By Admiral Sir Mark Stanhope, First Sea Lord

We in Defence are stretched, certainly, but I think we are also delivering across all of our business. The Navy's immediate, unquestionable focus remains its long-standing commitment to supporting the Joint Campaign in Afghanistan. From last October to April this year, around 3,000 members of the Naval Service provided over 30% of the UK forces deployed to Helmand, including not only the Royal Marines of 3 Commando Brigade and the Harrier jets of the Naval Strike Wing, but also Naval Air Squadron helicopters and significant numbers of logistic, engineering, medical and HQ staff. I pause to recognise the bravery of all those who have served and are serving in that Campaign. Indeed, as I speak, one of my sailors, Medical Assistant First Class Kate Nesbitt, is at Buckingham Palace to receive the Military Cross in recognition of her outstanding courage on the field of battle. I also pay tribute to those killed or injured in that fight, their selfless sacrifice and the courage of their families. The Navy's commitment to Afghanistan endures today with hundreds of individual sailors and marines in theatre supporting 11 Brigade. The future deployment of 40 Commando Royal Marines in 2010 as part of Operation HERRICK and of the remainder of 3 Commando Brigade planned during 2011 underscores the Navy's commitment to and engagement in this Campaign. Meanwhile, those elements of the Navy not in Afghanistan continue to undertake a vast range of other military tasks, providing the security needed to cover the UK's back while Defence focuses on Afghanistan. Naval ships, submarines, aircraft and personnel are currently deployed worldwide conducting national and multi-national operations which support the UK, promote its values and protect its interests and economic prosperity.

In the last 12 months alone, the range of tasks has been huge. Sailors and marines have been instrumental in intercepting major narcotic shipments in the Caribbean, off West Africa and in the Indian Ocean. Maritime security operations in the Mediterranean, the Arabian Sea and off the Horn of Africa continue to intercept illegal activity and reassure legitimate users of the high seas, enabling global trade to continue unhindered by pirates, traffickers and other criminals. Importantly, that activity also protects the sea lanes along which logistic support to the fight in Afghanistan is supplied, and along which this island nation's food, energy and goods are imported and exported. Naval units are permanently deployed in the South Atlantic in support of the Government's responsibilities to protect the Falkland Islands and our interests in Antarctica.

Capacity building in the Gulf, particularly in Iraq, continues - as does intelligence support to operations and hydrographic activity across 3 oceans. At the same time, Royal Navy ships and aircraft continue to safeguard the integrity of UK Territorial Waters and Airspace, to provide counter terrorism support to the Home Office, to protect shipping, ports and offshore energy platforms, undertake inspection and enforcement action on behalf of the Marine and Fisheries Agency and conduct Search and Rescue operations around our coast. We are very busy on the Queen's business. Last, but far from least, the Royal Navy has for the last 40 years also been responsible for delivering the Nation's Nuclear Deterrent, arguably the ultimate guarantor of our country's security and sovereignty. While the UK remains nationally committed to retaining a Continuous At Sea Deterrent, the Royal Navy will continue to deliver it, 24/7, 365 days every year. Given that context, and the imminent Defence Review, my responsibility as a Defence

Board member is to argue the case that the MoD's current prioritisation on the fight in Afghanistan should not lead to UK Armed Forces structured predominantly for a relatively narrow spectrum of land-locked, counter-insurgency operations and which lack the ability to conduct high-end war-fighting or indeed any of the vast array of operations in which the country's Armed Forces may be engaged in the future. Yet some have tried to argue that this is exactly the route we should be taking in Defence – that all future conflict will involve lengthy stabilisation operations, measured in years, with an emphasis on land forces fighting low-tech enemy insurgents. I think that view ignores two things: firstly, the clear potential for future global inter-state conflict and secondly, the declining appetite politically, and within society, for interventionism. While the focus on Afghanistan, and the priority that has been placed on achieving a successful outcome is unquestionable, we have to appreciate that international frictions do persist elsewhere and the possibility of state-on-state conflict within the next 20 years (either directly involving the UK or, more likely, indirectly affecting our vital national interests) cannot, and must not, be ruled out.

