

# The Health of the Covenant

An interim paper from the Leader of the  
Opposition's Military Covenant Commission

They're doing their duty.  
Are we doing ours?

MILITARY  
COVENANT  
COMMISSION



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# Summary

## First Thoughts

From its initial survey, evidence-gathering sessions and responses received from consultees, the Commission is able to state the following;

**The Covenant.** The concept of the Military Covenant is written into Army doctrine exclusively, but it is commonly accepted as being applicable across the Services.

**The Armed Forces and Society.** There has been a lot to celebrate in the attitude of society towards the Armed Forces in recent years, yet much to deplore as well. The estrangement of society and the Armed Forces owes a great deal to the fact that fewer citizens have first hand experience of service or of friends and family that have served.

**Awareness.** It is vital that children have a proper understanding of the role of the military and its relationship with the State. This can be fostered by welcoming sailors, soldiers, and airmen into schools for visits. We deplore the attitude of the National Union of Teachers towards our Armed Forces.

**Government and the Military.** There has been a breakdown in respect between the Government and the Armed Forces. For many, the loss of the dedicated role of Defence Secretary at a time when military activity is greater than at any time since the Second World War is symbolic of the low esteem in which the Government holds the Armed Forces.

**Overstretch and Family Life.** This lies at the heart of much of what we have found and has a big impact on service family life. Operationally it particularly affects the infantry and 'pinch point' trades. Under-manning would be much worse but for increasing reliance on non-UK nationals and we pay tribute to their professionalism.

**Tour Intervals.** Service personnel frequently experience shorter intervals between tours than recommended by the Ministry of Defence's harmony guidelines.

**Retention.** This affects the infantry, middle ranking officers and 'pinch-point' trades particularly. Exit rates for officers have increased in each of the last five years.<sup>1</sup> Terms and conditions remain unfavourable with the country's top soldier pointing out that, 'more and more single income soldiers are now close to the UK Govt definition of poverty'.<sup>2</sup> The Government's response has been the 'Armed Forces Benefits Calculator' so that personnel can be convinced that they are comparatively well-off.

**General Wellbeing.** We have heard of the inconveniences of service life and the perception that many of these are remediable. For example, the inadequacy of the air bridge between operational theatres and the UK and the consequent loss of leave.

**Reservists.** More people are leaving the Territorial Army and Royal Naval Reserve than joining.<sup>3</sup> The particular concerns of reservist personnel include insufficient time for training and lack of support from employers.

**Equipment.** Inquests and Boards of Inquiry have reported numerous instances where the Government has failed to provide service personnel with adequate basic equipment and kit in a timely fashion.

**Healthcare for Personnel.** Healthcare available to members of the Armed Forces probably compares well with civilian provision overall and in some areas is truly world class – notably the rehabilitation service at Headley Court. We support the Military District Hospital Unit (MDHU) concept as an inevitable consequence of a shrinking patient base, the training needs of professionals and the need for 21<sup>st</sup> century secondary and tertiary care. Whilst we welcome the introduction of a military managed ward at Selly Oak, we are not convinced that enough has been done to allow military patients to be treated whenever clinically desirable with their peers in a service environment. We are also concerned about service-related mental illness.<sup>4</sup> It seems unlikely that the serious downgrading of military psychiatry has improved the focus on mental health issues in the Armed Forces.

**Healthcare for Families.** The Commission heard that service families on relocating often lose their place on an NHS waiting list. The new dental contract means that frequent movers find it difficult to find and keep an NHS dentist. The most recent Chief of the General Staff (CGS) Briefing Team Report states 'there is considerable frustration among all ranks that their families find it difficult to get the appropriate medical and dental care'.<sup>5</sup>

**Healthcare for Veterans.** The Commission found that veterans entitled to priority treatment in the NHS often do not get it. An opinion survey by the Royal British Legion showed that 76 per cent were not aware that they are entitled to priority treatment.<sup>6</sup> NHS professionals also often do not know of the existence of priority treatment for veterans or find it a difficult concept in a service geared towards treatment according to clinical need.<sup>7</sup>

**Children and Education.** Nothing is more important to sailors, soldiers, and airmen than the welfare and education of their children. Yet there is evidence to suggest that the educational

<sup>1</sup> Defence Analytical Services and Advice, TSP5, April 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Chief of the General Staff's Briefing Team Report 2, 2007, p.3.

<sup>3</sup> *Hansard*, 18 February 2008, Col. 110WA.

<sup>4</sup> Roberto J Rona et al, 'Mental health consequences of overstretch in the UK Armed Forces: first phase of a cohort study', *British Medical Journal*, 30 June 2007, table 3.

<sup>5</sup> Chief of the General Staff's Briefing Team Report 2, 2007, p.16.

<sup>6</sup> The Royal British Legion, 'Healthcare for Veterans', *Honour the Covenant Policy Briefing Paper*, May 2008, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*.

achievement of children from military families is less than expected, probably in part at least as a result of the effects of turbulence on individual children and on the schools they attend. Ministers have resisted the suggestion that the collection of data relating to the number of service children from January 2008 should be used to help allocate funding in their favour. We suggest this demonstrates a lack of commitment to the Military Covenant.

**Housing.** 45 per cent of UK based Single Living Accommodation and 64 per cent of SLA overseas is in the bottom grade on a four-point scale.<sup>8</sup> Some accommodation is shameful. In addition, only 30 per cent of soldiers are home owners.<sup>9</sup> Uptake of Long Service Advance of Pay (LSAP) for house purchase which has been frozen in value for many years is disappointingly low. This may, in part, be due to restrictions on rental of property purchased using the LSAP scheme.

**Compensation.** The country owes those wounded physically and mentally in the service of our country a special debt of gratitude that extends beyond medals and ministerial rhetoric. This Government's clumsy and formulaic Armed Forces Compensation Scheme by general agreement is hardly generous and it compares unfavourably with industrial compensation. We are pleased that it is under review, belatedly in our opinion, and look forward to a better deal for our personnel.

**Veterans.** The majority of service leavers do well. However, we heard that those leaving after a relatively short period in the Armed Forces have a greater chance of experiencing difficulty in their working lives and at home. Many find leaving the Armed Forces a brutal and peremptory experience. We believe that insufficient attempts have been made to maintain links that could be of benefit not only to veterans but society, since every person discharged is a potential re-recruit, reservist, cadet leader or ambassador.

**Bereaved Families.** In paying tribute to the hard work of the Oxfordshire and Wiltshire coroners in particular, we note that there is still an inquest backlog of around 90 cases.<sup>10</sup> We are also troubled by the inequity caused by a failure to provide service families with legal representation at inquests whilst the MoD has paid £1 million since 2003 for its own legal counsel at what are meant to be non-adversarial hearings.<sup>11</sup>

**Verdict.** It is the view of the Commission that all the evidence points to a Military Covenant that is under serious and unprecedented strain.

