



MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
 MAIN BUILDING WHITEHALL LONDON SW1  
 Telephone 01-936 7022 ~~936 7022~~ 218 2111/3

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13th November 1980

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*Partly on very much*  
*not*  
 Dear Michael,

*Prime Minister*

*This is the assessment for which you asked.*

*Paul 15/11*

DEFENCE POLICY

In your letter of 3rd November you asked for an assessment of our own military capability on the lines of the JIC Note on France Defence Policy (JIC(80)(N)66).

I attach such an assessment. As we agreed, it does not aim to follow the JIC note exactly since that particular document was specifically an examination of the shifts of emphasis in French defence policy over the last two years. It is thus a snapshot. It reflects the specific decisions taken by the OD in July (OD(80)18th Meeting) but not the other measures necessary to accommodate the Defence Programme within the resource allocation to which we are currently working (ie those based on Command 7841). These measures will mean a marked reduction in capability compared with that shown in the assessment.

The note has been done as a staff exercise; it has not been cleared by the Chiefs of Staff and makes no recommendations for policy, which would, of course, fall to be discussed in the customary ways.

I am sending copies of the note with this letter to George Walden (FCO) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever*  
*Brian Norbury*

(B M NORBURY)

M O'D B Alexander Esq

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Deputy

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*From the Private Secretary*

18 November 1980

Defence Policy

The Prime Minister has read with interest the paper enclosed with your letter to me of 13 November and has asked me to pass on her thanks to those responsible for preparing it.

I am sending copies of this letter to George Walden (Foreign and Commonwealth Office), and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

Brian Norbury, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence.

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BRITISH DEFENCE CAPABILITY

INTRODUCTION

1. This note provides a summary of UK defence capability and shows how forces are deployed to meet UK defence commitments.

2. The aims of British defence policy summarised from Cmnd 7826-1 are:-

(a) In conjunction with NATO Allies to provide collective strength to deter aggression and to resist it effectively should it occur.

(b) To provide forces to meet national defence commitments further afield, including the defence of dependent territories, and to assist in the protection of Western interests world-wide.

3. 95% of the UK armed forces are now firmly committed to NATO tasks with only a relatively small effort devoted to out-of-area commitments. However, NATO forces can be, and are, used to meet out-of-area commitments and, as a matter of policy, sufficient flexibility is retained in the capability of these forces to ensure that this position is maintained.

POLICY IN NATO

4. The UK is entirely committed to NATO and possesses no military strategy which is not based on that of the Alliance. The extent to which UK forces are committed to NATO commanders varies. The majority are either assigned or earmarked for assignment at some stage of the alert procedure and most of those that are not thus formally committed are listed under the category of 'Other forces for NATO'. UK force levels and defence posture are deliberately designed to make the most effective contribution to the Alliance strategy of deterrence and the doctrines of flexible response and forward defence. Force planning is shaped to meet force goals set by NATO and the quality and range of the UK contribution is monitored by NATO and the major Military Commanders. This is a feature of our commitment to the Alliance integrated military structure.

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5. The UK contribution is based on four main pillars: our strategic and theatre nuclear forces, forces for the security of the UK Base, a contribution to the land/air forces in Central Europe and the major European contribution to the maritime forces in the Eastern Atlantic/Channel areas. In outline terms the UK maintains an army of some 167,000 men (including Locally Engaged Personnel eg Gurkhas), a fleet of over 100 surface and sub-surface combat ships and an air force of approximately 550 front-line aircraft.

6. The UK is committed to the NATO doctrine of flexible response which requires that NATO should maintain the capability to respond to and thereby deter aggression at any level. It follows, therefore, that the Alliance needs to maintain an adequate strategic and theatre nuclear as well as a conventional capability.

#### NUCLEAR FORCES

7. The UK commits all its nuclear forces to NATO and is the only European member to contribute to the strategic and theatre nuclear components of the NATO triad of forces. The independence of the UK strategic deterrent provides a second centre of decision making within NATO and in that way reinforces the Alliance's deterrence posture.

