CABINET

STATEMENT ON DEFENCE, 1957

Note by the Minister of Defence

I circulate for the consideration of the Cabinet a draft of the White Paper on Defence.

2. It is not yet in its final form, but will, I hope, serve as a sufficient basis for discussion of the important issues of policy involved.

D.S.

Ministry of Defence, S.W.1.

15th March, 1957
DEFENCE

Outline of Future Policy

Presented by the Minister of Defence to Parliament
by Command of Her Majesty
March 1957
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Defence: Outline of Future Policy

1. Introduction

Britain's defence policy must be radically revised. This has become necessary on economic, international and military grounds.

2. Effect on Economy

(a) Britain's position and influence in the world depend first and foremost upon the health of her internal economy and the success of her export trade. Without these, military power is of no avail and in any case cannot in the long run be supported. It is therefore as much in the interests of defence as of prosperity that the country's financial and commercial position should be consolidated.

(b) At present about a quarter of the nation's graduate scientists and engineers, and about 7 per cent. of the working population, are engaged on defence. The release of some proportion of these would clearly benefit the national economy.

(c) The level of exports is still too low to provide the reserves necessary to assure the stability of sterling. Moreover, unless more capital can be spared for the modernisation and re-equipment of industry, British manufacturers will have increasing difficulty in competing in overseas markets. If the country's productive capacity is to be expanded, it is an inescapable necessity that defence expenditure, along with Government expenditure of all kinds, should be reduced to a level which does not place an excessive burden on the economy.

3. Scientific Advances

(a) In recent years, military technology has been making dramatic strides. New and increasingly formidable weapons have been succeeding one another at an ever-increasing pace.

(b) Within a decade the atom bomb dropped at Hiroshima has been superseded by a hydrogen or megaton bomb hundreds of times more powerful.

(c) Parallel with this, the evolution of rocket weapons has been forging ahead. It is now only a matter of a few years before there will be missiles steered by electronic brains capable of delivering megaton warheads over a range of 5,000 miles or more.

(d) These sensational scientific advances in methods of waging war have fundamentally altered the whole basis of world strategy.

4. Military Alliances

(a) The defence problem has also been materially altered by the progressive consolidation of NATO, SEATO and the Baghdad Pact, and by the recent announcement of a more positive American policy in the Middle East.

(b) The effect of these international developments is to make it most unlikely that Britain could become involved in a major war except in
association with allies, including the United States of America. In
determining the size and character of the armed forces, full account must be
taken of this fact.

5. Long-Term Planning
   (a) Frequent changes in defence policy are wasteful and disturbing and
   must as far as possible be avoided.
   (b) Experience has shown that the rapid advance of scientific development
   and the continual fluctuations in the international situation make it difficult
to forecast future military requirements with any certainty. Nevertheless, an
attempt must be made to establish a broad but flexible framework, within
which long-term planning can proceed.
   (c) This long-term plan should provide for the armed forces being
   equipped with the most modern weapons. This means that they must be
   small enough for the cost of these weapons to be within our means.

6. Tasks of Armed Forces
   (a) Any new defence plan, if it is to be effective and economical, must
   be based on a clear definition of the military tasks to be discharged. This
   cannot be founded exclusively on considerations of purely national security
   or interest, since the safety and well-being of this country are indissolubly
   linked with those of other nations.
   (b) Britain's armed forces have two principal rôles to perform:
   (i) to play their part with the forces of allied countries in preventing war
      and in resisting aggression; and
   (ii) to defend, and preserve order in, British colonies and protected
        territories.
   (c) Since the first and more exacting of these tasks is part of a joint effort,
   Britain need not necessarily contribute forces which are self-sufficient and
   balanced in all respects.

