

It is clear that George Osborne (a man with no known defence experience or background) cares little for defence issues and is likely to wield his axe that way if the Conservatives win the next General Election. So all the present team are tainted ♦ they've stood up for defence spending, escort vessel numbers, armoured vehicles and so on. They've mostly been in their jobs for some time. They've mastered their briefs, they've talked to industry. Just imagine Sir Humphrey whispering in Cameron's ear to that effect... "Really, Prime Minister, they've gone native. You really can't depend on them to deliver swingeing cuts quickly. Don't you have some other credible candidates?" As it happens, there are. The best Secretary of State they'll never have is James Arbuthnot. He knows even more, so must be a definite no-no. So Defence Viewpoints, after its post political conference bath to soak off the travel grime and the general odour of politics, puts forward the following for consideration (and by doing so probably dooms them).

Defence Secretary: Andrew Robathan, currently Deputy Chief Whip. Coldstream Guards and SAS, fought in Gulf War I. Previously part of the defence team.

Minister for the Armed Forces: Keith Simpson, Shadow Foreign Affairs Minister. Former special advisor to two Conservative Defence Secretaries ♦ George Younger and Tom King. Honorary Colonel in the TA. Former senior lecturer in War Studies at Sandhurst. Author, RUSI member. Previously part of the defence team.

Minister for Defence Equipment and Support: Mark Hoban, Shadow Minister for the Treasury. Osborne's man and a chartered accountant with an economics degree. Will have his hands firmly round the throat of careless spenders.

Minister for Veterans: Mike Penning, Shadow Minister for Health. Former Grenadier Guard

Minister for Security (joint with Home Office): Baroness (Pauline) Neville-Jones. Currently shadowing this position. Ex spook.

Minister for Defence Diplomacy (jointly with FCO and DfID): Lord Hamilton of Epsom. Former Coldstream Guard and Minister for the Armed Forces. Recently been working in the defence industry. Member of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Development Policy committee in the House of Lords, so well attuned to the value of the proposed "comprehensive approach".

Sorry Lord Dannatt, you don't get a Ministerial limousine, but maybe there's a role for you as an adviser to the new National Security Council.