

Briefing Note

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DEFENCE

On 1st and 6th July 1982, the House of Commons debated the 1982 Defence White Paper. This White Paper had been written before the invasion of the Falkland Islands and would have been published in April. Thus it takes no account of the Falklands operation. A further White Paper will be issued towards the end of the year, after the lessons of the Falklands have been digested.

Implications of the Falklands Operation. As Mr. John Nott, Secretary of State for Defence, has said:

"We should not rush into premature conclusions based on the dimly perceived lessons of the last few weeks. It is the first engagement of its kind since the Second World War and we owe it to ourselves and to our allies to study the facts in depth" (Times, 23rd June 1982).

Nevertheless, Mr. Nott made some preliminary announcements in his speech. The ice-patrol ship 'Endurance' will continue in service, and after a refit will be deployed again in the South Atlantic. The Government is reconsidering its decision to sell the aircraft carrier 'Invincible'. Planned manpower levels in the Royal Navy and in Portsmouth dockyard will also be reviewed in the light of recent events.

All equipment lost in the Falklands conflict will be replaced, although not necessarily on a like-for-like basis. Mr. Nott announced that not only would the 7 Sea Harriers lost be replaced, but 7 extra ones would be ordered. 22 new helicopters will be immediately ordered both to replace losses and to strengthen reserve holdings. The destroyers 'Fife', 'Glamorgan' and 'Bristol', which were planned for early disposal, will be kept in service.

Defence Spending. The cost of replacing equipment, together with the cost of the campaign and of any future Falklands garrison will be met by the Government out of expenditure which will be additional to existing plans for defence spending. The defence budget for 1982-3 totals £14,091 million. It is the firm intention of the Government to implement the NATO aim of a 3 per cent annual real increase in defence spending at least up to 1985-6. The White Paper shows that the United Kingdom spent more on defence last year than any other European member of NATO.

The Continuing Soviet Threat. As Mr. Nott says in the foreword to the White Paper: "the events of recent weeks must not obscure the fact that the main threat to the security of the United Kingdom is from the nuclear and conventional forces of the Soviet Union and her Warsaw Pact allies". In nuclear forces, the Soviet Union has 4,440 land based European theatre nuclear systems whereas NATO has 2,180. In conventional forces, the Warsaw Pact has 5 tanks for every 2 NATO tanks on the Central European Front. The Warsaw Pact has twice as many submarines in the Eastern Atlantic as NATO.

Stronger British Forces. British forces have been steadily strengthened over the last three years. There are nearly 30,000 more regulars and reservists in the Services than in 1979. The number of manned tanks

on the Central Front has increased by more than a quarter. Two additional armoured regiments are to be formed, when the new Challenger tank is introduced. The Territorial Army is being increased over the next few years from 70,000 to 86,000, equipped with the most modern equipment and given more training days.

The Royal Air Force is phasing in a new generation of aircraft, weapons, ground support radar and communications systems. The first Tornado aircraft will enter service this year and in due course this programme will result in the re-equipment of half the RAF's front line. Among the weapons to be acquired in the coming years is the anti-ship missile Sea Eagle, which will both have a greater range and a greater ability to counter decoys than Exocet. UK air defence is being strengthened in a number of ways, notably by running on two squadrons of Phantoms instead of phasing them out later in the decade and by arming 72 Hawk trainers with missiles. The air defence version of the Tornado will be operational by 1985.

Mr. Nott announced in his speech that a ninth Type 22 Frigate had been ordered, and decisions will be taken on replacements for the frigates and destroyers sunk in the South Atlantic in the next few months. He also announced that progress had been made with the design work for the new cheaper Type 23 Frigate, which is due to be operational from 1988, and confirmed the Government's intention to build up the force of hunter-killer nuclear-powered submarines from 12 to 17. The Defence Secretary remarked in relation to attacks on the Government for planning to reduce the size of the fleet that:

"We are spending nearly £500 million more in real terms on the conventional naval programme than the previous Government in the year before we took office. We shall still be spending more on the conventional Navy, at the peak of Trident expenditure, than when the Labour Party was in power ... I have made a switch in emphasis in our forward plans from ship platforms to naval weapons ... (which) is far and away the best way of spending money for real security value" (Hansard, 1st July 1982, Col.1066).

Labour's policy. It is Labour Party policy, as stated in last year's Party Conference resolution and in the new 'Labour's Programme 1982' to reduce defence spending to the average proportion of GDP spent by other European NATO countries. Mr. Nott pointed out that "such a commitment would reduce our total planned defence budget by about one third. In the planned 18-year procurement period of Trident, the reduction implied in such a commitment would be equal to about 11 Trident programmes" (ibid., Col. 1067).

Conclusion. Mr. Nott concluded his speech by saying that our Armed Forces have in recent weeks:

"demonstrated the principles for which we as a nation stand and for which we are prepared to fight. Let those who might seek to attack our freedom, and that of the Western Alliance, be warned. Our defences are strong and it is our earnest intention to strengthen them further year by year" (ibid., Col. 1069).

For information on the Trident programme, see Briefing Note No. 11, dated 24.3.1982.

RT/JLS