

The Labour Party has published '21st Century Defence', a consultation paper, to launch its Shadow Defence Review of the threats the UK faces, assessing the Government's defence policy against recent events and expert opinion and seeking to define a long term vision for UK defence policy.

The review consists of three parts, examining first the nature of the security landscape, then the principles which must guide our defence posture and then looking at the implications for force structures.

Jim Murphy MP, Labour's Shadow Defence Secretary said : "We are determined that the limited consultation that came to characterise the Government's Strategic Defence and Security Review is not repeated. "The Arab Spring is the tip of the iceberg of the change we are likely to experience over the next decade."

Britain needs a defence policy which can keep up. It must be flexible and agile, with new and wide-ranging capabilities. It must prioritise coalition-building, be attuned to the threats and trends of the future and co-ordinate defence with development and diplomacy.

"We need a new defence strategy consistent with financial circumstances but also with strategic context. Labour is committed to being fiscally responsible, true to our own progressive principles and bold on defence reform."

On coalition-building : "The US's strategic reorientation makes their priorities more numerous at a time of more limited resource and the impact on how we work together must be considered. It's untenable that the US President announces that this is a moment of transition and European nations act as if this is a period of status quo: European nations have to get serious. We must do more together to preserve our reach, and co-operation such as the UK-France agreement must become the norm not the exception."

Time has come for a conversation on how European NATO nations co-ordinate spending reductions and changes to force structures. We need to explore how a 'Coalition of Cuts' can help us end the practice of fighting conflicts together but preparing for them individually.

"The UK-France Treaty, initially worked on by the Labour Government, is a model which can lay the foundations for a landscape of co-operation amongst more European nations based on distinct, sometimes regional co-operations. Where countries can and where it is in their mutual interests, they should work together."

On bioterrorism : "While the security environment of the 20th century was dominated by physics the 21st may see biology centre stage. Bioterrorism both exposes significant weaknesses in our security architecture and is a threat which could cause mass suffering."

Existing international organisations have not been tested to respond to an attack with the potential scope and complexity of a mass bioterrorist incident. Ease of access is a critical concern since terrorists may obtain bio material through various means... Stockpiling of vaccines and detection of chemical or biological materials at the scene of an attack are also issues which deserve attention".

On Afghanistan : "We have moved from a conditions-led to calendar driven approach and without a game plan for a long-term, representative political settlement the nation's fragile fortunes could be reversed."

Just because the Government don't talk about this the nation's biggest defence priority the challenge does not become any less pressing. The Government has to work at maintaining the consensus with the public.

Preventing Afghanistan from becoming ever again a safe haven for al-Qaeda is the shared goal of all ISAF nations, but this depends on our post-2014 plan more so than the pace of our exit. Bipartisan unity on Afghanistan is vital but it is dependent on consistency and clarity of government strategies and efforts in these vital areas."

On defence co-operation with the US: The recent US

Security Strategy signals a significant shift in strategic focus: "we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region". This is combined with the 0 billion and potentially up to trillion defence cuts expected over the next decade, a shift away from the 'two major theatre wars standard' and withdrawal from Afghanistan. This significant recasting of US global orientation makes it incumbent on all European nations to assess the impact on our own posture, reach and influence and the extent to which joint priorities and strategies with the US may be influenced."

On changing security landscape:  
Weak and failing states outnumber strong states by two to one. The long-term security effects of climate change may exacerbate inter-state tensions and reinforce tendencies to state failure. Increasing availability of technology to all states and non-state actors poses an increasingly enhanced threat, and new types of weaponry are being developed."

On NATO:  
Defence spending should always be decided by national governments, but collective defence is a matter for NATO. NATO members are making significant cuts to defence capability in isolation of one another, the aggregate consequence of which may be significant capability shortfalls across the Alliance. "All those who want to participate in the consultation can do so at: <http://labourfriendsoftheforces.org.uk/21st-century-defence/> <http://www.labouremail.org.uk/emails/ln/36007/2/2128/13148/49e73ea974049f68fcefdfc0c52b1913/>