## Our Provisional Recommendations

- The Military Covenant should be clearly established and written into tri-service doctrine as the fundamental pillar of the relationship between military personnel, society and government. It should also offer clear guidance on what the service community can expect as a result of this compact.
- The Covenant will not be repaired without tackling overstretch. Commitments and manpower should be matched through a defence review repeated every four years (the average course of a Parliament).
- The Secretary of State for Defence should be full-time and the minister responsible for veterans and personnel should be at minister of state level.
- Public shows of support for members of the Armed Forces and veterans should be encouraged with corporate and civic sponsorship wherever appropriate but without placing an undue burden on hard-pressed personnel or on already stretched military operations.
- Recently disbanded Schools Presentation Teams should be reinstated and head teachers should be issued with guidance that encourages members of the Armed Forces into schools.
- Combined Cadet Forces should be encouraged in state schools with limited military exposure, and veterans should be encouraged to volunteer as leaders with corporate sponsorship being sought.
- The wearing of uniform in public should be encouraged at the discretion of unit commanders. Personnel in the MoD should lead by example.<sup>12</sup>
- We believe that compensatory leave entitlement should be available to those whose flights home are significantly delayed and leave should be deemed to start on release from the relevant UK airhead or parent unit.
- Positions held by relocating service families on waiting and dental lists should move with them so they do not have to start again. A duty should be placed on NHS Trusts to ensure that this happens.
- There should be a review to determine the potential that the Royal Hospital Haslar site has to provide healthcare-related services to the Armed Forces.

<sup>8</sup> *Hansard*, 20 February 2008, Col.698WA.

<sup>9</sup> National Audit Office, *Leaving the Services*, 27 June 2007, Session 2006-7, HC 618,fig. 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Hansard*, 30 April 2008, Cols. 13-14WS.

<sup>11</sup> *Hansard*, 30 January 2008, Col. 365WA.

<sup>12</sup> We do not consider it appropriate to legislate for a new offence of discrimination against those wearing uniform as suggested in the National Recognition Study.

- The idea of a pupil premium to help school children from disadvantaged backgrounds should be adapted to reflect the needs of service children.
- All service accommodation should be brought up to an acceptable living standard as soon as practical. We also recommend that a special review into the defence estate should be conducted. Receipts from any asset sales arising from the review should be used to facilitate the refurbishment programme.
- We recommend that a review of the LSAP scheme is undertaken to determine how it or an alternative can better promote home ownership, including whether restrictions on renting property bought using LSAP could be removed.
- Compensation for injury sustained on active service should have regard for functional mental and physical impairment rather than a formulaic assessment of individual injuries. We look to the Government's review for an improvement to the current situation.
- The MoD should desist from hiring barristers to defend its position at coroners' inquests.
- The Commission recommends that there should be a comprehensive review of the administrative efficiency and effectiveness of the Ministry of Defence with a view to ensuring that decision making and business processes match best practice in organisations of comparable size and complexity. We anticipate savings.

#### **Work still to do**

The Commission's provisional recommendations will be refined over the summer in advance of the publication of a definitive report. Finally, we would like to pay tribute to our servicemen and women, service families, and veterans. Our thoughts are especially with those who are currently on operations and their loved ones.

# Introduction

## **The Work of the Commission**

On 4 March 2008 David Cameron launched the Military Covenant Commission. The Commission sprang from a widespread concern that the Military Covenant is not being upheld by the nation and from adverse reports on the welfare of service personnel, their families, and veterans at a time when the Armed Forces are heavily committed to operations.

The Commission was tasked with taking an independent look at the key issues that relate to the Military Covenant, to discover the extent to which the Covenant is not being upheld and to make recommendations that a future Conservative Government might adopt.

Since its launch, the Commission has consulted widely and received a large numbers of submissions through e-mail and by post. The Commission has also written to a large number of charities and experts asking for their ideas. We have received, and continue to seek, briefings from relevant charities and organisations. The Commission is grateful to everyone that has so far made a submission.

## **Objectives of the Interim Paper**

The interim report has three objectives:

- To outline the work the Commission has done so far and to establish themes to be developed further for the definitive report.
- To provide a summary of the key issues raised since the Commission was launched and to give the Commissioners an opportunity to present their views on them.
- To give the results of the Commission's military covenant health check.

This report is designed to provide an indication of the work we have undertaken, and of the key issues that we believe need addressing most urgently. **This interim paper is therefore not exhaustive.**

## **Key Principles**

**A Tripartite Covenant.** The Military Covenant is an agreement between three groups – the government, society, and the Armed Forces.

**Lessons from Abroad.** We intend to draw inspiration from other countries. However, our allies have their own traditions and customs and our recommendations must be consistent, with the British way of doing things.

# Part 1: The Importance of the Military Covenant

## History

The idea that the nation has an obligation to care for the Armed Forces is by no means a new one. During the reign of Elizabeth I, legislation was passed requiring each parish to contribute towards the care of sick and wounded soldiers and mariners. Growing public awareness and recognition of the conditions in which army personnel were serving came with the growth of the printed media. The Crimean War marked a turning point in public awareness of the realities of life on operations. Today 24-hour embedded media coverage, though sanitised, provide an accurate window onto conditions in theatre.

## The Current Military Covenant

The current Military Covenant agreement is written in Army doctrine. It reads:

*'Soldiers will be called upon to make personal sacrifices – including the ultimate sacrifice – in the service of the Nation. In putting the needs of the nation and the Army before their own, they forgo some of the rights enjoyed by those outside the Armed Forces. In return, British soldiers must always be able to expect fair treatment, to be valued and respected as individuals, and that they (and their families) will be sustained and rewarded by commensurate terms and conditions of service. In the same way, the unique nature of military land operations means that the Army differs from all other institutions, and must be sustained and provided for accordingly by the nation. This mutual obligation forms the Military Covenant between the nation, the Army and each individual soldier; an unbreakable common bond of identity, loyalty and responsibility which has sustained the Army and its soldiers throughout its history. It has perhaps its greatest manifestation in the annual commemoration of Armistice Day, when the nation keeps covenant with those who have made the ultimate sacrifice, giving their lives in action'.<sup>13</sup>*

Later in the document under 'Army Core Values' (Chapter 3), there is another reference to the Covenant;

*'The Nation, the Army and the chain of command rely on the continuing allegiance, commitment and support of all who serve: on their loyalty. Conversely, soldiers of all ranks, and their families, must be certain that the Army and the Nation will treat them with loyalty as well as justice. The system's loyalty to the individual – its obligation in the Military Covenant – is manifested in justice, fair rewards, and life-long support to all who have soldiered'.<sup>14</sup>*

## The Importance of the Military Covenant

The Military Covenant serves three main purposes:

**Strategic and Cultural.** The Military Covenant ensures harmonious civil-military relations and highlights the need for the Armed Forces to be professional in carrying out their work in accordance with the values of society.

**Moral and Compassionate.** The Military Covenant recognises that there is a moral obligation on society to ensure that service personnel and their families get a fair deal in recognition of the exceptional demands placed upon them, the risks they run and the restrictions on their ability to speak out individually or collectively in their own interests.

**Practical.** The Military Covenant recognises that the Armed Forces must be treated well so they can recruit and retain people.