7. Nuclear Deterrent
   (a) Though the Hunters and Javelins of the Royal Air Force would, in
the event of war with Russia, be able to take a substantial toll of Soviet
bombers, a proportion would inevitably get through. Even if it were only a
dozen, they could, with hydrogen bombs, inflict widespread devastation and
might well blot out a large part of the population of the big cities. It must
be frankly recognised that fighters cannot give the country as a whole any
effective protection against the catastrophic consequences of nuclear attack.
   (b) Clearly therefore the central aim of military policy must be to prevent
war rather than to prepare for it. In present circumstances the only way to
deter nuclear aggression is to possess the means of retaliating in time.
   (c) Now and in the foreseeable future, the free world is almost wholly
dependent for its protection upon the nuclear power of the United States.
While Britain cannot by comparison make more than a modest contribution,
she must possess an element of nuclear deterrent of her own.
   (d) British atomic bombs are in steady production and the Royal Air
Force holds a substantial stock of them. A British megaton weapon has now
been developed. This will shortly be tested and will thereafter be put into
production.
   (e) The means of delivering these weapons is provided by medium
bombers of the V-class. These will in due course be supplemented and
later replaced by ballistic rockets.
[Her Majesty's Government have accepted an offer from the United States Government to provide Britain with a substantial number of medium-range ballistic rockets of the THOR type, which is now in an advanced stage of development.]

8. Defence of Deterrent

(a) Since peace depends upon the effectiveness of the deterrent, it is essential that any would-be aggressor should not imagine he could readily knock out the bomber or rocket bases. Though great cities cannot at present be protected against nuclear attack, the defence of the very much smaller target presented by an airfield is an altogether more manageable task. There is every reason to believe that fighters would be able to interfere sufficiently with enemy bombers for the short time needed to enable the retaliatory force to take off.

(b) The Government have accordingly decided that air defence must be provided for the nuclear deterrent. A manned fighter force of adequate size for this purpose will be maintained. This will later be replaced by a ground-to-air guided missile system. In order to gain experience it is proposed to deploy a small number of guided missile units, equipped with the first British weapons of this kind, starting in 1958.

(c) There are grounds for hoping that it may ultimately prove possible to devise missile defences even against attack by ballistic rockets. Research on this problem, in collaboration with the United States Government, is being intensified.

9. Forces in Germany

(a) The power of nuclear retaliation is not enough by itself to prevent war. The frontiers of the free world, and particularly the vital land frontier in Europe, must be guarded.

(b) The defences must be strong enough to show that any aggression would be met at once by the combined forces of the Western Alliance, backed by their ability to retaliate with nuclear weapons.

(c) Britain must provide her fair share of the armed forces needed for this purpose. However, she cannot any longer continue to make a disproportionately large contribution. The defence expenditure of this country has been higher, in relation to national income, than that of any other member of NATO, except the United States, and nearly twice as high as the average of the other countries in Europe.

(d) Her Majesty's Government have, therefore after due consultation with the Allied Governments in the North Atlantic Council and in the Council of the Western European Union, decided to make reductions in the British land and air forces on the Continent. The strength of the British Army of the Rhine will be reduced from about 77,000 to about 50,000. The organisation of this force will be streamlined in such a way as to increase the proportion of fighting units, the total strength of which will be reduced by not more than 10,000. At the same time, they will shortly be equipped with atomic rocket artillery, which will greatly augment their fire-power. In addition, two Infantry Brigades in Britain will be earmarked for despatch to the Continent by air, if needed; and vehicles and equipment for them will be kept in Germany. This redeployment will be carried out gradually over the next 2½ years, during which time the German military contribution to NATO will be progressively building up.

(e) The strength of the Second Tactical Air Force in Germany will be reduced to about half its present size by the end of March, 1958. This
reduction in numbers will be counter-balanced by the fact that some of the squadrons will in due course be provided with atomic bombs. A similar reduction will be made in the light bomber force in England, which is assigned to NATO.

10. Reinforcements for SACEUR

(a) In a nuclear war, it can be expected that fighting on land and in the air would reach its climax within a few days. Consequently, reinforcements which could not be rapidly put into the battle would be of little military value.

(b) Under present plans, Britain is due to provide two Territorial Army Divisions as reinforcements for NATO. Since these certainly could not be ready for action on the Continent in less than three months, the Government consider that it would be more appropriate to assign them to home defence duties and to train and equip them for that purpose alone.

(c) Before any decision is taken the Supreme Allied Commander Europe and the North Atlantic Council will of course be consulted.

11. Middle East

(a) Outside the area covered by the North Atlantic alliance, Britain has vital interests in two other theatres, the Middle East and South-East Asia. Apart from the importance of the Middle East itself, it is the key to the right flank of NATO and is the gateway to the African continent.

