

UK Defence Capabilities

Main Effort Must Surely be Readiness to Meet the Russian Threat?

Not swanning around in the Pacific!

Introduction - Themes

- The Russians have an inferiority complex that is fully justified but we can't rely on their incompetence
- "Quantity has a Quality of its own," Quote: The Russians.
- The UK/NATO generally chooses quality over quantity which is broadly right but no ship, aircraft or tank can be in two places at once and combat losses must be factored into numbers – risk!!!!
- We are not doing this alone – thank goodness
- It's about Deterrence but: "To preserve Peace, We Prepare for War."
(Quote: USAF 81st Tactical Fighter Wing Bentwaters, Suffolk.)
- The Good The Bad and The Ugly

Overview

- Political Constants, Issues and Realities
- The Cold War Capability Benchmarks
- Funny Money
- The Capability Glasses Half Full and Half Empty:
 - The Naval Service
 - British Army
- Intermission
 - RAF
 - Strategic Command
- Key Capability Gaps
- Summary

Political Constants

- Conspiracies of optimism: Operational and Procurement
- “A Force For Good,” Show Boating, Madness of Iraq and Afghanistan
- Maintain The Special Relationship at almost any Cost
- Keep The US engaged in European Defence
- “Defence Procurement Must be Reformed? Everyone does it better than us” – Actually they don’t necessarily
- Buy American, its cheaper and better – Sometimes
- Competition delivers best VFM – Good luck with that

Issues and Realities

- Too many senior military and civilian officials – expensive and they get in each others way
- Defence Procurement rarely goes as well as we would like:
 - It is poorly understood. Traditional remedies rarely make things better
 - MoD/Treasury always falls for promises of twice as much for half the price
 - Too many people involved in decision making which is often slow/poor
- We try to be a mini Super Power
- We are on a path set by previous Defence Reviews
- Capabilities lost or reduced take a long time to rebuild

Cold War Capability Benchmarks

More Capability Risks Were Taken Than You Might Think

1980s Force Levels

- General: Stock levels were a bit risky, but readiness was high
- Navy:
 - Circa 50 Frigates (and Destroyers) of varying/dubious quality
 - Three small aircraft carriers, two assault ships, Twelve SSNs, Four SSBN
 - A lot of good quality helicopters – particularly ASW
- Army:
 - Eight Armoured Brigades in Ge and three further infantry brigades in UK
 - 80,000 Territorial Army
 - Circa 200 helicopters but not really up to the required standard
- RAF:
 - Circa 500 assorted fast jets of varying quality
 - Small force of battlefield transport helicopters
 - Biggest weakness was lack of defensive aids and stand off weapons

Funny Money

Smoke and Mirrors Obscure Funding Reality

- How much do you think the UK Defence Budget is in FY 2024/25?

- £58 Billion is the quoted number – But that is in the press who are not that knowledgeable
- There are quite widely differing numbers bandied around and on various HMG sites/documents
- So nobody really knows

The Good (ish)

- Last administration claimed it would rise to £89 Billion. What will Labour do?
- Based on 2.5% of GDP, which cannot be predicted.
- No clear relationship to required capabilities and readiness
- Cost of operations funded separately but may be included in numbers claimed by the Government

The Bad

- It probably includes things not previously covered by this total:
 - Intelligence: eg MI 6, GCHQ
 - Security: eg MI 5
 - Cyber security
 - Other things that we do not know about
 - Equipment, training etc for Ukraine
 - Operational deployments outside the Core Budget
 - “Wooden Dollars,” paid back to the Treasury to pay equipment depreciation charges.
- Different types of money. Everyday expenditure on: fuel, some spares, pay, etc limited. So equipment/personnel may stand idle.
- The process for being allowed to spend money in the budget is very tortuous.

The Ugly

- It has always included pensions which many other countries do not.
- Does it include gifts (equipment and training) to Ukraine?
- Annual underspends are not always carried over.
- When running cost cash is tight in any year, the Treasury often raids departments. That directly impacts military readiness.

Capability Glasses

Its Not As If We Are Starting From Scratch

But we are

Spoiling The Ship for a Hapeth of Tar

Issues and Realities

- The UK did not stop investing in defence after the Cold War – so we are not starting from zero, or anything like it. Quality is high.
- Core funding has been too tight for a long time. Quantities and readiness are low
- Professional forces are expensive – maybe not best VFM any more
- The good training is vital but it is a large overhead
- Pretending to meet NATO commitments undermines credibility
- Given time and money, current shortcomings can be put right
- But we can't afford to procrastinate

The Naval Service

Royal Navy, Royal Marines, Royal Fleet Auxiliary

[Bing Videos](#)

[Royal Marines - they come from the sea \(youtube.com\)](#)

