

Defence Secretary Philip Hammond outlined his vision for Defence in a speech to the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) Annual Defence Industry Dinner which was totally overwhelmed by the later vote in the House of Commons on an EU referendum. Here's the gist of what he said.

Mr Hammond began by paying tribute to the role of the British Armed Forces and the 'magnificent job' they did helping with the liberation of Libya.

He added that the operation has shown the utility of high-tech platforms such as Typhoon, and high-precision weaponry such as Brimstone. (This was echoed by evidence given by the Minister for the Armed Forces to the Defence Select Committee yesterday):

"I know I will be working with the bravest, most selfless and professional people the country has to offer - the men and women of our Armed Forces," he said.

"And they are supported by some of the most dedicated people in the public service, the most highly skilled workforces in British industry and some of the most committed people in the charitable sector."

He added that his first engagement as Defence Secretary at Royal Wooten Bassett reinforced just how important the Armed Forces are to the public and just how important the support of the public is to the Armed Forces.

On the wider defence environment the Defence Secretary said that this is a difficult time for the country, and for Defence in particular:

"We are dealing with the toughest economic climate in a generation and the biggest budget deficit in our peacetime history. Against that backdrop, in Defence, we have also to deal with the legacy of an unaffordable equipment programme and a decade of operations at a continuously high tempo.

"We do so at a time when the threats to our national security and our national interests are evolving fast - and by no means diminishing. And at a time when our Armed Forces, including a substantial number of reservists, remain engaged in a dangerous and enduring mission in Afghanistan."

Mr Hammond described the mission in Afghanistan as a vital operation to protect our national security and said he would make it a priority to get out to theatre to visit the troops as soon as possible.

He said that the first focus of Defence must be the delivery of success on operations:

"The projection of military power is, after all, the *raison d'être* of the Armed Forces and the MOD; everything else is a supporting role."

The Defence Secretary said that it was his firm belief that when the Government asks the men and women of the Armed Forces to put themselves in danger in pursuit of national security, the Government owes it to them to make sure they are properly supported and have the best tools we can give them to do the job:

"In Defence, we now have a clear programme to deliver on this pledge," he said.

"The Armed Forces that will emerge from the implementation of the Strategic Defence and Security Review will be formidable, flexible and adaptable, structured to defend the country and project power abroad, equipped with some of the best and most advanced technology in the world.

"This is not a vision of retrenchment, it is an ambitious programme of renewal after a decade of continuous operations - a blueprint for a sustainable future as one of the world's most capable fighting forces."

Speaking about the anniversary of the publication of the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), Mr Hammond acknowledged that it had been a year of difficult decisions, but outlined what his approach to competing demands would be:

"I am determined that we neither compromise current operations nor constrain future defence capability, that we do not remove critical skills and capabilities that are irrecoverable, and that we retain the ability to scale up in the future if our national security demands it," he said.

"I intend to be a strong and passionate advocate for our Armed Forces and the Ministry of Defence both within government and with the public. I will advance the interests of Defence and national security at every opportunity."

However, Mr Hammond said that first class Armed Forces depended on a first class economy and there is no future for a big military supported by a small economy:

"History is littered with examples showing that to be a fast track way to a collapse in global influence and military capability," he said.

He said that Future Force 2020, the reshaping of the Armed Forces, must be built on firm foundations with a force structure that is fit for the challenges of future warfare and the real-world risks we are likely to face.

Adding that it must be a defence programme that is affordable now and sustainable into the future:

"Unpicking the SDSR piece by piece is simply not an option. The transformation programme is essential to balance our books and modernise our organisation.

"I am clear that this is the only way to ensure success on operations and the continued ability to project military power."

Mr Hammond concluded by reaffirming his belief that the men and women of the Armed Forces are the greatest asset Defence has and that, during his tenure in office, the commitment to rebuild the Armed Forces Covenant will continue:

"This will mean all of us working together - Government at all levels working together with charities and the private sector - to look after our serving personnel and their families, and our veterans."

He said that there remains a big challenge ahead but the Armed Forces deserve no less than success.