. Chris Tuck of Kings College, London; and Peter Roberts, a Senior Research Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute. Roberts maintained that he saw this new *SDSR* as an indication that the government viewed Britain primarily as an economic power and that defense and security were subservient to economic ends. Tuck mentioned that this was a traditional looking defense paper with a status quo perception of Britain's global role; that it overstates Britain's soft power role; and that national aspirations are not matched by resources.³⁷

Gearson noted that the new *SDSR* responded to significant private allied criticism of the 2010 *SDSR* by saying Britain is more outward looking and that it tries to link homeland security with the rise of ISIS. He went on to express his uncertainty that the document effectively linked these last two concepts. Porter's opening statement emphasized Britain's role with the U.S.

as a co-defender of the liberal world order as expressed in the document's rhetorical emphasis on a "rules-based world order." He also expressed that since World War II Britain has tried to exert international power beyond its capacity for such power projection. Blagden added that this document envisions a power that is not a superpower but greater than a minor power possessing some capability and responsibility to project its values and self-vision internationally.³⁸

Other Perspectives

On December 2, 2015 an analysis by the British foreign policy think-tank Chatham House noted that the Cameron *SDSR* generally succeeded in providing a plausible outline for responding to state and non-state threats based on integrating domestic and foreign efforts of defense, intelligence, law enforcement, diplomatic and development agencies augmented by substantive defense spending increase. This assessment also said the *SDSR* politically strengthened the government's domestic political position due to the chaotic state of the Labour Party opposition, and the skepticism of Conservative Party parliamentarians toward the European Union, their strong support for defense, and their displeasure at the cuts made during the 2010 *SDSR*.³⁹

This Chatham House assessment also criticized the 2015 *SDSR* for making expensive commitments such as purchasing two aircraft carriers with requisite sized air groups and purchasing new maritime patrol aircraft. Additional criticism was made that review decisions were based more on lobbying efforts by various national security interest groups instead of objective analysis. Examples of such lobbying appear to be police lobbying against funding cuts following the November 13, 2015 Paris terror attacks and Army efforts to brand restructuring of its two strike brigades to enhance their attractiveness. Chatham House also said the review's political character distorted national security policymaking by placing more emphasis on equipment instead of personnel; partially funding purchases by pay and personnel reductions; focusing on inputs such as money, equipment, or unit numbers instead of outputs such as measurable security improvements; and concentrating on means instead of ends such as funding military and intelligence capabilities but neglecting diplomats and civil servants to determine how and why new capabilities should be used.⁴⁰

Analysis

All defense white papers reflect the diplomatic, economic, political, and strategic environments in which they are produced. This is true for British

defense white papers as for comparable documents produced by other countries. The 2015–2020 parliamentary cycle will see ongoing debate over the 2015 British *SDSR*, the degree to which it is implemented, and how nations friendly and hostile to Britain will respond to its implementation. British armed force personnel size and military spending have fluctuated in recent years depending on economic circumstances and the perceived international security environment. The following tables quantify British defense spending in U.S. dollars, as share of GDP, and personnel size during the Cameron Government.

United Kingdom Defense Spending 2010–2014 U.S. Dollars

2010	\$62.928 billion
2011	\$60.270 billion
2012	\$57.702 billion
2013	\$55.264 billion
2014	\$54.914 billion ⁴¹

United Kingdom Defense Spending 2010–2014 GDP Share

2010	2.5%
2011	2.4%
2012	2.4%
2013	2.2%
2014	2.2% ⁴²

United Kingdom Military Service Personnel Statistics – November 2015

Air Force	37,020 -120 since November 1, 2014
Army	121,430 +700 since November 1, 2014
Navy	38,220 +120 since November 1, 2014
Total	196,670 +710 since November 1, 2014 ⁴³

United Kingdom MOD Civilian Personnel Statistics

October 1, 2014	64,530
October 1, 2015	58,540 ⁴⁴

Many British defense white papers have sought to address London’s geopolitical aspirations and national security interests within government spending and political constraints. They also have sought to harmonize British national security goals with those of the United States and its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies. While Britain may no longer “rule the waves” as it did during the British Empire’s heyday and continues facing a conflict between significant financial constraints and sufficiently confronting external security threats, it remains one of the U.S.’ more important allies in the North Atlantic and European region and its well-trained and equipped forces have proven their mettle in multiple global theaters of operations.⁴⁵

A key question is whether Britain sustains the will to enhance its defense capabilities? The 2015 *SDSR*, the presence of a Conservative majority government unencumbered by an alliance with a more dovish Liberal Democratic Party, Labour Party disarray under Jeremy Corbyn, and recent Russian

military assertiveness offer cautious optimism that Britain may be able to sustain a more assertive international military stance.