Key Force Elements



Royal Navy: warships and submarines
Royal Fleet Auxiliary: Support to the Fleet
Fleet air arm: Fixed and Rotary Wing aircraft
Royal Marines Commando Forces

Key Force Elements – Surface Combatants



Key Capabilities – Sub Surface Combatants



Key Capabilities – Fleet Air Arm



Key Capabilities – Royal Marines



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Key Capabilities – Royal Fleet Auxiallry



Good

- Ingrained professional ethos
- Innovative – eg seabed infrastructure defence vessels
- Good sustained focus on future programmes
- Understand importance of UK based industry
- Procurement process for Type 31 much improved
- Ships upgraded regularly to keep up with the threat
- Likely early introduction of laser air defence systems
- Royal Marines very capable and adapting to new types of threat (circa 6000 strong plus Army Commandos)

Bad

- Sacrificed too much to pay for, and operate, carriers.
- Badly need new/more frigates/destroyers, Type 26 delayed by funding shortages and procurement processes.
- OPVs a joke. Good ships but effectively unarmed.
- Not enough submarines to do the job, even in peace time.
- F35 numbers building up too slowly

Ugly

- Delusions of grandeur – trying to do too much
- Poor Retention and trade group management = can't manage what they currently have
- Carriers a vanity project for worldwide power projection
- No capacity to replace losses
- Making the most of what they have seems to be a constant struggle

The British Army

A Loose Association of Waring Tribes

[British Army 2023 Recap | British Army \(youtube.com\)](#)

Some Key Capabilities



Some Key Capabilities



Key Force Elements

Circa 80,000 Regular Troops plus 25,000 Reserves



For the sake of simplicity not all units are shown

Good

- Ingrained professional ethos
- Strong unit cohesion
- Flexible and adaptable – recognizing the need to adapt but a lot of work to be done quickly
- Good at making do
- Probably the best, at tactical level, army in NATO (albeit small)
- Personal equipment very good
- Infantry equipment much improved
- Good intellectual training of officers
- World's best at ceremonial events

Bad

- The Army is testing the boundaries of critical mass which undermines their credibility with friends and foes alike
- Thinking too short term
- Equipment husbandry:
 - Maintenance is poor
 - Through Life Management and upgrade is dreadful
- Chaotic Approach to acquiring new equipment with inconsistent sustained focus on equipment requirements – hence they get nothing of the RAF and RN.
- Far too few Tanks, AFVs, artillery, helicopters
- Too little cyber and Electronic Warfare capability
- Stockpiles much too small and depleted by gifts to Ukraine
- No Land Mines

Ugly

- Bluffing and too prone to capability optimism
- Inter Tribal Rivalry contributes to lack of consistent approaches to force development and equipment procurement
- Under manned: Poor Retention, Very Poor Recruit pipeline [Nobody seems to know why – including the Army]
- No capacity :
 - To replace losses
 - Mount any homeland defence
- Resentful of/blind to, the importance of industry
- Resent losing equipment funding to the RN and RAF [But its largely their own fault.]
- Unable to make the Reserves work well enough
- Some nasty discipline/ethical issues in and Iraq, AFG and Kenya
- Taking forever since 2014 (end of AFG operations) to be ready for war fighting

Intermission

The RAF

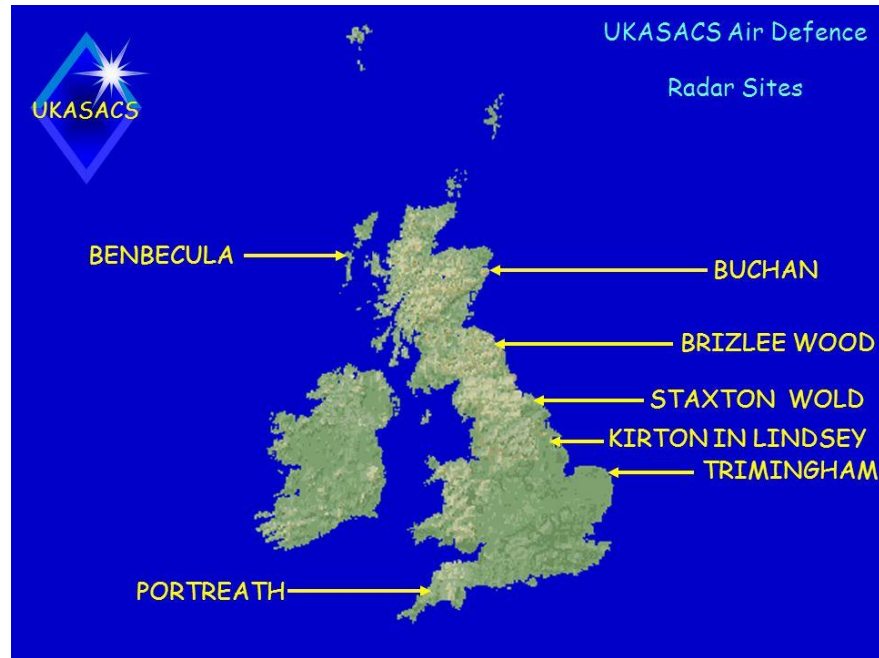
Most Capabilities Covered But Not Enough of Anything