8. The UK strategic force currently consists of four nuclear powered submarines, each carrying 16 Polaris A3T ballistic missiles with a range of 4600KM. Each missile has 3 Multiple Re-entry Vehicles (MRVs). A minimum of one submarine is always on patrol at 15 minutes notice to fire. When only one submarine is on patrol a second is always ready to sail within a maximum of 48 hours. When the Chevaline programme, designed to maintain the effectiveness of the force until the 1990s against Soviet anti-ballistic missile capabilities, is introduced from 1981, the number of MRVs per missile will be reduced to two, but in addition each missile will carry advanced penetration aids and decoys and will have the ability to manoeuvre the payload in space. The warheads will be much harder and some of the decoys are themselves hardened. By the mid-1990s when the submarines will be coming to the end of their useful life they will be replaced by a 4 or 5 boat force equipped with Trident I ballistic missiles. Each submarines will be able to carry 16 missiles with up to 8 Multiple independently targettable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs) and the missile range will be between 6400 and 9600KM

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depending on the number of warheads. As with Polaris, while the missile will be purchased from the US, the UK will build the submarine and design and produce the warheads. Like the Polaris force, the Trident missile will be assigned to SACEUR and targetted in his strike plans in accordance with Alliance deterrent concept, but will remain under UK operational control at all times.

9. The UK theatre nuclear capability is embodied in the Vulcan, Buccaneer and Jaguar aircraft for use in Allied Command Europe and Buccaneers, Nimrods (dual key) and organic helicopters in the maritime role. In addition BAOR possesses (under dual control) Lance missiles and 8" and 155 mm howitzers for battlefield use. Only the Vulcans, and to a lesser degree the Buccaneers, possess the range to give these systems the capability to strike Soviet territory. They will be replaced in the mid-1980s by Tornado which (unlike the Vulcan) does not have the unrefuelled range to strike the USSR. However, a force of 160 US operated Ground Launched Cruise Missiles would be deployed in the UK.

10. As in previous years some two percent of the UK Defence budget is to be spent on strategic forces in 1980/81. Of this, half a percent will be devoted to the Chevaline programme which is now nearing completion at a total cost of about £1000M. The capital cost of future programmes, in particular Trident, is estimated to amount to £4½ to 5 billion over the next fifteen years at today's prices, which will absorb about 3 percent of the defence budget overall (5% in the peak years towards the end of the 1980s). Theatre nuclear forces are not separately identified in the defence budget since most of the systems are dual capable, but during the 1970s total expenditure on our nuclear forces absorbed under 5% of the defence budget and on average it is expected to amount to roughly the same proportion over the next ten years.

#### SECURITY OF THE UK BASE

11. The UK is a rear base for the Supreme Allied Commander Europe, a forward base for the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic and the main base for the Commander-in-Chief Channel. It is also the operating and maintenance base for the UK strategic nuclear force and a large portion of NATO's theatre/tactical nuclear forces. The waters of

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the UK base, by definition, extend to the 100 fathom line. NATO strategy depends upon the assured delivery of reinforcement and re-supply and it is through these waters that the bulk of both must pass. It is also estimated that in war between 100,000 and 150,000 US personnel and over a million tons of equipment will be brought into the UK either for direct operations or onward transportation to mainland Europe. Over 400 US aircraft will pass through the UK, some remaining in passage for up to six weeks; a further 600 USAF aircraft, including many with nuclear capability will augment those already based in UK, operating from some 20 airfields. The UK is also the base for those forces which meet solely national objectives such as the fulfilment of commitments to the remaining dependent territories and other operations in support of UK foreign policy. During the 1960s and early 1970s the home defence capability was neglected and allowed to decline relative to the capability that was maintained for operations in other theatres. However, in recent years there has been a growing awareness of the direct conventional threat which the Warsaw Pact forces pose to the UK. The most immediate of these is from the air. There are also serious threats from mining of the ports and anchorages and the reinforcement and re-supply shipping routes as well as from submarine torpedo and missile attack. There is also a significant threat of sabotage and disruption, primarily from the Soviet Special Purpose Forces.

12. There are serious deficiencies in the capability to meet all the threats to the UK Base. Although the air defence ground radar system is being improved, the UK does not have enough air defence fighter aircraft to meet the threat, despite the planned addition of another Lightning squadron, and the tanker and airborne early warning support available is also inadequate. Furthermore, the surface-to-air-missile defences are only deployed so as to be able to cover attacks from the East. Although nearly 30% of the Army's mobilised strength will remain in the UK in war it is estimated that Key Point guarding and the counter to the sabotage and subversion threat may require some 8,000 more men than are likely to be available at the time and the prospect is that the requirement will grow faster than the forces available. The mining threat to the reinforcement ports, anchorages and routes and SSBN exit routes is such that the RN needs at least 50% more Mine Counter Measures Vessels than are currently planned and the nature of the threat dictates that

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these need to be more capable than those currently in service. Current ASW sensors and weapons are degraded in shallow water and there are insufficient ASW units allocated to the defence of UK Base waters. It has not yet been possible to incorporate in long term plans any significant improvement in these shortfalls. Furthermore, current UK mining stocks and capabilities are inadequate for the defensive mining required to help counter the submarine threat.