(b) In the Middle East, she has two major commitments. The first is in the Arabian Peninsula, where British forces must at all times be ready to defend Aden Colony and Protectorates and the territories on the Persian Gulf for whose defence Britain is responsible. For this task land, air and sea forces have to be maintained in that area, including East Africa.

(c) Britain's other major commitment in the Middle East arises from her membership of the Baghdad Pact. Under this treaty she has an obligation to co-operate with the other signatory states, in defending their territories and in preventing Communist encroachment and infiltration. In the event of emergency, all British forces in that area would be made available to support the Baghdad Alliance. They would consist of the forces in the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf, referred to above, and of bomber squadrons operating from Cyprus. The latter would be capable of delivering a heavy counter-blow with nuclear weapons.

(d) Apart from local garrisons, it is not proposed in the long term to maintain land forces in the Mediterranean area. Should it be necessary to provide further support for the Baghdad Alliance it will be found from the Central Reserve.

(e) Following upon the termination of the Treaty with Jordan, British forces will be withdrawn from that country, and Britain will be relieved of the responsibility of defending Jordan in the event of attack.

(f) The British forces in Libya will be progressively reduced.

12. South-East Asia

(a) In South-East Asia, apart from her responsibility for defending her colonies and protectorates, Britain has agreed to assist in the protection of Malaya after she attains independence.

(b) In addition, Britain has an international commitment, as a member of the South-East Asia Treaty Organisation, to help maintain stability and resist the extension of Communist power in that area.
The land forces that are being maintained in this theatre include a mixed British-Gurkha division and a United Kingdom contribution of about two battalions to the Commonwealth Reserve Brigade. Small naval and air forces will also be maintained there.

The remainder of the brigade is provided jointly by Australia and New Zealand. With the steady growth in their population and economic strength, it is reasonable to expect that, as time goes on, they will wish to assume an increasing share of responsibility for the defence of this area which is so vital to them.

13. Overseas Garrisons

(a) Britain has the responsibility for providing numerous garrisons for her colonies and protected territories. This is making large demands on military manpower. [There are, in fact, nearly 150,000 men of the Army and the R.A.F. serving overseas in countries other than Germany.]

(b) The Government have come to the conclusion that these forces could be reduced. Responsibility for assisting the civil power in the maintenance of internal security is being increasingly assumed by colonial forces. With the ability to reinforce rapidly in an emergency, the garrisons can be reduced to those immediately necessary for purely local defence where a threat exists requiring their presence.

14. Central Reserve

(a) With the reduction in size of garrisons and other British forces overseas, it will be more than ever essential to maintain in Britain an effective Central Reserve, from which reinforcements can be despatched at short notice.

(b) To be effective the Central Reserve must possess the means of rapid mobility. For this purpose, a substantial fleet of transport aircraft is being built up in R.A.F. Transport Command. It will be composed mainly of Comet II’s, Britannias and Beverley freighters. These Service transport resources would be supplemented, when necessary, by suitable civil aircraft. Naval resources would also be used for this purpose.

(c) Should an overseas emergency develop which calls for larger reinforcements than can be provided from the Central Reserve in Britain, the additional troops needed might have to be transferred from Germany. The right to do this is specifically provided for in the Paris Agreements of October 1954.

15. Naval Power

(a) On account of its mobility, the Royal Navy provides an effective means of bringing power, in particular air power and Royal Marine units, rapidly to bear in peacetime emergencies or limited hostilities. As the number of Britain’s overseas bases is reduced, the role of the aircraft carrier, which is in effect a mobile air station, becomes increasingly significant.

(b) With this consideration in mind, it is proposed to base the main elements of the Royal Navy upon a small number of carrier groups. Each of these will be composed of one aircraft carrier and a number of supporting ships.

(c) Apart from the aircraft carriers, the number of large ships will be restricted to the minimum. The number of cruisers in the active fleet will be reduced and replaced by ships of the Tiger Class and guided weapon vessels. The four older battleships now in reserve will be scrapped. The future of H.M.S. Vanguard will be discussed with NATO. Reductions will also be made in the various classes of smaller vessels.
It is the Government’s intention to maintain British naval strength East of Suez at about its present level. One carrier group will normally be stationed in the Indian Ocean and a small force at Singapore. Thus the proposed reductions will primarily affect the forces in peacetime in Home Waters and in the Mediterranean.