Bing Videos

Key Capabilities - Aircraft



Key Capabilities – Air/Space Defence of UK



Good

- Ingrained professional ethos
- Generally good recruiting, retention and trade group management
- Modern fleet of aircraft - Upgrades sustain capabilities
- Modern and very effective weapons (air to air and air to ground)
- Understand the importance of working with industry
- Do the job properly and tend not to cut corners

Bad

- Not enough of anything!!!
- Retired battlefield surveillance aircraft in 2021 due to lack of funds for upgrade
- No Air Defence Missile Systems to protect any part of the UK
- Never enough pilots.
 - Pipe-line too long (7 years) and slow to ramp up.
 - Pilot retention a continuous issue

Ugly

- Overstretched by “peacetime” commitments/tasks
- Reputation for misogyny
- No capacity to replace losses
- Bases vulnerable
 - No Air defence
 - RAF Regiment too small (<2000) to be significant

Strategic Command

People Who Claim To Talk About Strategy Often Descend into Tactics

[Space Command: UK launches new defence against threats from space \(youtube.com\)](#)

Key Roles

- **Cyber Operations:** Enhancing the UK's cyber capabilities to protect against cyber threats and attacks.
- **[Space Operations:** Managing and safeguarding the UK's interests in space, including satellite communications and surveillance.]
- **Joint Warfare:** Coordinating joint military efforts across the Army, Navy, and Air Force.
- **Information Warfare:** Ensuring effective communication and countering misinformation.
- **Nuclear Deterrence:** Maintaining the UK's nuclear deterrent capability
- **Special Forces**
- **Joint Medical Services**

Good

- Ingrained Combined Arms operational ethos
- Joint Service Staff College supports combined arms culture
- Interservice learning culture – Lessons Identified
- Separate Space Command established
- Leadership of international forces, eg:
 - Allied Rapid Reaction Corps
 - Joint Expeditionary Force

Bad

- Talk a good game but are they credible with allies?
- Can be arrogant without much justification
- Overall lack of critical mass in services to justify leadership roles
- Capabilities in space are very limited
- Cyber and Electronic Warfare capabilities weak
- No sub strategic nuclear deterrence
- No Tactical ABM capabilities

Ugly

- Iraq and Afghanistan:
 - Political and Military Hubris
 - Biting off more than we can Chew
 - Strategic Failures
 - Bending The Army to Afghanistan
- “No Need to Plan For a Land War in Europe,” Gen D Richards CDS
- How cost effective is it for each service to have its own air force and/or army?

Key Capability Gaps/Risks

Can We Meet Our Current NATO Commitments?

BTW: The goal posts are about to move

What needs to Improve

- Make what the services currently have ready for war:
 - Enough high quality trained people
 - Enough expendable items (munitions, spares etc)
 - Platform availability issues resolved
- Increase forces (equipment, personnel, logistics):
 - Anti Submarine Warfare: Submarines, Maritime Patrol Aircraft etc
 - Long Range Strike aircraft: F53A
 - Air/Land Defence of NATO border (Estonia is our main patch):
 - Main Battle Tanks
 - Infantry Fighting Vehicles
 - Artillery: Numbers and Range (ATACMS)
 - Air Defence
 - Apache helicopters
 - Make The Army Reserve work properly
- Defence of the UK:
 - **Probably Top Priority is Air Defence of the UK**
 - Maybe establish a volunteer militia
 - Protect infrastructure at sea
 - Sub strategic nuclear deterrence – UK has no tactical nuclear weapons. US owns all NATO TNW except those owned by France!

Summary 1/2

- Generally good quality of personnel and equipment. Compares well with the Cold War
- Below critical mass in many areas of manpower, equipment and consumables. Compares badly with the Cold War although risks were taken then
- No capacity to replace losses
- “Planned” funding may not be enough to achieve sufficient capabilities in time
- “Headline funding may not translate into actual expenditure
- Too much political and military dishonesty
- There is no need to panic but politicians and service chiefs need to stop bluffing and get real. **This defence review is the last chance saloon.**

Summary 2/2

We may have to choose:

- Between the Services
- Between enemies
- Between threats
- Between capabilities

We are probably doing that anyway but much more honesty might help get limited resources where they can achieve the best effects.