CONTINENTAL FORCES

13. The UK makes a visible and politically significant contribution to the defence of Central Europe. On land the UK has a responsibility for defending a frontage of 65KM along the Inner German Border and for this purpose has assigned to NATO 1(BR) Corps consisting of four armoured divisions, an artillery division and a field force. The regular element of BAOR is some 55,000 men (the number we are committed to under the Brussels Treaty). Manning problems, leave, courses and training outside the theatre together with the Northern Ireland commitment mean that the effective strength on the ground currently averages some 47,000. However, most of those out of theatre would be returned very quickly in case of need. The Corps is primarily equipped with Chieftain tanks, self-propelled artillery (numbers of which will shortly be increased) and a wide range of anti-armour and air defence Guided weapons. In the main the equipment is modern and effective and the UK's contribution to forward defence is well appreciated by our Allies, although it is now assessed that Chieftain is no longer an adequate match for the Soviet T72 tank. Plans are in train to supplement it by Challenger in 1984: this will match current Soviet tanks. A lack of air defence weapons within the Corps also causes concern to the Alliance but current resources will not permit this to be rectified in the short term. The UK possesses no chemical weapons with which to respond to any use by the Soviet Union, although our defensive equipment is among the best in NATO.

14. 1(BR) Corps would be reinforced to over twice its regular strength in time of tension or war by the mobilisation of reserve units. In the light of current assessments that, in the worst though less likely case, NATO could receive as little as 48 hours warning of a Warsaw Pact attack, considerable emphasis has always been placed upon the ability of member nations to mobilise their reserve forces at short notice and deploy designated units rapidly to their war locations. The lack of in-place UK forces (arising from manpower shortages that have also caused problems in the other

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Services) has often been the subject of criticism within the Alliance. However, the outstanding success of Exercise Crusader this autumn has gone a long way to allaying these fears by demonstrating the effectiveness of the UK's reinforcement procedures.

15. In addition to the land forces, the UK maintains in Germany 12 front-line RAF squadrons comprising some 150 combat aircraft as a contribution to the 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force. These would be reinforced in time of war by the addition of some regular units but to nothing like the same degree as the land forces. Although small, the air forces deployed in Germany are kept at a very high state of readiness and are subjected to a continuing process of NATO tactical evaluation in which they consistently achieve results unmatched by any of our Allies. The Buccaneer strike/attack aircraft (a number of which are currently grounded by structural faults) will be replaced by Tornado in 1983, later than originally planned, and there are also plans to modernise the Harrier force. For financial reasons the Jaguar force will not be improved despite the fact that it will not be replaced until the mid-1990s. Moreover, a major weakness of the RAF capability lies in the field of electronic warfare where the Warsaw Pact forces are drawing steadily ahead.

16. In common with the land forces, the air forces in Central Europe do not possess sufficient stocks of weapons to maintain full scale operations for more than 5-6 days. While our holdings do in general match the NATO criteria, these are now generally regarded as inadequate to support sustained operations and are being revised. Efforts by both the Army and the RAF to increase our weapons holdings have so far met with little success in the face of financial difficulties.

#### MARITIME FORCES

17. The UK also makes a visible and militarily significant contribution to the defence of NATO and the security of national interests further afield in its maritime forces. The UK provides 70% of the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic's forces in the Eastern Atlantic and a major contribution towards the anti-submarine defence of the Strike Fleet. The Royal Navy consists of some 83 surface ships and 32 submarines, including the Polaris SSBNs together with fixed wing aircraft and ASW helicopters. The RAF provides four squadrons of maritime patrol aircraft, two squadrons of strike/attack aircraft



and two squadrons of air defence aircraft devoted to maritime operations. However, the formidable Soviet maritime strength has been considerably improved both in quality and quantity over the last 15 years and the maritime balance has shifted and continues to shift in favour of the Soviet Union. Meanwhile there are increased pressures on the RN to fill the gaps left by the possible non-arrival of USN units diverted to other tasks. SACLANT has stressed that shortages of ships amount to more than 50% of the forces required to achieve his tasks. With the introduction of INVINCIBLE Class of anti-submarine aircraft carrier, the new ASW helicopter, the new class of SSN and the Mk 2 version of the Nimrod, the ASW capability of UK maritime forces will seek to keep pace with the threat; however, quantity is required as well as quality if we are not to fall further behind. Given the competition for the resources available, this increased anti-submarine warfare capability is inevitably provided at some expense to other requirements and, relative to the threat, RN anti-surface ship and anti-air warfare capability is declining, as will the amphibious capability, vital to the support of the Northern Flank and for national intervention operations.