## A New Covenant?

The Commission recognises that there are serious shortcomings with the current Military Covenant. Firstly, it is only written into Army doctrine. The Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force do not have equivalent recognition despite the fact that society recognises that the Covenant applies in practice to all three services.

Secondly, it is a brief statement and perhaps could be clearer in terms of stating what is expected of the nation specifically. Thirdly, it does not deal adequately with veterans although the document does refer to the need to provide 'life-long support to those who have soldiered'.

**We recommend the publication of a tri-service Military Covenant document. This could be, for example, written as a Joint Service Publication (JSP). The new Covenant must lay down clearly what is expected of the nation in fulfilling its side of the agreement towards service personnel, their families, and veterans.**

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Defence, Army Doctrine Publication, Chapter 1. <[http://www.army.mod.uk/servingsoldier/usefulinfo/valuesgeneral/adp5milcov/ss\\_hrpers\\_values\\_adp5\\_1\\_w.html#milcov](http://www.army.mod.uk/servingsoldier/usefulinfo/valuesgeneral/adp5milcov/ss_hrpers_values_adp5_1_w.html#milcov)>

<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Defence, Army Doctrine Publication, Chapter 3. [http://www.army.mod.uk/servingsoldier/usefulinfo/valuesgeneral/adp5milcov/ss\\_hrpers\\_values\\_adp5\\_3\\_w.html#loyalty](http://www.army.mod.uk/servingsoldier/usefulinfo/valuesgeneral/adp5milcov/ss_hrpers_values_adp5_3_w.html#loyalty)

## Part 2: The Social and Military Context

### The 1957 Defence Review

The challenges that today's Armed Forces and current civil-military relations face are largely due to the fact that Britain has still not fully adjusted and come to terms with a decision that was made in the 1950s.

Conscription and compulsory service had been continued after the Second World War by the Attlee Government, and this meant that the Armed Forces at the time were a mixture of regulars and national servicemen. National service required all healthy males of 18 years or over to serve two years in the Armed Forces. The significance of this was that national service, combined with compulsory service that came with the two world wars, put nearly everyone into contact with the Armed Forces at some point in their lives. This included future journalists, opinion-formers and politicians.

It became clear that post-imperial Britain would have to adapt to a new strategic and economic reality. In 1957, the then Conservative Government published a White Paper which proposed the abolition of conscription, meaning that Britain would now have an all-volunteer force. It aimed to reduce the Armed Forces from 690,000 to 375,000. As a result, the last national service call-up was in 1960, and conscription was finally phased out in 1962.<sup>15</sup> Since then, the Armed Forces numbers continued to be reduced and our regular all-volunteer Armed Forces stands today at 173,960 personnel.<sup>16</sup>

### The Consequences

The fact that the Armed Forces were to consist exclusively of volunteers brought with it the question of how they could be sustained. Service life would have to be made more attractive – with pay increases, a career structure and better conditions. The changed socio-economic picture from the 1960s onwards also made the situation more difficult. This included the fact that the individualist trends towards hedonism and atomization (which do not fit easily with military service) were replacing the collectivist values of self-sacrifice, selflessness, duty, obligation and patriotism (which define military service). These changes, combined with a rise in living standards, the decline in manual labour, and other developments concerning educational and employment opportunities have meant that the Armed Forces has come under increasing competition in the labour market.<sup>17</sup>

Changing societal attitudes are only part of the story, however. Failure by ministers to ensure that a military career is attractive has been equally to blame.

## Part 3: The Health of the Covenant

### The Armed Forces and Society

#### Society's Interest in the Armed Forces

Senior military figures have expressed concern at the gap that now exists between the military and society. In September 2007, the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Richard Dannatt said:

*'I have become increasingly concerned about the growing gulf between the Army and the Nation...In America, appreciation for the armed forces is outstanding and, frankly, I would like to be able to mirror some of that here. In the States, many companies offer military discounts for serving soldiers, sports teams give out free tickets, people in the street shake the hand of men in uniform. In Canada the route along which the bodies of servicemen killed in action are brought home has been titled the "Highway of Heroes". Flip the coin and contrast that to the UK where – despite many public campaigns – we still have people objecting to a home for our wounded soldiers families, we still have a Nation that at time seems immune to homeless and psychologically damaged soldiers'.<sup>18</sup>*

This view was reinforced during the autumn of 2007 when there appeared to be a lack of public interest in the homecoming parades of units that had served on operations.<sup>19</sup> However, it seems that the situation has improved somewhat since then, probably as a result of media pressure.<sup>20</sup>

In terms of public support, polling data suggests that despite the objections people may have towards the Government's foreign policy, they still support the Armed Forces and this is encouraging. The Army's own poll on the 'To the Best' website indicates that 89 per cent were proud of the Army, 10 per cent were not.<sup>21</sup> However, it has been noted that there is today little interaction between the Armed Forces and society and discussions on defence rarely receive much attention in the media, although this has improved a little since the current operations began. In 2007, Tony Blair stated that there should be a national debate on the subject, which implies that there has been insufficient national discussion.<sup>22</sup>

#### The Wearing of Uniforms

The British tradition of not wearing uniform in public relates to the terrorist threat of 1970s Irish Republicanism. It is no longer relevant.

The disadvantage that personnel in uniform experience today has shifted to episodes of verbal abuse and discrimination. For example, a directive was issued to RAF Wittering in

<sup>15</sup> Minister of Defence, Defence: *Outline of Future Policy (Statements)*, April 1957, Session 1956-7, Cmnd 124, p.7.

<sup>16</sup> Defence Analytical Services Agency, TSP3, April 2008.

<sup>17</sup> See Jeremy Black, *The Dotted Red Line: Britain's Defence Policy in the Modern World* (London: The Social Affairs Unit, 2006), pp 11-12.

<sup>18</sup> Speech to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 21 September 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Tom Newton Dunn, 'Public Snub Heroes Parade', *The Sun*, 15 October 2007.

<sup>20</sup> 'Troops in Town for Homecoming Parade' *BBC News Online*, 26 April 2008.

<sup>21</sup> <http://tothebest.army.mod.uk/Pages/PollResults.aspx?poll=5>

<sup>22</sup> Speech on *HMS Albion*, 12 January 2007.

Cambridgeshire not to wear uniforms in public because of the abuse experienced by personnel in Peterborough. Instances like this are regrettable, but they are isolated and we do not believe they are representative of British attitudes.

**The Commission believes that on the whole Armed Forces personnel should be encouraged to wear uniforms in public. We also believe that military staff at MoD main building and elsewhere in the capital should set an example. However, the final decision to encourage uniforms to be worn in civilian settings should be left to local commanders following an assessment of threat.**

### The Armed Forces and Schools

A better understanding of the Armed Forces in society must start with schools. Despite a focus on citizenship in schools in recent years, there has been reluctance in some quarters to allow members of the Armed Forces into schools to talk about what they do. We consider this to be most regrettable.

In April 2008 a motion was passed by the National Union of Teachers opposing what were characterized as military recruitment activities in schools in England and Wales.<sup>23</sup> Earlier the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published a report which asserted that the MoD's 'marketing to children below recruitment age commonly glamorises warfare'.<sup>24</sup> The Commission disagrees with these viewpoints.

