

Round-up of his views expressed Friday, May 14, 2010

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The former head of the British army has said that troop numbers need not be cut in the strategic defence and security review (SDSR) if the government looks for savings in the Ministry of Defence equipment programme.

Speaking on BBC Radio 4's Today programme, General Sir Richard Dannatt said: "I think by anyone's recognition we've got too many tanks, too much heavy artillery, too many fast jets.

"The navy needs to look very closely at what it needs to be. And I think, particularly as far as fast jets are concerned, a number of contracts need to be looked at. One of which is the air-to-air refuelling contract, which was a shameful one, very, very expensive two years ago.

"A new government has got a chance to look a number of contractors in the face and say 'hang on, things have changed. We're going to do it differently'. We can make a lot of savings on the equipment programme and still do what we need to do.

General Dannatt described speculation that the armed forces could do without the Royal Air Force as 'facile'. "We need three separate armed forces that work superbly together on joint operations," he said.

In a separate article in the Daily Telegraph, General Dannatt praised the coalition government's decision to convene a meeting of the new national security council on its first day was a "great step forward", and an improvement on the previous government's "hotchpotch of subcommittees".

"It recognises that the defence of the realm, the safety of its citizens and the wellbeing of its Armed Forces should be at the heart of policy-making," General Dannatt said of the council.

Welcoming the appointment of Sir Peter Ricketts as National Security Advisor, General Dannatt wrote: "With his experience at the Foreign Office, NATO and as chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee, he has the knowledge and gravitas for this new and important role.

"By showing the clear importance he attaches to issues of defence and security, David Cameron has made the best possible start.