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DEFENCE

Defence Transformation

The Secretary of State for Defence (Dr Liam Fox): The strategic defence and security review (SDSR), announced last October, marked the start of the process of transforming defence to meet the challenges of the future. It set out a path to a coherent and affordable defence capability in 2020 and beyond; and some of the key building blocks—such as the return of the Army from Germany, and a Royal Air Force (RAF) structured around fewer, more capable fast jets.

This statement provides detail of our intent on future armed forces basing and rationalisation of the defence estate.

This has been a complex piece of work. It addressed the decision to accelerate the return of the 20,000 personnel still in Germany, plus their dependants, to the UK and the formation of the Army into five multi-role brigades. It took into account the footprint of the armed forces around the UK and the planned changes to the RAF force structure. A number of other initiatives, such as the future location for defence technical training and the restructuring of the Army's non-deployable regional footprint, have also had significant estate implications. Finally, it has also taken account of the need to realise receipts from high-value sites defence no longer required to help address the black hole in the defence budget left by the previous Government.

Basing affects a wide range of interested parties across defence. Experts from across the Department and all three armed services were consequently involved in the study. Throughout the process MOD has been very clear and consistent about the criteria used—above all what is best for the defence and security of the UK and what makes overall military sense. We looked at what was best for those serving in our armed forces, and their families. We also recognised that defence decisions have broader regional, economic, and social consequences. Finally, the resulting plan must of course be affordable and offer value-for-money for the taxpayer.

The starting point for the review of basing has been the military requirement. Units which are part of larger formations have to be close enough together geographically to be able to work and train effectively and to create the formation coherence necessary for successful combat

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operations. To do so, they need access to suitable training areas of the right size, and with the right terrain, so they can prepare for deployment.

We have considered the impact of the proposed changes on service personnel and their families. Under the armed forces' new employment model, the Army aim to base personnel close to a number of units so they can change post without their family needing to move home, and close enough to an urban centre for their families to have

access to jobs and education and to the housing market. This will allow greater stability, which is important for the welfare of our armed forces and their families, and to continuing the Government's commitment to rebuilding the armed forces' covenant.

The defence of the United Kingdom, and wider military tasks, including the capacity to support the civil authorities in times of crisis, requires a strong military presence across the entire country. We have also considered the impact of changes on local communities. Finally, we have taken into account the need to make the maximum use of existing defence estate and to dispose of that which is not required.

Much detailed planning remains to be done, both to identify the most effective draw-down plan for the forces currently in Germany and to determine which units are the best match for which sites. We will also need to take into account the potential changes in the balance between the regular and reserve forces I have also announced today. And there will be a need for the appropriate level of engagement with local authorities, including the preparation of sustainability assessments and the other work needed to meet our obligations. This means that some uncertainties remain, particularly about the time scales in which the necessary moves will take place. But our strategic objective and the key building blocks of our plan are clear. I will set these out, together with indicative time scales we are currently assuming for planning purposes.

There is already a concentration of the Army in the south-west of England, around Salisbury and around Catterick in Yorkshire. These will make up three of the five multi-role brigades (MRBs).

One of the two remaining MRBs to be formed from the units returning from Germany will be based in Scotland. The centre of gravity of the brigade will be in the central Lowlands. The key sites that are anticipated to be used are Kirknewton, which we propose to develop into a major Army base, and Glencorse. Other MRB units will be moved into Caledonia and, eventually, Arbroath, with the long-term plan being to bring the bulk of the Royal Marines together in the south-west of England. A site will also be used at Albemarle Barracks, Northumberland. We will aim to move the first unit into Kirknewton in 2016-17, with units probably moving into Glencorse and Caledonia a year earlier. We will plan to move the Royal Marines out of Arbroath around 2015-16, with a unit from Germany moving in shortly thereafter.

RAF Marham will remain as a base for Tornado GR4 and we have decided that we will build up the Typhoon force at Lossiemouth, retaining that station for the long-term as a RAF base, providing the location for the northern quick reaction alert missions. We will start preparing the infrastructure at Lossiemouth to receive the Typhoon force straight away, and would aim

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to start to redeploy aircraft there in 2013. We will continue to redeploy aircraft over the following years as space becomes available.

Although Leuchars will cease to be an RAF base it will remain in military use and will be used to base two major Army units and a formation headquarters. Our aim will be to move the headquarters to Leuchars before 2015, with the major units thereafter in the period 2015-17. This will ensure that as space becomes available at Leuchars, the Army will begin to take advantage of it.

We are also planning to place Army units in Kinloss in around 2014-15, subject to further detailed planning.

The MRB centred in Scotland will require a new training area and the MOD is grateful for the positive engagement being taken forward with the Scottish Government to achieve this. We will continue to engage with the Scottish Government to develop firm plans, including the confirmation of a specific site. Overall, this is good news for Scotland with overall force levels increasing.