18. While the quality of the fleet is of a high order, continuing efficiency at sea is being jeopardised by the failure of the dockyards to meet the refitting programme. Furthermore, there is a serious lack of war reserves. In addition, the UK has also been criticised for its shortage of ships, submarines and maritime aircraft.

SPECIALIST REINFORCEMENT FORCES

19. The UK maintains specialist reinforcement forces which are included as part of NATO's Strategic Reserve. These have deployment options throughout Allied Command Europe and the Atlantic Command area and are held in high regard by NATO Commanders.

(a) Under the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's command:-

(i) A UK contribution to the Allied Command Europe Mobile Force (including a battalion group and one squadron of Harriers).

(ii) The UK Mobile Force (6 Field Force, Puma



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helicopters and one squadrons of Jaguars).

(iii) The UK contributes two additional squadrons to SACEUR's Strategic Reserve (Air), while four further squadrons are assigned, three to the Northern Flank and one to the Southern Flank, as regional reinforcements.

(iv) SAS

(b) Under the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic's command a Brigade Group of four RM Commandos with logistic support and Wessex helicopters are part of the UK/NL Amphibious Force. Although assigned to SACLANT, the two mountain and Arctic warfare trained Commandos are more likely to be used by SACEUR for operations in North Norway.

#### NORTHERN IRELAND

20. At the moment the British Army has 11 major units (6 resident and 5 on emergency tours) deployed in Northern Ireland in support of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. At the end of November 1980 a further emergency tour unit will be withdrawn leaving a total of just over 11,000 regulars in the province. The emergency tour units will be drawn equally from the British Army of the Rhine and United Kingdom Land Forces. The regular troops are supported by 11 battalions (7,500 men) of the Ulster Defence Regiment, a locally recruited and essentially part time force. On transition to war all the units on emergency tours will return to their parent formations whilst 4 of the 6 resident units will be re-deployed to Great Britain. This presumes the call-out of the UDR for full time service. One effect of the continuing commitment of the Army to Northern Ireland is to reduce the effectiveness of the British Army of the Rhine and to create additional and unwelcome trubulence, but conversely the experience of real operations and the high standard of individual training and awareness which they demand has been beneficial, particularly for the younger officers and NCOs. Both RAF and RN helicopters operate in support of the Army in Northern Ireland.

#### POLICY OUTSIDE THE NATO AREA

21. The UK still has some commitments for the defence of its

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..... overseas dependencies and defence agreements with Allies and continues to maintain garrisons overseas in support of them. A complete list of the UK forces maintained overseas is contained at Annex, the most important being those in Hong Kong, Cyprus, Gibraltar and Belize. Berlin is also included in this list since, while geographically in Central Europe, it is outside the NATO Alliance.

22. Over the last 20 years there has been a steady decline in the number of formal UK defence commitments worldwide. However, with the growth of Soviet military capability and its continuing spread beyond its immediate frontiers, there is a growing awareness of the need for the Western World to be ready and able to act in response to any military action or overt threat to its worldwide interests. The UK has taken a lead in highlighting this new danger and, by virtue of past experience and a continuing residual capability, is well placed to play a significant part in making a response. The Royal Navy deploys task groups out-of-area and this summer ships from the Far East Task Group have visited China and have been deployed to the Gulf as a consequence of the Iran/Iraq war. In addition the UK still provides loan service personnel to assist friendly countries in the training of their own forces.

23. Proposed measures to improve the UK's airlifted out-of-area capability include the enhancement of the Army's parachute capability, provision of an equipment stockpile to sustain a two battalion force for a period of up to six months and the stretching of some of the RAF Hercules transport aircraft. However, notwithstanding these measures, it is unlikely that the UK would mount an airlifted amphibious out-of-area operation other than in conjunction with one or more of her Allies. The forces required for such operations would still have a primary commitment in the UK or NATO area, which would by definition be weakened by their use elsewhere.

