

Britain's future defence posture: A UK NDA briefing 17th September

The vexed question of Britain's role in the world has been raised again by the UK National Defence Association. The UKNDA has an honourable record of seeking to raise the salience of UK defence policy and the means by which varying governments aspirations are to be funded. Its two latest papers return to the fray. The first raises the question of whether or not the UK can afford to allow itself to pursue a policy of disarmament by default; the second seeks to pose some questions by way of starting a debate on the necessity of national defence. Nick Watts of Great North News Services was at their launch.

A panel of wise men presented both papers. They pose challenging questions and deserve to receive considered responses from Government. At the very least these papers deserve public study and a fair wind from the media. The first paper "Disarmament and consequences" incorporates an interesting quote from Enoch Powell: "history is littered with the wars everyone knew would never happen." The authors of this paper sketch out a series of scenarios and consider the risks of each to the UK.

The second paper "A National Debate on Defence ♦ a dire necessity" revisits the consequences of reduced defence funding and the consequent effects on the UK's capabilities as a result. The consequence of ever diminishing capability means that the UK's ambitions to remain a world class player begin to ring increasingly hollow.

Taken together the two papers run the risk of sounding like handwringing by senior ex-servicemen. However, the issue they raise need to be considered by us all; the UK is a maritime trading nation and the Royal Navy is getting ever smaller. Likewise our offensive air capability is diminishing. These papers have perhaps fired the opening salvos of the debate in the run up to the Strategic Defence Review of 2015.

In their news release, UKNDA said : David Cameron and his senior Cabinet colleagues risk going down in history as "Guilty Men" akin to Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain unless they call a halt to current Defence cuts and accept that we cannot risk reducing our Armed Services at a time when countries such as Russia and China are expanding their military forces, the Middle East is more volatile than ever, piracy is on the increase, the Falkland Islands are once more in Argentina's sights, and America is reducing its commitment to Europe's defence.

This is the message from the UK National Defence Association (UKNDA) which is calling for a national debate on Defence and which this week launches two major reports highlighting growing deficiencies in Britain's military capabilities, and warning of the serious consequences of allowing our Armed Forces to continue to shrink.

Both reports carry a hard-hitting foreword by the distinguished historian Andrew Roberts who warns that the present Government is ignoring the lessons of history and seems set on a course that is "illogical, dangerous and ultimately self-defeating". He counsels the Prime Minister that it is in his own and the Government's interests to take action sooner rather than later to put things right: "Nothing can ruin a British statesman's reputation quicker or more completely than being suspected of having neglected the nation's defences."

Co-authors of the two new UKNDA reports include Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Graydon (former Chief of the Air Staff), General Sir Michael Rose (former UN commander in Bosnia), Vice Admiral Sir Jeremy Blackham (former Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff) and Air Commodore Andrew Lambert (Bosnia / Iraq / Falklands).

"Disarmament and Consequences: Can Britain Remain Aloof?" presents a series of hypothetical (but realistic) scenarios in which the United Kingdom would be seriously endangered by events around the world spiralling out of control, and in which our drastically reduced Armed Forces would be unable to guarantee the security of the UK homeland, our borders, our trade routes and our vital energy supplies.

National Debate on Defence ♦ "A Dire Necessity" examines the UK's role in the world and poses a series of inescapable questions for the Government to answer about Britain's strategic goals and our relationships with America, Europe and the wider world. At a time when public opinion in Britain is increasingly supportive of the Armed Forces and concerned about Defence cuts, the UKNDA report calls for "a serious national debate on the priority which Britain should accord Defence within a total budget the nation can afford".
The papers can be viewed at www.uknda.org