While there can be no doubt about the value of sea power in localised emergencies, the rôle of naval forces in total war is uncertain. It may well be that the initial nuclear bombardment and counter-bombardment by aircraft or rockets would be so crippling as to bring the war to an end within a few weeks or even days, in which case naval operations would not play any significant part. On the other hand, there is the possibility that the nuclear battle of the opening phase might not prove immediately decisive. In that event, Russia’s large fleet of ocean-going submarines would constitute a formidable threat.

So long as this uncertainty remains, Britain must continue to be vitally concerned in keeping open her Atlantic life-line; and it is, therefore, right that she should make her contribution to the maritime forces of NATO. What that contribution should be is a matter which will have to be discussed with the other members of the Atlantic Alliance.

16. Headquarters and Rearward Services

(a) The more the overall strength of the forces is reduced, the more important it is to prune to the utmost the elements which do not directly contribute to fighting capacity.

(b) The Service Departments and Ministry of Supply are engaged in a further intensive drive to reduce administrative overheads of all kinds, and in particular to cut down the numbers of headquarters and the size of staffs, both military and civilian.

(c) Economies will also be sought by eliminating duplication between the Services on common tasks such as signal communications, and by reducing the number of men serving in depots and base installations.

(d) To make this possible, it will be necessary to concentrate work in a smaller number of establishments and to curtail greatly the holdings of stores.

(e) Consideration will also have to be given to the larger problems of integration which will emerge as the size of the forces comes down.

(f) These examinations will be carried out under the direction of the Ministry of Defence.

17. “Civilisation”

(a) It is generally accepted that it is more efficient and economical to employ civilians to perform civilian tasks; and every endeavour will be made to extend the application of this principle.

(b) The Service Departments are reviewing their establishments, with the object, wherever possible, of reducing uniformed personnel on duties such as store-keeping, accounting, repair and maintenance of equipment, policing and catering, by increased use of directly employed civilians or civilian contractors.

(c) By these methods it should be possible to reduce substantially the number of uniformed staff required.

18. National Service Training

(a) The measure which by itself would produce the largest saving in overheads would be the abolition of National Service.

(b) National Service is an efficient method of producing large numbers of trained reserves against a possible emergency and was originally designed
mainly for this purpose. It is, however, an expensive and inefficient, but hitherto unavoidable, method of manning active forces.

(c) The shorter the period of service, the more men are occupied in training or being trained. There are at present no less than 75,000 men in the Army alone in training establishments in the United Kingdom.

19. Reduction in Size of Forces

(a) The reshaping and redistribution of the armed forces, on the general lines indicated above, will greatly reduce the military manpower required.

(b) The total strength of the three Services to-day is about 700,000*. The revised plan aims to reduce the forces to not much more than half their present size over the next few years. Provided that commitments are curtailed in the manner indicated above, the Government believe that Britain should be able to discharge her essential defence responsibilities with reduced forces of this size.

(c) That assumes that they could be recruited on an all-regular basis and that the heavy overheads of National Service would be eliminated.

20. Regular Enlistment

(a) So long as it was felt necessary to maintain the strength of the Services at anything approaching their present level, it would have been unrealistic to imagine that such large numbers of men could be obtained wholly by voluntary enlistment. However, the big reduction in the demands on manpower, which will result from the revised defence plan, now makes it reasonable to contemplate the possibility of putting the armed forces on to an all-regular footing.

(b) The Government accordingly propose to take positive action to encourage recruiting. In particular, they will endeavour to make Service conditions more agreeable; and, despite the general need for economy, they will press ahead with further measures to secure this end. Barrack accommodation will be modernised. Better recreational facilities will be provided. The number of married quarters will be increased. The standard of Service conditions will be raised with effect from April 1st next. Methods of improving the Serviceman's prospect of good employment on his return to civilian life are also being considered. In these and other ways, it is hoped to make a career in the Services more attractive for all ranks.

(c) In order to waste no time in building up the Regular element in the forces, the recruiting campaign will be intensified and more money will be provided in the coming year for this purpose.

21. National Service

(a) There is undoubtedly a general desire in the country to see National Service abolished as soon as this is practicable, consistent with the needs of defence; and that is the Government's declared aim.

(b) Even with the reductions in manpower requirements resulting from the new plan, it is not going to be easy to go over to all-regular forces. The task of bridging the gap between the present long-service regular element and the minimum strength required is a formidable one.

