

The announcement by the MOD (below) of the formation of a 'cyber reservists' unit has been well trailed in several policy speeches. It is a recognition that the MOD and the military do not possess sufficient skills in the depth needed to cope with the very real cyber threat which the UK government has identified, writes Nick Watts.

The nature of the cyber threat to Britain's economic well-being has been identified as posing a threat to an economy which is largely service based and which relies to a large extent on high tech design, research and financial services. This poses a risk of both e-crime and the theft of high value Intellectual Property from major UK manufacturers.

The military threat is similar in that the MOD's networks are constantly being probed by unfriendly actors to exploit weaknesses. Military campaigns also rely to a large extent on ITC systems to enable both communications and mission planning, particularly where precision guided munitions and Remotely Piloted Aerial Systems (RPAS) are central to a successful outcome.

This unit the Joint Cyber Unit (Reserve) will be able, once it is fully recruited, to monitor MOD systems and campaign planning systems when the UK deploys forces. It has also been announced that this unit will give the UK the capability take the offensive in cyber space. This it is hoped will act as a deterrent, but while cyber-attacks remain largely un-attributable it remains to be seen whether this development will have the desired effect.

The UK military is moving away from the "old style" of waging war: fewer tanks and artillery pieces. This developments points towards the future. There is no guarantee that training and equipping for cyber war is going to be any cheaper than for conventional war.

The Defence Secretary has announced that Britain will build a dedicated capability to counter-attack in cyber-space and, if necessary, to strike in cyber space as part of our full-spectrum military capability.

As part of this new domain of operations the MoD is set to recruit hundreds of Cyber Reservists as computer experts to help defend the UK's national security, working at the cutting edge of the nation's cyber defences.

The Defence Secretary confirmed the creation of a new Joint Cyber Reserve Unit which will see Reservists working alongside Regular forces to protect critical computer networks and safeguard vital data.

The Defence Secretary Philip Hammond said:

"In response to the growing cyber threat, we are developing a full-spectrum military cyber capability, including a strike capability, to enhance the UK's range of military capabilities. Increasingly, our defence budget is being invested in high-end capabilities such as cyber and intelligence and surveillance assets to ensure we can keep the country safe. The cyber reserves will be an essential part of ensuring we defend our national security in cyber space. This is an exciting opportunity for internet experts in industry to put their skills to good use for the nation, protecting our vital computer systems and capabilities."

The creation of the Joint Cyber Reserve will represent a significant increase in the number of Reservists employed in cyber and Information Assurance, and members of the Joint Cyber Reserve will provide support to the Joint Cyber Unit (Corsham), the Joint Cyber Unit (Cheltenham) and other Information Assurance units across Defence.

Recruiting for the Joint Cyber Reserve will commence in October and target three sectors: Regular personnel leaving the Armed Forces; current and former Reservists with the necessary skills; and individuals with no previous military experience, but with the technical knowledge, skills, experience and aptitude to work in this highly-specialised area.

All personnel applying to join will be subject to a security clearance process.

The MoD has also published these notes to editor

* The Joint Forces Cyber Group was stood up in May 13 to deliver Defence's cyber capability and will include the Joint Cyber Unit (Reserve) as its Reserve component.

* The Joint Cyber Unit (Reserve) will provide support to the Joint Cyber Unit (Corsham), the Joint Cyber Unit (Cheltenham), and tri-service Information Assurance units.

* Recruiting for the Joint Cyber Unit (Reserve) will commence in October 2013.

* The creation of a Joint Cyber Unit (Reserve) will allow

Defence to draw on individuals' talent, skills and expertise gained from their civilian experience to meet these threats.

* Cyber Reservists will have knowledge of systems and niche technologies that are invaluable to Defence.

* In times of rising tension, or national emergencies, Reservists can help MOD deliver a higher level of operational output.

* A "whole force" approach to cyber has been developed to make best use of the skills of Civil Servants, Regular and Reserve Forces along with industry. Cyber Reserves are a valuable and valued part of this transformative cyber effort.

* The Joint Cyber Unit (Reserve) will offer individuals the opportunity to be part of the proud history and ethos of either, the Royal Navy, the British Army or the Royal Air Force.

* In recognition of the highly specialist nature of this work, the Joint Cyber Reserve will run a pilot scheme to evaluate innovative and

inclusive approaches to recruiting, training, employment and retention of Reservists employed in cyber-related posts.

* The terms and conditions of service employed in the pilot will recognise the unique attributes of individuals who might otherwise not be attracted to, or able to serve in the Reserve Forces. Citizenship and residency requirements will apply and an individual must be aged 18 or over; be able to commit to the minimum annual training; and be willing to undergo and must pass a security clearance process.

* As with all Reserves, Cyber Reservists will also have the opportunity to learn new specialist skills, undertake career-enhancing training, gain new and transferable qualifications, and develop their existing skills and experience in a different and challenging environment.

* The MoD will work closely with employers as an essential component in the development and future success of the Joint Cyber Unit (Reserve).