We also believe that the decision to phase out the Defence Schools Presentation Team structure was unwise.<sup>25</sup> It seems unlikely that the replacement e-learning tool 'Defence Dynamics' will have anything like the same impact on its intended audience, 14 to 16-year-olds preparing for GCSEs with defence themes.

Fortunately, head teachers can still request Single Service Student Presentation Teams with real servicemen to visit schools. They should be encouraged to do so.

**The Commission believes that more interaction should be encouraged between the Armed Forces and schools, not less, and that a proper regional tri-service structure of Schools Presentation Teams should be guaranteed.**

The Commission has also noted with interest the Centre for Policy Studies pamphlet, *Troops to Teachers*, by Tom Buckard. This looked into an American programme in which retiring service personnel are retrained as teachers to work in schools in challenging inner city areas. It considers that similar schemes

could work in the UK based on work already carried out by the UK charity Skill Force.<sup>26</sup> We will consider this further.

### Cadet Forces

Cadet Forces teach young people the values of discipline, respect, and loyalty. They also provide a taste of military life.

The Government's decision to pilot Combined Cadet Forces in state schools was welcome<sup>27</sup> and we note **David Cameron expressed his support when launching the Commission. However, we must now seek ways of expanding the scheme into more state schools and we will look at how this can be achieved.**

## Government and the Armed Forces

We do not understand why the government has downgraded the office of Defence Secretary. It should not be a part-time post. The Government's ineptitude has sent an appalling message to the Armed Forces about its commitment to them and they are understandably angry. **The Armed Forces must always be properly represented at Cabinet with a full-time Defence Secretary. We also recommend that the minister responsible for veterans and personnel should be at minister of state level.**

Regrettably, this example is just an indication of a wider tension between Whitehall and the Armed Forces. Former Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Mike Jackson has said: *'I didn't always find the MoD wholehearted about soldiers' interests. I was constantly battling the civil servants, and it was often very frustrating. I'd come back from a visit and say, "we've got to do something about the state of those barracks", but it was like trying to fight your way through cotton wool. A soldier's approach is very straightforward: this is the problem, all right, give me the tools and let's crack on. But bureaucrats are not like that at all.'*<sup>28</sup>

General Jackson's remarks paint a grim picture of Whitehall's disinterest in Service welfare. They suggest the need for a change of attitude.

## The Conditions of Service

### Overstretch

The 1998 Strategic Defence Review correctly identified the

<sup>23</sup> National Union of Teachers, Conference 2008, Motion 55, 'War'.

<sup>24</sup> David Gee, *Informed Choice? Armed Forces Recruitment Practice in the United Kingdom*, November 2007.

<sup>25</sup> *Hansard*, 7 February 2007, Col. 923WA.

<sup>26</sup> Tom Buckard, *Troops to Teachers: A Successful Programme from America for our Inner City Schools*, The Centre for Policy Studies, February 2008.

<sup>27</sup> *Hansard*, 9 January 2007, Col. 8WS.

<sup>28</sup> General Sir Mike Jackson, *Soldier – The Autobiography* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2007), p.358.

problem affecting Armed Forces personnel policy at the time. It recognised that overstretch and under-manning were linked; under-manning puts pressure on existing personnel creating overstretch, and that overstretch causes people to quit. The SDR put it succinctly;

*'We must break this vicious circle. To do so we must match the commitments we undertake to our planned resources, recognising that there will always be the risk of additional short-term pressures if we have to respond rapidly to an unforeseen crisis'.<sup>29</sup>*

But the current Government has managed to exacerbate the situation. Between 1997 and 2007 whilst continuing to commit a substantial number of forces to Bosnia, the Government added Kosovo, Sierra Leone and two major counter-insurgencies – Iraq and Afghanistan, among others, to that list. During the same period the Government actually cut its intended manpower targets for all three services.<sup>30</sup>

### Harmony Guidelines

The tour intervals of units are on many occasions well below the Government's recommendation of 24 months. For example, the average tour interval for the Royal Logistics Corps is 15 months.<sup>31</sup> The Grenadier Guards' last tour interval was 8 months sandwiched between a deployment to Iraq and a tour in Afghanistan.<sup>32</sup>

- Personnel are spending less time at home contrary to individual separated service guidelines;
- Fewer than 1 per cent of Royal Navy personnel exceed 660 days separated service.
- 10.3 per cent of Army personnel exceed 415 days separated service.
- 10 per cent of Royal Air Force personnel exceed 140 days of detached duty.<sup>33</sup>

### Retention

Retention remains a key and growing problem, especially among officers. Exit rates for officers have increased in each of the last five years, and reached their highest rate since 2001-2 during the last financial year. The outflow rate for other ranks also remained relatively high in 2007-8 as 11.1 out of every 100 trained personnel left the Armed Forces.<sup>34</sup>

### Completing the Circle – Undermanning

Based on the Government's own target figures;

- The Armed Forces are undermanned by 5,310 personnel.
- The Royal Navy is undermanned by 1,190.
- The Army is undermanned by 3,530.
- The RAF is undermanned by 590.<sup>35</sup>

Individual trades within the services are under particularly pressure (known as 'pinch point trades'). Below are some examples:

Infantrymen at the rank of Private or Lance Corporal are currently over 1,200 undermanned.

Army Radiologists at the rank of Major or above are currently 75 per cent short.<sup>36</sup>

### Common Complaints

The cycle of overstretch and under-manning is causing enormous frustration for our service personnel as evidenced by the most recent CGS Staff report:

- There is considerable concern about the impact of the high operational tempo on personnel's personal and family life. The most recent CGS Staff's Briefing Team Report stated 'COs are concerned at the impact that this [pace of life] is having on the morale component'.<sup>37</sup>
- Leave is a key issue. The CGS Briefing Team Report said that 'the loss of leave was still widespread'.<sup>38</sup> New figures reveal, for example, that 11 per cent of flights to and from Afghanistan suffered from a delay of six hours or more.<sup>38</sup> This is unacceptable.
- CGS believes that 'more and more single income soldiers are now close to the UK Govt definition of poverty'.<sup>40</sup> His Briefing Team report, commenting on the impact of the Pay As You Dine scheme, said that 'it was made clear that a number of soldiers were not eating properly because they had run out of money by the end of the month'.<sup>41</sup> Earlier this month CGS developed his remarks in a critique of military pay.<sup>42</sup> We hope that the independent Armed Forces Pay Review Body will look into this when publishing its report next year.

<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review*, July 1998, Session 1997-8, Cm 3999, para 125.

<sup>30</sup> *Hansard*, 8 February 2002, Col. 1202WA; Ministry of Defence, Defence Plan 2008-12, June 2008, Session 2007-8, Cm7385, p.39

<sup>31</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Spring Performance Report 2007-8*, 13 May 2008, table e.

<sup>32</sup> *Hansard*, 12 May 2008, Col. 1307WA.

<sup>33</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Spring Performance Report 2007-8*, 13 May 2008, table f.