Russian military incursions into British air and sea space over the past decade are particularly compelling reasons why London must augment its military capabilities. Between 2005 and early February 2015, the RAF launched Quick Reaction Alerts on 94 days to Russian military aircraft incursions into UK airspace and there were 23 air and 10 sea Russian military encroachments into UK air and sea space during this time period. The locations of these encroachments involved the following geographic regions are:

Location	Air	Sea	Total
North Sea	13	4	17
Atlantic Ocean	6	1	7
English Channel	0	5	5
Unknown	4	0	4
Total	23	10	33 ⁴⁶

Russian military aircraft involved in these incursions into the Tupolev Tu-95 Bear Bomber, Tupolev-160 Blackjack Bomber, Tupolev-142 Bear F/J Bomber with the Tu-95 being involved in 16 of the 23 incidents. Russian naval vessels involved in these incursions include the *Admiral Kuznetsov* aircraft carrier, *Vice-Admiral Kulakov* and *Severomorsk* Udaloy-class destroyers, the *Yaroslav Mudry* (Neutrashimy-class frigate, and an Akula class submarine with the *Kuznetsov* being involved in 4 of the 10 incidents.⁴⁷

Many of Moscow’s aerial incursions into the UK began at Engels Air Force base and fly over Scandinavia then toward the UK and North Atlantic. Naval incursions tend to originate from the Baltic Fleet headquartered in Kaliningrad and pass through the North Sea on their way to the Atlantic. Northern Fleet units headquartered at Severomorsk near Murmansk traditionally voyage from the Barents Sea and through the Norwegian Sea on their way to the North Sea, English Channel, and Atlantic Ocean.⁴⁸

Descriptions of specific incidents of Russian military incursions into UK air and sea space include:

December 12, 2011

Incident Type: Sea

Geographic Region: North Sea

Description: *HMS York* sent to Scotland from Portsmouth after *Admiral Kuznetsov* and other Russian military vessels come within 30 miles of British shores.

January 7, 2014

Incident Type: Sea

Geographic Region: North Sea

Description: Royal Navy vessel sent from Portsmouth after the *Admiral Kuznetsov* and other Russian Northern Fleet ships anchor eight miles from Scotland’s coast in the Moray Firth.

September 19, 2014

Incident Type: Air

Geographic Region: Atlantic Ocean

Description: RAF Typhoon Jets scrambled after one Tupolev Tu-95 Bear bomber approaches UK airspace.

January 28, 2015

Incident Type: Air

Geographic Region: Atlantic Ocean

Description: RAF Typhoon Jets scrambled after two Tupolev Tu-95 Bear bombers come within 25 miles of UK shoreline. These craft may have been flying with their transponders turned off making them invisible to civilian aircraft.

February 17, 2015

Incident Type: Sea

Geographic Region: English Channel

Description: *HMS Argyll* shadows frigate *Yaroslav Mudryy* in the English Channel.

May 14, 2015

Incident Type: Air

Geographic Region: North Sea

Description: Two Typhoon fighters scrambled to intercept two Bear bombers approaching UK airspace.⁴⁹