(c) There are less than 260,000 long-service regular other ranks in the forces to-day; and the number of these in the Army is only about 80,000. It is true that there are in addition over 100,000 men on three-year engagements. But it must be recognised that a large number of these would

* This figure relates to adult male uniformed United Kingdom personnel.
not have enlisted had it not been for their liability to National Service and that, with the abolition of National Service, the three-year engagement would lose much of its appeal.

(d) There are so many uncertain factors that it is impossible to predict with confidence the future level of recruitment. However, with sufficient improvement in conditions of service, the Government believe there is a reasonable prospect of increasing the rate of regular enlistment sufficiently to make it unnecessary to call up any further National Servicemen after 1960; and they have accordingly decided to plan on this basis.

(e) It must be, however, emphasised that, should there be any serious shortfall below the much reduced numbers now planned, the Services would be unable to discharge their essential defence tasks, and the position would clearly have to be reconsidered.

(f) While regular recruitment is building up and the size of the forces is being run down, the men becoming available for National Service will, to a growing extent, exceed the numbers required. It will therefore be necessary during the period of transition to reduce progressively the size of the intake. Every effort will be made to ensure that this is done in as fair and reasonable a manner as possible.

22. Civil Defence

(a) Passive preparations for nuclear war must take second place to active measures to prevent it; and expenditure on civil defence must as far as possible be curtailed. Nevertheless, plans must be made to enable organised society to survive.

(b) The civil defence services will be maintained, and will be supplied with adequate equipment for training. The work of strengthening essential communications will continue. Research and planning will go forward.

23. Expenditure

(a) The Defence Estimates for the year 1956/57 amounted to about £1,600 million, before deducting receipts from the United States and Germany. Had the programme as planned a year ago been allowed to continue unchanged, the figure for 1957/58 would have risen to about £1,700 million.

(b) However, as a result of strenuous efforts to effect economy, it has been found possible to keep the defence estimates for the coming year down to a total of £1,484 million. From this must be deducted receipts from Germany and the United States, which are expected to amount to about £50 million and £10 million respectively. Thus the net estimate of total defence expenditure for the year 1957/58 will amount to about £1,424 million.

(c) This large saving has been secured by various measures, including in particular a substantial reduction in the overall strength of the forces, the cutting down of production orders and purchases of stores and some pruning of the research and development programme.

(d) It is not as yet possible to forecast the level of expenditure in later years. It should not however be expected that it will show a decline in any way comparable with that in the manpower strengths of the forces. This is primarily due to the ever-increasing complication of modern weapons and equipment, the higher cost per man of regular forces and the fact that proportionately more civilians will be employed. Nevertheless, it can safely be assumed that the new plan, when it is fully implemented, will further appreciably reduce the burden on the economy. Above all, it will release for productive employment in industry several hundred thousand men, including many badly needed scientists and technicians.
24. Effects of Contraction of Forces

(a) Any large change—and this will be the largest change in defence policy ever carried through in normal times—must mean some temporary dislocation. It will not be possible for the level of work in all factories, dockyards, depots and establishments to be maintained; and some will have to be closed. Where this happens the Government will do everything possible to help those displaced to find other employment [and to see that the resources set free are put to productive use.]

(b) The new plan will mean many changes in the Services, but the fundamental traditions will be maintained.

(c) With so large a contraction of the forces some units will have to be disbanded, and the services of some regular officers and N.C.O.’s will have to be terminated. Those whose Service careers have to be terminated will receive fair compensation and will be helped in every possible way to find suitable employment in civil life.

(d) Plans are being prepared for the different ranks and branches of each Service, which will be designed to provide good long-term careers for all who join the new all-regular forces.

25. Conclusion

(a) The Government have adopted this new defence plan in the confident belief that it will not only give relief to the country’s sorely strained economy, but will produce compact military forces of the highest quality.

(b) All three Services will be provided with the newest weapons. The reduced Fleet will be composed of the most modern vessels; the Army will be equipped with atomic artillery and given a high degree of strategic mobility; the Air Force will be supplied with a British megaton bomb; a missile system of air defence will be developed; and ballistic rockets will be introduced to supplement the V-bombers.

(c) Standards of training and efficiency will be attained such as are possible only in an all-regular force. The aim will be to produce long-service professional forces of the highest quality and standing.