<sup>34</sup> *Defence Analytical Services and Advice*, TSP 5, April 2008.

<sup>35</sup> *Defence Analytical Services and Advice*, TSP 3, April 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Memorandum to the House of Commons Defence Committee*, 18 March 2008.

<sup>37</sup> *Chief of the General Staff's Briefing Team Report 2*, p.3.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>39</sup> *Hansard*, 6 May 2008, Col. 832WA.

<sup>40</sup> *Chief of the General Staff's Briefing Team Report 2*, p.3.

A high operational tempo means that service personnel are habitually separated from their families. A concerned employer should seek ways of mitigating the effects of separation. It seems that there is more that could be done and as an example we cite the comments of the Army Families Federation relating to the deployment telephone allowance; ‘the primary concern is communication and whilst the additional 10 minutes telephone time per week in 2007 was welcome, 30 minutes per week is still significantly below the expectation of most people today’.<sup>43</sup>

### Reservists

The Volunteer Reserve Forces (Royal Naval Reserve, Territorial Army, Royal Marine Reserve and Royal Auxiliary Air Force) continue to play an important role in our defence capability.

The Strategic Defence Review of 1998 stated that ‘we need a different kind of Reserve force, more closely integrated with their Regular colleagues, more capable of use at shorter notice and in crises short of all-out war in Europe’<sup>44</sup>. As a result, Reserve Forces, especially the Territorial Army, have been used increasingly on operations.

A series of reports over the past few years have highlighted welfare issues relating to Reserve Forces. The Public Accounts Committee last year stated; ‘the welfare support most used by Reservists and their families is provided by their Reservist unit, but not all units have dedicated welfare resources’.<sup>45</sup> This is reinforced by the most recent Territorial Army Attitude Survey in which 61 per cent of TA officers and 67 per cent of TA soldiers said they were not satisfied with the circumstances in which they were eligible to use services provided by the Army Welfare Service.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, communication still remains a problem with limited awareness of what is available.<sup>47</sup>

A key concern of reservists is the lack of sufficient time for training. As the most recent CGS Staff report said about Territorial Army training: ‘although not officially “capped”, funding difficulties have led to training being curtailed’.<sup>48</sup>

Some TA personnel also have concerns that their deployment could hinder or seriously harm their own civilian careers. The CGS report stated that the Reserve Forces Act of 1996 ‘is perceived as protecting the employers, not supporting soldiers. Most units have anecdotal evidence of soldiers dismissed from

civilian work for TA membership although all have been formally dismissed for other reasons’.<sup>49</sup> The report goes on to say that ‘there is a belief that there is a reduction in support for mobilisation from employers. Measures are needed to encourage employers to value TA employees more’.<sup>50</sup>

Reserve forces are blighted by retention difficulties. The most recent Territorial Army Attitude Survey recorded that 44 per cent of officers say that the impact of the TA on domestic life either increases or strongly increases their intention to leave.<sup>51</sup> As a result, more people are leaving the TA and Royal Naval Reserve than are joining as illustrated below.

Calendar year	Inflow	Outflow
2006	8,560	9,920
2007 (1 January to 28 February)	1,020	1,700
	Inflow	Outflow
<b>Royal Marine Reserve</b>	300	240
<b>Royal Naval Reserve</b>	140	280

Source: *Hansard*, 18 February 2008, Col. 110WA

The Commission will look at specific measures to help reservists to ensure that their skills are fully utilised, that they and their families are protected and that their civilian employment is secure. We will be studying carefully the series of reports of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Reserve Forces.

## The Provision of Equipment

Recent coroners’ inquests have highlighted failures in the provision of equipment.

On 15 February 2008, the inquest into Captain Philippon’s death concluded. Captain James Philippon was killed during a contact with the Taliban in June 2006. The inquest found that he lacked key equipment such as underslung grenade launchers that may have prevented his death.

The inquest into the deaths of 2nd Lieutenant Joanna Yorke

<sup>41</sup> Chief of the General Staff’s Briefing Team Report 2, p.18.

<sup>42</sup> Tom Newton Dunn, ‘Soldiers risk life yet earn less than a traffic warden’, *The Sun*, 5 June 2008.

<sup>43</sup> Army Families Federation, *Memorandum to the House of Commons Defence Committee*, 18 March 2008.

<sup>44</sup> Ministry of Defence, *Strategic Defence Review*, 1998, para 105.

<sup>45</sup> House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, Reserve Forces, 12 July 2007, Session 2006-7, HC 729, conclusion para 8.

<sup>46</sup> Territorial Army Continuous Attitude Survey, 2007, p.24, Q52b

<sup>47</sup> House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, Reserve Forces, 12 July 2007, para 7.

<sup>48</sup> Chief of the General Staff’s Briefing Team Report 2, p.4.

<sup>49</sup> Chief of the General Staff’s Briefing Team Report 2, p.8.

<sup>50</sup> Chief of the General Staff’s Briefing Team Report 2, p.9.

<sup>51</sup> Territorial Army Continuous Attitude Survey, 2007, p.32, Q76i.

Dyer, Corporal Kris O'Neill, Private Eleanor Dlugosz, and Kingsman Adam James Smith found that their Warrior vehicle was armour-protected on the top and sides but not on the bottom.

The inquest into the death of Lance Corporal Sean Tansey concluded that the failure to provide the right safety equipment that could have prevented the vehicle from falling on him was a contributory factor in his death.

We find the many of the conclusions of these inquests deeply disturbing. What is even more alarming is that the MoD went to the High Court to challenge coroners' right to criticise it when delivering a verdict, although this argument was subsequently rejected on 11 April. We believe it is outrageous that the MoD should treat coroners in this way.

In relation to the death of Private Jason Smith in Iraq, the High Court ruled that cases in which service personnel have been killed because they were not given the adequate equipment could be subject to human rights legislation. We believe that it is a fundamental responsibility of any Government to minimise the risks to our forces by equipping them adequately. In order to reduce such instances in future, we believe that a future Conservative Government should seek to review the procurement process. It should also look at what lessons can be learned from the speedy acquisition of Urgent Operational Requirements to conventional procurement.

## Health Care

### Casualty Evacuation

In January 2008 it was reported that the death of Corporal Mark Wright in Afghanistan could have been avoided if properly equipped helicopters had been available. When Corporal Wright was injured in a minefield a suitable helicopter could not be deployed because all of the winches had been returned to the UK.<sup>52</sup> The incident suggested a helicopter fleet under strain.

Whilst we welcome the decision by the Government to acquire new helicopters, it came very late in the day.<sup>53</sup> The provision of support helicopters should have been given greater priority much earlier.

### Health Care of Service Personnel

During the 1990s, the decision was taken to abandon dedicated military hospitals in favour of military healthcare within NHS units. The vehicles for delivery were to be known as Military

District Hospital Units or Ministry of Defence Hospital Units (MDHUs). The development was the inevitable consequence of a shrinking patient base, the advent of super-specialisation and concerns over the specialist accreditation of healthcare professionals. There are currently MDHUs embedded in NHS hospitals at Frimley Park near Aldershot, Peterborough, Derriford near Plymouth, Northallerton near Catterick, and Portsmouth.