Russian Aircraft and Naval Incursions into British Air and Seaspaces



Source: *Daily Mail*



Source: *Daily Telegraph*

Conclusion

Like other western countries, the United Kingdom has been devoting a declining share of its governmental budget resources to defense spending and military personnel numbers have fluctuated over the past decade.⁵⁰ This occurs at a time when it and its NATO allies face increasing aggression from transnational terrorist groups such as ISIS and resurgent Russian military power as demonstrated by Moscow’s increasing aggressiveness in British airspace and maritime approaches. Russian military assertiveness was also visibly demonstrated in its *National Security Strategy* signed by Vladimir Putin on December 31, 2015. This document explicitly criticizes Western efforts to enhance Eurasian region tensions to undermine Russian interests while also condemning the U.S. and European Union countries for supporting an “unconstitutional” coup in Ukraine producing deep Ukrainian societal schisms and the outbreak of armed conflict. This document also claims that the U.S. and its allies seek to maintain their international affairs dominance by undermining Russian foreign and domestic policy.⁵¹

Despite the presence of punitive western economic sanctions against Russia for its 2014 seizure of Crimea from Ukraine, Russia continues enhancing its defense capabilities. Russian defense expenditures from 2010–2014 and the percentage of its GDP spent on defense is as follows:

2010	\$65.809 billion	3.8%
2011	\$70.237 billion	3.7%
2012	\$80.996 billion	4.0%
2013	\$84.841 billion	4.2%
2014	\$91.694 billion	4.5% ⁵²

Russia also continues modernizing its armed forces in a process initiated in 2008 by Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov and continuing under Sergei Shoigu. This modernization affects all branches of Russia's armed forces including testing of the PAK FA fifth generation combat aircraft in 2016, introduction of the T-90 main battle tank, increasing the number of nuclear submarines with *Bulava* missiles, and developing the *Sarmat* liquid fuel silo-based ICBM. Russia also aspires to have 80% its military consist of post-Soviet equipment by 2025, expanding the military's hybrid warfare capabilities, and the continuing critical importance of nuclear weapons and asymmetric warfare such as cyber warfare in Russian military doctrine make it imperative that Britain and other western countries equip their militaries to deter and defeat potential Russian military coercion despite the financial strains Moscow is experiencing due to declining energy prices and western economic sanctions.⁵³

The financial efficiency of British military spending must also be considered as a critical factor in determining the UK's ability to meet the 2015 *SDSR's* force enhancement aspirations. A December 2015 National Audit Office (NAO) assessment mentioned that the Defence Equipment & Support (DE&S) section of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) responsible for managing MOD's equipment acquisition and life-cycle support noted deficiencies in DE&S' cost controls. These included identifying and recording private sector support costs and other program costs pertinent to defining operating cost envelope accuracy and DE&S' inability to provide NAO with sufficient evidence to support private sector support costs and related trade and payables balances to accurate record transactions supporting defense spending in order to receive an unqualified audit opinion in 2015–2016 financial statements.⁵⁴

It remains to be seen if the more assertive rhetoric in the 2015 *SDSR* will be matched by budgetary and personnel enhancements in the British military force structure. Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne (CON-Tatton) announced on June 4, 2015 that Britain had the fastest growth rate of G7 economies in 2014. During 2015 Britain experienced economic growth of 2.2% representing twelve consecutive quarters of growth and governmental borrowing declined from over £12 billion (\$17.315 billion) in 2009/2010 to £7.5 billion (\$11.302 billion) as of December 2015. Such developments may provide cautious optimism that the UK can sustain increased defense spending.⁵⁵ At the same time, this document suffers from a talismanic fetish

believing that international development expenditures represent a valid quantitative measure for documenting national security. It also is weakened by saying that spending 2% of British Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense spending or any other percentile of GDP on defense spending are valid indicators of the quality and quantity of British national military policymaking and combat performance capabilities.

There is a need for the UK to emphasize lethal force strike and sustainment capability to counter and defeat potential Russian aggression in the Arctic and Europe along with countering and defeating Islamist operations in the Mideast and North Africa. An early 2016 scholarly assessment of the 2015 *SDSR* observed that the December 2015 parliamentary vote authorizing air strikes in Syria was a sign that the UK was moving from strategic shrinking to greater international engagement while also maintaining it was too early to determine if spending 2% of GDP on defense would be sufficient to meet national security aspirations.⁵⁶ Civilian and military British national security policy analysts and policymakers must engage in ongoing reviews and updates of domestic and international economics, public opinion, military capabilities, and strategic trends and developments to determine if the 2015 *SDSR* satisfactorily addresses Britain's emerging national security requirements.

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