

By Leon Grasmann

## **Introduction**

When we think about defence and security, we must clearly consider the world we live in. We must reflect upon the threats that face us, and the possible solutions that exist to these threats. Viewing defence only in terms of manpower, technology, and munitions limits change to the small and incremental. When governments think about security in the UK these days, it seldom involves thinking about defending the UK or the EU from external military threat, for no such credible threat actually exists. Since the 1950's, the UK has largely used its military forces in support of US, NATO and UN missions, most recently in Iraq and Afghanistan. Whether this should be considered a desirable use of UK forces or not lies outside the scope of this essay. But within the scope of this essay lies the necessity to relate defence capability to defence needs.

UK defence expenditure is the third highest in the world (after the USA and China) and the highest, as a percent of GDP, in the EU. This gives the UK an unusually good ability to project force outside its borders. However, this force projection brings little, if any, benefit to security within the UK. One could even argue that recent UK force projections in Iraq and Afghanistan have made UK citizens less secure, rather than more, for these military adventures have made the UK a target of both domestic and foreign terrorists.

This essay argues that both the UK's and the EU's security and defence posture is severely compromised by energy dependence. We face a vicious cycle: money poured into the volatile Middle East props up regimes that are at best corrupt and oppressive, and at worst provide support to various proxies fighting Western troops. Because of this, governments pour more money into defence to fight a demon that is at least partially their own creation. Let me state it simply: money spent on oil finances military action against the UK and other troops around the world.

## **The Solution**

As little in the way of military threat is on the horizon, the solution this essay proposes is: cut the military budget and deepen security and defence integration with the EU in order to achieve greater energy independence.

The UK must work towards carbon reduction with the goal of completely eliminating any dependence on dangerous, corrupt regimes. This should be facilitated and financed by the trimming of military excess and security and defence integration within the EU.

Besides cutting the budget of an excessively bloated task force and making Britain safer within

an effective allied organisation, this policy will heighten environmental sustainability. A further consequence would be stemming the flow of money to the Middle East and therefore the jihadists and others that seek to impose an Islamic agenda by violence. Doing so would also help dry up the source of funding for extremist education in Madrassas, and elsewhere, that is fuelling another generation of militant Islamists, that future generations would have to confront.

## **Where to Cut**

It is an axiom of military history that generals are always well prepared to fight the last war. Much of the UK's arsenal is well suited to repelling Warsaw Pact armies that no longer exist. The UK stands well-equipped to help defend Western Europe against a communist foe. However, the Communist economy and military machine have long since atrophied to the point of being a threat only to their equally impoverished neighbours. To be precise, Russia no longer represents a military threat to Western Europe and the UK. Nevertheless, large parts of the UK defence budget are spent on prestige, high-tech warfare, which is unsuited to the present low intensity conflicts against non-state actors that the UK is engaged in.

Since the beginning of the industrial age, with its improved communications and technology, management structures in private industry and government have been getting flatter. Entire layers of middle managers were stripped away from large organisations. Perhaps the greatest exception to this streamlining is the military, where multiple redundant managerial layers were allowed to thrive and expand, even as their responsibilities diminished.

The Russian military is the clearest example of this with a 30 or even greater percent of their armed forces classified as officers. The corresponding figure for the UK is 14 percent. At first sight, this UK figure may seem, although not optimal, at least not unreasonable. However, there are another two (at least) management layers beneath that: sergeant and corporal, or their equivalent. To call the military top heavy is a profound understatement. To quote but one example, the Telegraph reported in 2008 that the Navy had 41 admirals, and just 40 ships. This sort of mismatch between hierarchy and capability is common in modern defence forces. There is also a well-trodden path between retirement from senior military posts and jobs in the armaments industry, creating an unhealthy dependence on weapons manufacturers to supplement army pensions for the upper ranks.

## **How to Cut**

When contemplating how to shrink the defence force, we must bear in mind what is politically possible. Turnover in the armed forces is high, natural attrition would be the most politically palatable way of reducing personnel. As to which positions actually get cut - there have been numerous inquiries, submissions, joint statements, bold speeches, audits and so on with little to show for their work except an even more bloated military. Instead of the 'top down' approach followed to date, a bottom up is long overdue. The following is a broad outline of how the UK could implement defence cuts that would be politically expedient and would not compromise security:

1. Every rank above sergeant should provide submissions as to what positions should be

abolished and what equipment should be retired. This can include recommendations to retire oneself.

