

By Great North News Services staff reporters. Additional material by Nick Watts.

Fourteen years ago, the late lamented Tony Blair (Who he? Ed) told the UK Defence Forum to "think the unthinkable". Over the years we've done a bit of that – who can forget our papers on Vanguard submarines; Project Horizon; and scrap the RAF. (See the archives at [www.ukdf.org.uk](http://www.ukdf.org.uk) if you do.) But as everyone is having their two penn'orth, we thought we'd parade a few of our ideas which are guaranteed to raise a few hackles. If we're wrong, use the comment facility to tell us why!

1. Do away with a deterrent based on sea-launched ICBMs. Instead, the next generation should be more limited but more widely dispersed, in the form of nuclear tipped cruise missiles (Tomahawk or Sea Shadow – that's a longer range variant of SCALP Navale developed in conjunction with the French, and thus incidentally ITAR free) Order 3 more Astutes instead of a new class of boomers.

The argument is that this is higher risk. True. Response times might have to be days, to allow time for redeployment, rather than instant Armageddon. Not every square inch of the planet would be in reach. But since 80% of the world's population is within 200 miles of the littoral, such a system couldn't guarantee the incineration of all human life – just most of it. And some of the missiles might be shot down. So maybe as few as half reach their intended targets....that's still a mighty deterrent, with plenty of uncertainty thrown in which always used to be at the heart of MAD.

2. Merge the Royal Marines and the Parachute Regiment to form an elite all-environments light infantry. They would have to have a new name because of all those artificial historical hang-ups (Spearheads anyone?) We'd lose a lot less good men in training but not having them jump out of aircraft, but the pool of recruits for Special Forces would remain.

3. The Queen is the Head of State in 16 countries as well as Head of the Commonwealth. So some of her other realms should be invited to take their turn "guarding" her at Buckingham Place. For example, now India and Pakistan are toning down their "warlike" border closure displays, they'd delight the tourists at the top of The Mall.

4. Grey hulls in the water are the key to the Royal Navy. Their ever declining number of ships can't be in two or more places at once. And does Johnny Al-Qaida know the difference between the various ensigns? Integrate the Royal Fleet Auxiliary into the Royal Navy, get some war-like equipment into their often capacious holds, give future senior officers their "big ship" to command. Get them out on patrol in the world's maritime choke points – we are a nation almost entirely dependant on sea trade, and piracy off east Africa is arguably a bigger threat to our national interest than JAQ.

5. Being the best isn't affordable. We'd all like Rollers but settle for cars that Top Gear would

effect to despise. So our Armed Forces should expect that they'll get 80% of the capability – for 50% of the price. And if there really is a requirement for bells and whistles, that's what refits and SLEPs are for.

6. Just say NO, Mr 4 star. Politicians are always going to ask for more than they have a right to expect of you. "Can do" and "Yes Sir/Madam" may be admirable but are foolhardy if we don't give you the kit. Not enough choppers in Helmand? Then tell us you can sustain 5,000 troops not allow creep over 10,000, however temporary it's supposed to be.

7. Order a third carrier – and sell the first one to India. Get benefits of scale, learning curves etc, as well as doing something about the catastrophic impact on the skilled shipbuilding workforce down the line.

8. With the delay, marinise Eurofighter Typhoon. Look at the U K Defence Forum paper a couple of years back on power-to-weight ratios, bring-back weights and so on. Why exactly do we need a first day of the war stealth capability? Who are we ever going to fight alone which would require this? Typhoon already has a vestigial tail hook. Visibility on approach Automated landing isn't that advance a technology. What's good for Airbus is good for Joint Force Typhoon. Sure you'd need a beefed-up undercart, but bung BAE Systems a couple of bill and they'll come up with something that will save £5 billion plus against F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. With British jobs. And no ITAR. And full operational sovereignty. And a single class, with all that logistics and support tail. And so on. Including export potential to exploit under point 7.

9. Banging bureaucrats is always good fun. But consider this:

- There are 320 military one star officers (leaving out the civil service equivalent). Many of them aren't doing proper soldiering/sailing/airpersonning. What would be the impact on doing what the Forces are there for by reducing this to say just 81; 27 for each service.
- The capitation rate for a 4 star equivalent is £250,000 p.a. OUCH.
- There are 7,500 staff officers and 80,000 civil servants in defence.
- Of the 20,000 staff in DE&S, some 1,500 are on gardening leave awaiting their next appointment. The MoD isn't in the business of growing flowers or fruit and veg.

10. Britain's strategic aspirations are limited by the size of our national wallet. If we don't get the balance right we will have the deployable combat power of the Netherlands (much as we love them...) and we will be paying £34 bn for the privilege. Currently the UK is generating a one star HQ equivalent on operations in Afghanistan. About 10,000 people, with all the loggies and comms people added in. National HQ elements don't add to combat power....

11. MOD needs to develop a corporate memory and a strategic culture. A vital part of Smart Acquisition was to keep people in post for more than a single tour, even promoting in post. Whatever happened to that ambition? Delivering a new class of ship, plane or AFV should be seen as an equally valid route to the highest echelons as commanding a bunch of them when

they're fielded. The service chiefs should be sent away from Main Building to manage their services and prepare them for deployment or training, not brief against each other.

12. In short, like any other organisation under stress :

- Focus on your core business
- Slaughter the sacred cows
- Right size the management and the organisation fast
- Invest in success, starve failure
- Think every which way around the box
- And if you do it right, fast enough, you'll live to fight another day