#### CONCLUSIONS

24. It is concluded that:-

(a) The UK sees its security as best maintained through the collective defence arrangements of NATO; its forces are therefore fully committed to the Alliance's integrated military structure and it adheres to NATO's doctrine of flexible response and forward defence.

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(b) As a central component of our contribution to Alliance deterrence, the UK maintains both a strategic nuclear force which, though committed to NATO, constitutes an independent second centre of nuclear decision making within the Alliance, as well as a range of theatre nuclear weapons (though some with US warheads) all within the concept of flexible response. Improvements in hand are designed to maintain the effectiveness of the UK's nuclear weapons.

(c) The overwhelming emphasis in conventional forces is on a contribution to NATO in terms of protecting the UK <sup>and of providing</sup> Base, land/air forces in the Central Region, maritime forces in the Atlantic, and specialist reinforcement forces. The UK has well balanced forces which cover nearly the full spectrum of military roles. However, there are serious deficiencies in the quality and quantity of some equipment available (especially anti-armour capability, air defence of the UK and the size of the Fleet) and gaps in capability exacerbated by manpower shortages; these must be viewed against the rapidly increasing threat.

(d) The UK has a capability for limited operations outside the NATO area which is based on the more flexible use of existing forces. These are increasingly important now that the global nature of the Soviet challenge has been recognised.



FORCES STATIONED OUT OF AREA

	Number of Servicemen	Major Equipment	Remarks
1. <u>BERLIN</u>			
a. <u>Army</u>	2900	14 x Tanks 3 x Light Helicopters	Including 3 Infantry Battalions
b. <u>RAF</u>	650		
2. <u>HONG KONG</u> (Does not include temporary reinforcement for Illegal Immigrant Operations)			75% Costs paid by HK Govt
a. <u>Army</u>	6000	7 x Light Helicopters	Including 4 Infantry Battalions (3 of which are Gurkha)
b. <u>RAF</u>	250	8 x Support Helicopters	
c. <u>RN</u>	400	5 x Patrol Craft	
3. <u>BRUNEI</u> (Paid for by Sultan)			
a. <u>Army</u>	800	3 x Light Helicopters	One Gurkha Infantry Battalion



		Number of Servicemen	Major Equipment	Remarks
4.	<u>CYPRUS</u>			
	a. <u>SBA</u>			
	1. <u>Army</u>	2200	4 x Light Helicopters	Including 1½ Infantry Battalions
	2. <u>RAF</u>	1400 (includes UNFICYP)	2 x Support Helicopters	
	b. <u>UNFICYP</u>			
	1. <u>Army</u>	900	4 x Light Helicopters	Including ½ Infantry Battalion
	2. <u>RAF</u>		4 x Support Helicopters	
5.	<u>BELIZE</u>			
	a. <u>Army</u>	1400	6 x Field Guns	Including 1 Infantry Battalion
	b. <u>RAF</u>	200	4 x Light helicopters* 4 x Combat aircraft	
			4 x Support Helicopters	Included in SACEUR Assigned figures
			4 x Rapier Fire Units	Detached from UK Base
	c. <u>RN</u>	250/470	1 x Frigate/ Destroyer	Guardship
				(*double earmarked from UK)



	Number of Servicemen	Major Equipment	Remarks
6. <u>FALKLAND ISLANDS</u>			
a. <u>RN</u>	50		Royal Marines
7. <u>DIEGO GARCIA</u>			
a. <u>RN</u>	36		
8. <u>ANTARCTICA</u>			
a. <u>RN</u>	120	1 x Ice Patrol Ship	Seasonal
9. <u>CANADA</u>			
a. <u>Army</u>	130	42 x Tanks	British Army Training Unit Suffield
b. <u>RAF</u>	65		RAF(U) Goose Bay



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From the Private Secretary

3 November 1980

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to check with MOSSA.

DEFENCE POLICY

The Prime Minister has seen a JIC Report (JIC(80)(N)66) on developments in French defence policy. She would like to have an assessment of our own military capability, laid out in the same way as the JIC Report and following it paragraph by paragraph. I should be grateful if you could let me know by telephone how long it is likely to take to prepare this.

I am sending copies of this letter to George Walden (Foreign and Commonwealth Office) and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

M. O'D. B. ALEXANDER

Brian Norbury, Esq.,  
Ministry of Defence.

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