2. These recommendations should be anonymously peer reviewed (e.g. If a major suggests a certain rank, position or section should be abolished, or armament retired, a committee of majors should agree.)

3. Each position successfully abolished, or armament retired, will result in the person who recommended it receiving a percentage of the costs saved after a pre-determined period.

4. This same process can occur amongst the proliferating civilians who form part of the defence work force.

There would need to be checks and balances in such a system to prevent score settling and unholy alliances. This would ensure that cuts are congruent with policy objectives.

In broad terms, the approach has much in its favour. History has shown that unless those involved in cuts have some incentive to cooperate, natural organisation inertia and deliberate foot-dragging takes over, resisting anything other than cosmetic or accounting changes. The above plan is one way of breaking through this.

This paper does not intend to pick this or that armaments system to mothball, or this or that level of management to retire. Clearly, those with the most training and experience know better where the axe should fall. Their voice should be sought. All other 'reforms' of the armed forces have failed, for they do not use the knowledge of all defence force members. To put it the vernacular: the soldiers, sailors and aviators of all ranks know where the bodies are buried, and no high level commission is going to uncover them without their help.

Currently, the incentive in all higher ranks is for expansion and top-heavy bloat that limits, rather than improves, military responsiveness. This essay does not criticise those officers in higher ranks - they are naturally following a pattern of incentives that the armed forces and governments past, perhaps unwittingly, have created. This process also takes the task of taking cuts away from the political sphere; thus it requires less political courage to implement them.

Legislation must be passed to further loosen the link between unnecessary expenditure and reward for officers. All UK military personnel should be banned for life from gaining any pecuniary benefit from arms makers or suppliers, or their subsidiaries. When high rankings officers recommend a weapons system, or piece of technology, and then gain a well paid position a few years later with that same arms maker, or a subsidiary, it is clearly thinly veiled corruption. This may mean increasing military pensions, but nevertheless officers would be given an incentive to recommend the most effective, rather than the most expensive and complex systems.

## **Why integrate**

In order to render national military budget cuts even more feasible, deeper integration with

continental Europe in matters security and defence will be helpful. Besides leading to greater ties and therefore support to UK's security and defence objectives, stronger cooperation would also encourage much needed specialisation and economies of scale – both of which would lead to considerable savings. Cost sharing is a further reason for an at least partial supranational security and defence policy. As Lord Garden correctly points out, "the more expensive enabling capabilities such as air to air refuelling, air transport, space based navigation, reconnaissance and communication systems, would be more cost effectively as EU or US assets on a cost share basis"<sup>1</sup>. With the 'European Security and Defence Policy', the necessary framework to achieve such ends has already been established.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, future UK defence needs are best met by the development of renewable energy sources, facilitated and financed by a peer-based clearing out of redundant layers of management and superfluous military hardware, as well as European security and defence integration. Continual rounds of arms cuts by politicians or 'task forces' will not bring forth meaningful long-term change. Full-scale systemic change, with the appropriate incentives, will make UK defence forces leaner and more responsive. Cooperation with the EU will increase UK's security and allow for specialisation, economies of scale, asset sharing and therefore significant cost savings. Spending the savings gained on energy independence will make Britain safer. It will give the UK more latitude to act in accordance with its own interests and values, rather than paying due deference to sometimes odious regimes for the sake of access to hydrocarbons.

## **About the author:**

Leon Grasmann is a postgraduate student reading International Relations at the University of Warwick. With an undergraduate background International Business, he is particularly interested in the impact of public policy on the market as well as how market lessons can be applied to security and defence measures. Leon is a strong proponent of deepened European integration in the areas of energy independence, security and defence. Against this background, his current research focuses on how carbon dependency fuels European security and defence needs and policy.

## **Reference:**

1 Garden, Timothy (2007), Rethinking Defence Policy. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.tgarden.demon.co.uk/writings/articles/2007/070424raes.html> on 29/07/2010