

The British Army has for some time been moving towards super-garrisons - large bases which concentrate units, some of which might even be in economically less well off regions of the UK from where it draws many of its recruits. But there seems to be backsliding on the idea.

In answer to a recent Parliamentary Question from Lord Lee of Trafford on 15th September asking how many troops will be based at the proposed West Midlands super-garrison Baroness Taylor of Bolton, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence, said "The Army aspires to quartering the majority of its units in fewer, bigger and better garrisons over the coming decades. Development of this approach is continuing with a range of possible options being considered. The location of such garrisons has not yet been decided."

When compared and contrasted with the published plans of Defence Estates, this seems to be a significant watering down. The same plan shows clearly that Royal Marines will be moved from Arbroath in the 2018-2030 timeframe, and the same Peer asked the same minister a question about it. She answered "The strategic requirements for basing all Royal Marines units are routinely reviewed to ensure that the most cost-effective solution which contributes to 3 Commando Brigades operational capability is being followed.

"There are no current plans to move 45 Commando to the south-west; a recent review recommended that the balance of advantage for 45 Commando Royal Marines lies with its current base at Arbroath, which is considered fit for purpose."

So does this mean these are just contingency plans against a rampant Scottish National Party, or is it another cut?

Clearly following through on the Defence Estates plan, Lord Lee asked about projected numbers in Germany - and once more the answer demonstrated the skills of the UK Defence Establishment. They might not be able to supply the long term equipment requirements of the military, but by George when it comes to obfuscation the Civil Servant remains world class. In passing someone noted that there are now more MoD civil servants than during the Second World War. maybe some MP or Lord can see if they can get any facts on this.

.The Minister said : "With the continued agreement of the German Federal Government, the United Kingdom Ministry of Defence (UK MoD) intends to maintain a significant presence in Germany for the foreseeable future. While it is not possible to confirm exactly how many Armed Forces personnel will be based there over the next 22 years, it is anticipated that around 15,000 will remain following the return to the UK: of 4 Mechanised Brigade (which is nearing completion); the Headquarters of the NATO Rapid Reaction Corps in 2010; 1 Signal Brigade and 102 Logistic Brigade (the precise timings for these moves have yet to be determined).

"The estate is made available by the German Federal Government under Article 48 of the Supplementary Agreement to the NATO Status of Forces Agreement. Where estate or

accommodation is no longer required, it will be released to the appropriate German authorities. The estate used by the British Forces in Germany is not owned by the UK MoD and it is therefore not appropriate for me to speculate on the value of the land and buildings which may be surplus to requirements."

Does this mean that somebody has been looking at capital receipts - sell off real estate in UK, get money. Relinquish in Germany, no money.....