This debate, as we all know, is taking place at a time of substantial resource challenges, both in the UK and elsewhere. Although we enjoy a very high level of public support for most of what we do, the financial realities are such that the UK is considering adjustments in Defence whilst at the same time the ability of our allies to share the burden of defending our common values may also reduce.

That creates an obvious tension, and any Defence strategy, whatever assumptions underpin it, must reconcile the competing demands of policy and resource. "Common values" are another important point of context. If we are to ensure that the UK's Armed Forces are used as effectively as possible to meet the security and defence challenges of today and tomorrow, we need to focus on values. We need a common understanding, across Government and with our coalition partners and allies of what the UK stands for and how the country's Armed Forces can and will be used to promote those values while also protecting our interests. An articulation of our national values can find its expression in foreign and security policy ambitions. These should in turn drive the strategy which shapes the Armed Forces' contribution to the defence and security of the Nation, at an affordable scale, in the most cost-effective and agile manner. This suggests that economic policy should take its place alongside foreign and security policy as a driver of the UK's strategy for Defence. I'm optimistic that the Defence Review promised by both the Government and the Opposition, provided it can remain pitched at the strategic level, should help us to get there - and I am committed to working with my fellow Service Chiefs and the Government to ensure that we do. Let me be absolutely clear about one thing. Success in Afghanistan – however that success comes to be defined as the Campaign progresses - is vital to our national credibility and, hence, our national security. The Secretary of State in September espoused a policy of Afghanistan First, in which he made clear that it should be the Main Effort for Defence; this is a welcome development which builds on the Army's achievement, in last year getting operations there onto a true Campaign footing for the first time.

I fully support this new emphasis on Afghanistan, not least because, as I have explained, very many of my sailors and marines are fully engaged in the fight there, alongside Air Force and Army comrades. Importantly, and in contrast to the tone of resigned exasperation that seems to characterise so much press coverage of the Campaign, when I speak with those from all 3

Services who have returned from or who are still serving in Afghanistan, I am struck by their commitment to the mission, their unshakeable belief in what they are doing and the progress they are making. However, as I have stated, Afghanistan is not the only game in town, either now or in the future. As a member of the Defence Board, I am duty-bound to take a longer-term, strategic view of the challenges to the security and Defence of our Nation.

I am obliged to think Beyond Afghanistan. Beyond Afghanistan in terms of looking today at security challenges emanating from elsewhere in the world. And Beyond Afghanistan in terms of looking at the sort of threats and challenges we may be facing long after the fighting in Afghanistan has been consigned to history. We have to guard against Afghanistan becoming the template for a future UK Defence structure that can do nothing but more Afghanistans. The range of threats to UK interests is greater than that. I say that because we live in an unpredictable world characterised by a rapid, often confounding, rate of change. This inevitably has an impact on the UK. Britain is an island nation, dependent on the free movement of maritime trade and highly reliant on the stability and security of the globalised world. The UK has worldwide interests and responsibilities; it benefits from being a hub for global activity and is an influential member of the UN Security Council Permanent 5, the G20, NATO and the EU. The UK is also responsible for the security of 14 overseas territories and its population is increasingly multi-ethnic, with a large number of UK nationals living abroad. Our national prosperity and freedoms are increasingly vulnerable to events across the globe and therefore UK domestic security, and the protection of our vital national interests, cannot be separated from the security and stability of the international system upon which we rely. The UK's National Security Strategy, updated in July, reminds us that the UK's prosperity and national wealth are founded upon, and continue to be enhanced by, our outward-facing participation in the global trading system. When it comes to thinking about and planning for the security challenges of tomorrow – from a strategic perspective – you might agree with an analysis that suggests that while an existential threat to the UK is pretty unlikely, this country's involvement in conflict somewhere on the planet is a distinct possibility. The proliferation of small wars as state and non-state actors jostle for their place in the new order of things, and the reliance of our economy on investment and trade across the international community, make this a reasonable assumption. Governments not directly involved in these smaller conflicts will – as ever – have to decide to what extent their national interests are engaged by them and decide on the extent they wish to respond militarily. That in turn depends on the military capability at their disposal. As always, the military needs to be configured to give maximum political freedom of choice to Government. Whether the military is used in a given situation is a matter for Government. How the military is used is also a matter for Government, taking advice from the Chiefs – but how the military is configured is very much the business of the Chiefs. When you think about it, what the Government really wants from Defence is the efficient delivery of one of the levers of national power – military force – in a way that maximises political freedom of choice.