In 2001 the Government decided to locate the main receiving unit for Aeromedical Evacuation casualties at the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine (RCDM) at Selly Oak Hospital Birmingham.

There is no longer any serious suggestion from informed quarters that exclusively Military Hospitals should be re-established. The range of facilities and experience provided by the NHS means that service personnel would be at a disadvantage if they did not have access to the very best clinical treatment available through the NHS.

We therefore support the decision to set up the Military Managed Ward at Selly Oak Hospital in Birmingham and the Commission has no doubt that the clinical care offered to injured Service personnel is excellent. But we also believe that a greater degree of separation of military and civilian patients is desirable. Wherever practical, service personnel should be treated exclusively alongside other service personnel in a familiar, safe and secure environment. It is essential that the Military Managed Ward model is replicated at the new PFI hospital in Birmingham.

While the clinical care received by military patients at Selly Oak Hospital is good, there are concerns over the provision of accommodation for the families and that many service families live a considerable distance from Birmingham and struggle to visit injured relatives. We will examine this further.

We are further concerned that the MoD should be so ready to sell off the Royal Hospital Haslar that has provided healthcare to the Armed Forces since the 18th century. We are not convinced that there are no defence medical services that could be provided from part of the site and recommend that an incoming Conservative Government should review the situation.

### Rehabilitation

The current arrangements for rehabilitation are tiered. Initially patients are treated at one of the 70 Primary Casualty Receiving

<sup>52</sup> Sean Rayment 'Heroes Death Could Have Been Avoided', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 14 January 2008.a

<sup>53</sup> *Ministry of Defence Press Release*, 30 March 2007.

Facilities (PCRFs). PCRFs can refer patients to one of 15 Regional Rehabilitation Units. Patients can also be referred to the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Headley Court in Surrey.

It has been generally accepted that the rehabilitation care provided by the MoD is very good and this has been explicitly recognised by the Defence Select Committee.<sup>54</sup> However, the Commission has some concerns about capacity and the need for additional facilities. The charity Help for Heroes is currently raising money to build a gym and swimming pool for Headley Court.<sup>55</sup> Last year the charity SSAFA Forces Help also decided to provide accommodation for visiting personnel. Many have criticised the MoD for not stepping in sooner and the Commission believes that it was unfortunate that it was seen to be reacting to the generosity offered by charity. We consider that there is a fine line between what is reasonable to expect the state to provide and what can be left to the generosity of donors.

Whilst we naturally welcome the additional MoD provision, we will be monitoring the impact of the extra £24 million promised by the Government to fund the refurbishment of Headley Court facilities.

It is not clear that veterans will receive the high level of limb prosthetic care when they leave the Armed Forces and are dependent on the NHS. In particular, we are worried about the servicing and replacement of state-of-the-art 'C' leg prostheses. Despite recent ministerial assurances, we will be watching this carefully.

### **Mental Health Care**

Although combat stress is by no means the most common form of mental illness in the service population, it is clearly service attributable and thus of special cause for concern.

The intensity and nature of warfare that British service personnel have experienced since 1982 and the disappearance of many of the old support networks sustain current levels of combat stress.

Tour intervals appear to have a relationship with the chances of sustaining mental ill health. Rona et al reported in 2007 that prevalence of many psychological symptoms were higher among those deployed for 13 months or more. Furthermore, the prevalence of severe alcohol problems increased with duration of deployment.<sup>56</sup>

For service personnel, out-patient care is provided through 15 Departments of Community Mental Health. In-patient care was provided until 2003 by the Duchess of Kent Psychiatric Hospital. Since then, in-patient military mental healthcare has been provided by the Priory Group. There has been some concern about the Priory Group's suitability.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, outsourcing mental health care to a group with finite experience of the Armed Forces does not seem to be the ideal solution. We note the downgrading of the discipline of military psychiatry at a time of increasing demand for its services.

Post-deployment monitoring of personnel is important for the identification and management of service-related mental ill health. Therefore, the shortage of military psychiatrists is cause for concern. We also intend to look further into Post Operational Stress Management (POSM) which involves a decompression period in Cyprus and Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) consisting of briefings through the chain of command.

The Defence Select Committee discovered that the Government's system for tracking veterans is poor. The Committee concluded that 'the identification and treatment of veterans with mental health needs relies as much on good intentions and good luck as on robust tracking'.<sup>58</sup>

The Commission will be debating how this might be improved with interested parties such as Combat Stress.

### **Health Care of Service Families**

The Commission believes that the families of Service personnel should not be put at a disadvantaged in gaining access to healthcare as a result of having a service spouse or parent. In the UK service families are reliant on NHS facilities. Whilst they experience the same general problems that face NHS patients, there are specific issues that relate to their relationship with the Armed Forces.

Service personnel, especially those moving to England and Wales from abroad, may find it particularly difficult to gain access to a NHS doctor or dentist. Since personnel and their families move constantly, families often lose their place on NHS waiting lists when moving to a different PCT area. This was particularly noted by the most recent CGS Briefing Team Report which stated that 'there is considerable frustration among all ranks that their families find it difficult to get the appropriate medical and dental care, it is the latter that is the most acute... It has been mentioned by every unit and in strong terms'.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>54</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, *Medical Care in the Armed Forces*, 18 February 2008, Session 2007-8, HC 327, para 54.

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.helpforheroes.org.uk/>

<sup>56</sup> Roberto J Rona et al, 'Mental health consequences of overstretch in the UK Armed Forces: first phase of a cohort study', *British Medical Journal*, 30 June 2007, table 3.

<sup>57</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, *Medical Care in the Armed Forces*, 18 February 2008, para 95.

<sup>58</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, *Medical Care in the Armed Forces*, para 110.

**The Commission recommends that service families' places on NHS waiting lists are transferred when moving from one PCT to another. We also recommend that service families moving from one place to another should be guaranteed access to a NHS dentist.**

### **Veterans Health Care and the NHS**

In 1953 the hospitals managed by the Department for Pensions for war pensioners were transferred to the NHS. The Government gave an undertaking that there would be priority examination and treatment for war pensioners in NHS hospitals.<sup>60</sup> In 2007 the Government determined that this would apply to all veterans whose injuries were suspected of being caused by their service.<sup>61</sup>

However, it seems that not all veterans and health professionals are aware of these arrangements. A Royal British Legion survey found that:

Of those war pensioners who had sought NHS treatment for the condition for which they received a war pension, over three-quarters (78 per cent) said they were not treated ahead of other non-emergency patients.

Only 3 per cent of these people remembered being asked by an NHS health professional if they were war pensioners.

The survey also found that 76 per cent of those taking part were not aware that they are entitled to priority treatment.

71 per cent of GPs questioned knew nothing at all about priority treatment.<sup>62</sup>

The Commission believes that priority treatment for veterans will not be delivered adequately until such time as a robust tracking mechanism is put in place and until an effective way of raising awareness of the requirement for priority treatment among healthcare professional and veterans is found. The current system is not working.