The other MRB will be based in the east of England centred on the former RAF base at Cottesmore (in Rutland). The RAF will vacate Cottesmore in 2013, and we anticipate the first unit coming back from Germany should arrive the following year. We also intend to use other former RAF bases and existing Army bases including north Luffenham, in Rutland, where we aim to bring the first unit back in about 2015-16, Bassingbourn, in Cambridgeshire, with the first unit arriving back around 2016-17, and Woodbridge, in Suffolk, where the first unit is unlikely to arrive back before 2017-18.

Other sites that are anticipated to be used to accommodate Army units returning from Germany are Aldegrave in Northern Ireland, with the aim of a unit arriving in 2015, and Pirbright where we are planning for units from Germany to arrive in 2013.

Defence must also continue to look to make the most efficient use of the defence estate and the process will continue to identify and dispose of sites that are no longer needed. Those sites which can be sold, especially high-value sites, will deliver much needed receipts to the defence budget. We also need to make sure we are making maximum use of those sites which remain. The decision has therefore been taken to vacate and dispose of Craigiehall, Redford and Dreghom Barracks in Edinburgh. We will aim to achieve these disposals by 2014-15 at the latest. We also plan in the same timescale to vacate and dispose of Waterbeach in Cambridgeshire which, subject to the necessary planning consents, will support the Government's broader aim of increasing the supply of new housing. The units currently based at these sites will, as appropriate, be accommodated at other locations.

This conclusion also paves the way for a number of other estate-related initiatives to proceed.

In accordance with SDSR direction it is proposed that the Army's four regional divisional headquarters will be replaced by a single UK support command. The new formation, commanded by a major general, will be known as headquarters support command and it will be based in Aldershot. Its creation will lead to the disbandment of Headquarters 2nd Division in Edinburgh, Headquarters 4th Division at Aldershot and Headquarters

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5th Division at Shrewsbury in 2012. Savings at the regional brigade level will be made through structural changes to each of the ten regional brigade headquarters and to HQ London district, together with their supporting structures rather than closing individual brigade headquarters.

Another of the decisions from the SDSR was to reduce the Army by one deployable brigade as part of the measure to restructure towards five MRBs, replacing the current mix of armoured, mechanised and light brigades. Having considered the various options, we have concluded that 19 Light Brigade and its constituent units, currently based in Northern Ireland, is the most logical option from a military judgment for disbandment as it is not well suited to become an MRB, nor do the existing basing and training facilities in Northern Ireland cater for heavier equipments and all-arms training. Detailed planning and trade unions consultation will now commence on the basis of our intent to complete the disbandment by 2013. While this will result in a reduction in the current troop levels in Northern Ireland, with some units being amalgamated within different brigades and others disbanded, we continue to consider options for future basing in Northern Ireland consistent with our wider re-basing plans. We remain committed to maintaining a permanent military garrison in Northern Ireland. As part of the implementation planning we will now undertake, we will examine what alternative military uses can be made of the sites which are no longer required for 19 Light Brigade.

Routine business on basing and further work on disposals will continue. Stafford will become home to two additional Signals Regiments in the period 2015-18. This will be done in close consultation with the German authorities, which will continue as the Army now draws up its plans for how to draw down from Germany in a sensible and coherent way.

RAF Lyneham is the preferred location for future defence technical training. This confirms that the Department will withdraw from Arborfield in Berkshire and Bordon in Hampshire, releasing the sites for sale by 2014-15 at the latest. This announcement in no way threatens the existing defence presence at St Athan. There are no plans to move or reduce the 300 technical training posts as part of the rationalisation to Lyneham. Indeed plans to relocate additional defence units to St Athan are being developed, and if those plans come to fruition, they will bring a major uplift in employment at that base. We intend to make an announcement before the end of the year.

As noted above, 160 brigade will also continue to be in Wales at Brecon.

Finally, even with the decisions to use the former RAF bases to the greatest extent possible, the demand for civilian workforce at RAF Kinloss, Cottesmore and Lyneham will be reduced. This, combined with the need to match skills to jobs, means that around 545 posts in total will be lost. Consultation has been under way with trade unions on the drawdown of RAF Kinloss, Lyneham, Cottesmore and much work has been done to help individuals to assess their future options. Staff have been encouraged to apply for MOD voluntary early release (VERS), and many have taken

up that opportunity. However, to manage the drawdown of the stations efficiently, it is necessary to introduce a redundancy

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scheme, which will commence with voluntary redundancy terms. Consultation with trade unions on the redundancy scheme will take place very shortly.

The detailed planning work, including the investment required to adapt sites, will now get under way based on this strategic direction. The Ministry of Defence will now begin the process of detailed planning and the appropriate and necessary engagement with the devolved Administrations and local authorities concerned around the country.

Further work will be done to draw up individual project plans and determine the timing and sequencing of the Army moves, and this may affect some of the indicative time scales set out here. Once completed, this will deliver the military requirement for basing and estate, which will facilitate our work to maximise the effectiveness of our armed forces under the adaptable posture set out in the SDSR. It will rebalance the defence footprint across the UK, offer stability to our armed forces, and deliver better value for money for the taxpayer.