I think that has always been the case, but the need to preserve political choice has been thrown into sharper relief by the experience of recent campaigns. In terms of maximising choice, I am a firm believer that prevention of conflict is always better than cure. A proactive policy of conflict prevention, using all the levers of national power but placing conventional military capabilities at its heart, should be central to our national efforts to defend the international system and the UK's place within it. This is a strategy that offers the Government choices in deciding how best

to prevent conflict, while retaining the option of resort to combat force in the event that this proves necessary. An effective conflict prevention strategy calls for a range of activities, including diplomatic and economic action, which can simultaneously persuade, dissuade and if necessary deter a potential aggressor, in order to prevent the escalation of situations into conflict. Those activities do, however, ultimately depend on military capabilities to enable them or back them up. For us in the military, conflict prevention strategies encompass non-kinetic activities such as capacity building, wider regional engagement, reassurance, the ability to conduct Non Combatant Evacuation Operations as we did in the Lebanon in 2006, the provision of humanitarian relief, and military-to-military cooperation and training. All of these military activities enable security threats to be tackled early and facilitate the promotion and protection of UK national interests globally.

Importantly, it is not solely about influencing potential aggressors. It's also about reassuring friends and developing alliances. This is vital for effective coalition security operations because although forces can surge when necessary to respond to crises, trust and co-operation with allies cannot be surged. It is particularly in this regard that the UK's Armed Forces can be the standard-bearers for this nation and its values.
However, the ability to influence is also dependent on maintaining a capable and credible military which can operate in support of a wider Government strategy. If non-kinetic activity to contain or deter others is to be effective, it must be underpinned by the existence and proven success of credible, conventional military forces, capable of wielding a big stick and a willingness, if necessary, for Government to compel others to act in a desired manner.

It is precisely because the effective prevention of conflict in the future depends upon the continued credibility of our armed forces that the success of UK Armed Forces in the Afghanistan campaign is so important.
And what contribution can you expect from Maritime Forces? Appropriately structured, trained and resourced maritime forces afford the Government a highly cost-effective, military means by which political and diplomatic influence can be leveraged to prevent conflict.

When necessary, they can also apply decisive combat force in support of national objectives. The ships and submarines that guarantee the freedom of the seas also exploit those freedoms for strategic and operational effect, free from the constraints of host nation support or the need for access, basing and over-flight permissions from other countries.

Warships are incredibly versatile and can deploy for many months with a small logistic foot-print and very controllable political overheads. A single ship can do everything from diplomatic engagement, the delivery of humanitarian aid, capacity-building by training other forces, containment and coercion through embargo operations and the delivery of decisive combat power onto the land. A balanced maritime force can deliver amphibious forces, Carrier Strike, Naval Gun Fire and submarine-launched Tomahawk cruise missiles. That last bit – the ability to strike with precision – really matters. The case for conflict prevention activity is strong, but there can be no guarantees that it will be successful in every case.

As I said a moment ago, in the event that prevention activity fails, military forces with credible war-fighting capabilities will be required to coerce or confront a potential aggressor in order to

limit or contain the conflict. In extremis, they may be called upon to intervene militarily, using their war-fighting capabilities to defeat the aggressor. Where force has to be used, it must be used precisely.

Maritime Forces can do all of this, and operate on land – as they are in Afghanistan – at sea and in the air. So, while Afghanistan is rightly the Main Effort, it should not be regarded as the Only Effort. The range of threats to UK interests is greater than that. In these challenging times, we will need to retain armed forces that are versatile and adaptable, flexible and resilient across the full spectrum of operations, from conflict prevention to high-end war-fighting and back again, at range, from the UK.

Forces that possess these attributes will best equip Defence for its vital role in supporting Government in the future. Such forces can offer real policy choice to the Government in deciding whether and how to engage with others, how to respond to developing threats and crises while minimising entanglement and how best to protect the UK's national interests and promote its values in the wider world, Beyond Afghanistan.

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