## **Service Families and Children**

### **The Impact of Service Life on Families**

The current unmitigated intensity of operations is having a significant impact on service family life and, inevitably, on

effectiveness and retention. The Army Families Survey of 2007 found that of those Army spouses who believe that operational deployment has changed their partner's behaviour, 64 per cent of officers' spouses and 68 per cent of soldiers' spouses said that the change in behaviour has had either a negative or very negative impact on their family.<sup>63</sup>

Many family members are concerned that their own careers are suffering due to the nature of service life.<sup>64</sup> The Army Families Federation has highlighted the fact that coping whilst a family member is away from home is particularly challenging both emotionally and financially.<sup>65</sup>

In addition, some military establishments are in remote locations. This can present challenges in developing social networks. It also means potential difficulties in accessing amenities.<sup>66</sup>

The Commission will examine these issues in more detail.

### **Pre-School Childcare**

The first 2007 CGS Briefing Team Report said that 'more needs to be done to provide pre-school childcare and After School Clubs in order to assist working wives and single parent servicewomen'.<sup>67</sup> The report also discussed barracks that lacked childcare provision. For example, the feedback from families in Wattisham stated: 'There is no childcare provision here at all. Colchester has it but we do not, it seems highly unfair'.<sup>68</sup>

The Commission will examine pre-school childcare in greater depth. It will also look into the effectiveness of the MoD's childcare voucher policy.

### **Children and Education**

Service children in the UK are educated through the local educational system run by the Department for Children, Schools, and Families (DCSF). Overseas they are educated through the agency Service Children's Education (SCE) which is run by the MoD. SCE educates 13,000 children in 44 schools. 36 are primary schools, 2 are middle schools and 6 are secondary schools. These are based throughout the world including Germany, Cyprus, and Belize.<sup>69</sup> In addition, there is also the option of MoD managed boarding schools and the Continuity Education Allowance that provides the greater part of independent boarding school fees.

One of the key concerns is the impact of continuing mobility on

<sup>59</sup> Chief of the General Staff's Briefing Team Report 2, 2007, p.16.

<sup>60</sup> Department for Health, *Health Service Guidelines, Priority Treatment for War Pensioners*, 18 June 1997, HSG(97)31.

<sup>61</sup> Ministry of Defence Press Release, 23 November 2007.

<sup>62</sup> The Royal British Legion, 'Healthcare for Veterans', *Honour the Covenant Policy Briefing Paper*, May 2008, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> *Army Families Continuous Attitude Survey*, February – May 2006, Q25c.

<sup>64</sup> RAF Families Federation, *Memorandum to the House of Commons Defence Committee*, 13 March 2008.

<sup>65</sup> Army Families Federation, *Memorandum to the House of Commons Defence Committee*, 18 March 2008.

<sup>66</sup> Army Families Federation, *Memorandum to the House of Commons Defence Committee*, 18 March 2008.

<sup>67</sup> Chief of the General Staff's Briefing Team Report, 30 July 2007, p.25.

<sup>68</sup> *Families Feedback CBT Report 2007*, Annex B to the Chief of the General Staff's Briefing Team Report, 30 July 2007.

children's emotional and educational well-being. In its report in 2006, the Defence Select Committee discovered examples of service children changing schools at least 11 times in their school careers.<sup>70</sup> The Army Families Federation states that whilst up to 11 per cent of civilians in the UK move house in a year (2 per cent move outside their local authority area), up to 40 per cent of Army families move every 12 months and many move from overseas.<sup>71</sup>

We can get some indication of mobility by studying mobility indexes (percentage of students on the school roll leaving at 'non-standard' times). During 2005-6 the mobility rate in SCE primary schools was 82 per cent and for SCE primary schools it was 58.9 per cent.<sup>72</sup> In some cases, it can be as high as 131 per cent.<sup>73</sup>

However, it is currently difficult to measure exactly how this impacts on educational attainment, particularly in the UK as the DCSF are only just starting to include service children in the Schools Census. In the meantime data from Wiltshire County Council suggests that service children are doing less well than expected.<sup>74</sup> This is compatible with Ofsted's observation that 'almost all schools with mobility above 15 per cent have average GCSE scores below the national average'.<sup>75</sup>

We are concerned that the current system of LEA funding does not help service children in the UK sufficiently. There is a very persuasive argument made by the Service Children in State Schools Working Group (SCISS) that LEA funding formulae should recognise the extra challenges that service children may pose in terms of providing educational support.<sup>76</sup> It must be noted that some LEAs, such as Wiltshire and Oxfordshire already choose to provide additional funding for schools with significant numbers of service children from their own budget based on the percentage of service children in their schools. The Commission notes with approval these examples of good practice. But it also notes the Conservative Party Green Paper on Education, Raising the Bar, Closing the Gap and its discussion regarding the limitation of the Dedicated Schools Grant which allocates funding between LEAs. We are particular interested in the following proposal;

*'We have proposed an explicit Pupil Premium to increase per capita funding for pupils from deprived backgrounds (recommended by the Conservative Public Services Improvement Policy Group). We believe that the Pupil Premium*

*should attach to pupils directly'.<sup>77</sup>*

**The Commission supports the idea of a pupil premium and we recommend that provision for service children should be included as part of this policy.**

## Accommodation and Housing

### Service Accommodation

45 per cent percent of UK based Single Living Accommodation and 64 per cent of overseas SLA is in the bottom grade on a four-point scale.<sup>78</sup>

The current state of accommodation has come under heavy criticism from independent bodies and committees. The Defence Select Committee has described the condition of some housing as 'disgraceful' and 'were told that soldiers from 1 R ANGLIAN [1st Battalion, The Royal Anglian Regiment] on deployment to Afghanistan had more comfortable accommodation than their comrades left behind in Pirbright'.<sup>79</sup>

**The Commission believes that the process of refurbishing service accommodation should be accelerated. The Commissions also recommends that a review into the defence estate should be conducted and the receipts from any further asset sales should be used in order to facilitate this.**

### Service Personnel and Housing

A common complaint among service personnel is the lack of opportunity to get on the property ladder. The National Audit Office reported that only around 45 per cent of service personnel from the other ranks and 30 per cent of soldiers own their own home.<sup>80</sup> The CGS Briefing Team Report notes, 'house purchase plays a larger part in a decision to leave the service than has been previously thought'.<sup>81</sup>

The Government has introduced some measures to help service personnel, including making some of them eligible for the Open Market HomeBuy shared ownership scheme. Service personnel are also entitled to a loan called Long Service Advance of Pay which entitles those personnel to a £8,500 interest free loan. **We recommend that this should be reviewed and we are currently examining how this can be improved upon.**

<sup>69</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, *Educating Service Children*, 6 September 2006, Session 2005-6, HC 1054, para 55.

<sup>70</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, *Educating Service Children*, 6 September 2006, para 14.

<sup>71</sup> Army Families Federation, *Memorandum to the House of Commons Defence Committee*, 18 March 2008.

<sup>72</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, *Educating Service Children*, 6 September 2006, para 14.

<sup>73</sup> *Hansard*, 19 February 2007, Col.201WA.

<sup>74</sup> Personal correspondence between Wiltshire County Council and Dr Andrew Murrison MP

<sup>75</sup> Ofsted, *Managing Pupil Mobility*, March 2002, page 7.

<sup>76</sup> *Memorandum by Mike Curtis to the House of Commons Defence Committee*, 28 March 2006.

<sup>77</sup> *The Conservative Party, Raising the Bar, Closing the Gap*, Opportunity Agenda Green Paper No.1, 20 November 2007. pp 41-2.

<sup>78</sup> *Hansard*, 20 February 2008, Col.698WA.

<sup>79</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Work of Defence Estates*, 14 September 2007, Session 2006-7, HC 535, para 40.

<sup>80</sup> National Audit Office, *Leaving the Services*, 27 July 2007, Session 2006-7, HC 618, fig. 10.

<sup>81</sup> *Chief of the General Staff's Briefing Team Report 2*, p.10.

## Veterans

### The Ex-Service Community

There are no official government records on veterans. What we know about veterans as a social group largely comes from a Royal British Legion study, *Profile of the Ex-Service Community in the UK*, published in 2005. The RBL reported the ex-service community to number 10.5 million, equivalent to 18 per cent of the UK population.<sup>82</sup> The report also stated that there are 4.8 million ex-service veterans.<sup>83</sup>

### Resettlement

In 2007 the National Audit Office conducted an evaluation of the Armed Forces resettlement package. Entitlement is dependent on length of service and personnel usually get the opportunity to attend a range of briefings on careers, housing and pensions.

Most ex-members of the Armed Forces do well, and we believe that the skills they have acquired in the military have a large part to play in this. But elements of the resettlement programme could be improved. There are issues concerning the availability of staff for the Army in terms of the 'first line' service.<sup>84</sup> Another source of grievance from veterans we have spoken to is the provision of training grants.<sup>85</sup> Finally, service personnel are getting less time to prepare for civilian life because of their increasing work load. The Commission intends to look into these problems further.

### Social Exclusion

The survey conducted by the NAO in 2007 found that 6 per cent of service leavers are unemployed.<sup>86</sup> 5 per cent of those who took part in the survey also said that they had been homeless.<sup>87</sup>

We note the important work that charities such as Veterans Aid, which we have visited, do for the ex-service community. In our deliberations, we will investigate what how the fulfilment of the Covenant in this area can be better facilitated. We will also be assessing whether current legislation can be improved to help homeless people with an ex-service background.

### Veterans' Day

The idea of a National Veterans' Day was first proposed in February 2006. The idea was to promote better recognition and understanding of veterans. Gordon Brown said that there would be 'ceremonies in every constituency and locality of the country to mark National Veterans' Day, where we present

veterans with medals at local ceremonies'.<sup>88</sup>

The idea was sound but it has not achieved its full potential. Veterans' Day 2007 was completely overshadowed by the resignation of Tony Blair as Prime Minister. Tony Blair might have considered resigning on another day if he had held veterans in the esteem that he claimed.

The Commission has spoken to veterans about Veterans' Day and found that they are generally appreciative. Their main complaint was that the main Veterans' Day events were too concentrated in one or two places, and therefore could not participate fully. The Commission will examine what could be done to ensure that there is a whole range of events around the country so that every veteran has a chance to participate.

The National Recognition Study proposed the idea of having an Armed Forces and Veterans' Day in order to increase the prominence of the day. We would be concerned that three a separate Armed Forces related days – Veterans' Day, Armed Forces' Day and Remembrance Sunday would dilute each of them and, in particular, challenge the pre-eminence of the latter. Therefore, we endorse the idea of having an Armed Forces and Veterans' Day.

### The Armed Forces Compensation Scheme

The Armed Forces Compensation Scheme was introduced in 2005. It consists of a tax-free lump sum payment which is paid according to a 15-level tariff system and a Guaranteed Income Payment scheme for the first 11 tariffs. Problems with the scheme were first highlighted when Lance Corporal Ben Parkinson was awarded a lump sum of £152,150 after sustaining serious injuries in an explosion in Afghanistan.<sup>89</sup> After the ensuing public furore, the MoD changed the rules and announced that those with multiple injuries who qualify for 100 per cent of the GIP (Tariffs 1–4) will receive the full lump sum compensation award for each of their injuries sustained in a single incident, up to the maximum of £285,000.<sup>90</sup>

But it emerged that an Iraqi teenager accidentally shot by a British soldier is to receive £2 million in compensation after suffering severe spinal injuries which have left him paralysed.<sup>91</sup> The Iraqi, who was aged 13 at the time of the accident, later moved to the UK where he began legal action through the British courts. This has prompted the Government to carry out a second review.

Clearly the current arrangements for the compensation scheme

<sup>82</sup> The Royal British Legion, *Profile of the Ex-Service Community in the UK*, 10 November 2005, p.16.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> National Audit Office, *Leaving the Services*, 27 July 2007, Session 2006-7, HC 618, para 2.29.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, para 2.16.

<sup>86</sup> National Audit Office, *Leaving the Services*, 27 July 2007, Session 2006-7, HC 618, fig.6.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, fig. 14.

<sup>88</sup> Speech to the Royal United Services Institute, 13 February 2006.

<sup>89</sup> 'Maimed soldier "let down" by Army', *BBC News Online*, 28 August 2007.

<sup>90</sup> *Hansard*, 11 October 2007, Col. 42WS.

<sup>91</sup> 'Wounded Iraqi is given £2m payout', *BBC News Online*, 15 April 2008.

are unacceptable. **The Commission will scrutinise the Government's review with great care.**

## Bereaved Families

Since the Court of Appeal ruling in the 1980s concerning the death of Helen Smith, a coroner must investigate an unnatural or suspicious death relating to bodies repatriated in his or her area where the death occurred outside England and Wales. This meant that the deaths of service personnel abroad have been subject to a coroners' inquest.<sup>92</sup>

Operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have generated an inquest backlog. We recognise that the situation has been improving. Indeed, the last Ministry of Justice Written Ministerial Statement indicated that the backlog had fallen to around 90.<sup>93</sup> However, over the past couple of years this figure was well over 100, and many families had to wait months for their relatives' inquest to be heard and completed.

Secondly, there is the question of representation at inquests. The Ministry of Defence has always asserted that inquests are non-adversarial and consequently that families do not need legal assistance and representation.<sup>94</sup> Yet the MoD itself has spent over £1 million since 2003 on legal representation at inquests.<sup>95</sup> This is clearly not fair. We believe that if inquests are going to be held then there should equitable arrangements for them. The MoD cannot provide itself with publicly funded barristers yet deny the same to bereaved families. **Therefore, we believe that the MoD should desist from hiring barristers to defend its position at coroners' inquests.**

In terms of showing respect to those who have died, we know that in the town of Wootton Bassett near the repatriation base at RAF Lyneham, the town council and the Royal British Legion organise a lining of the route when a funeral cortege passes through. But this appears to be an honourable exception. In Canada when a hearse bearing the remains of a fallen serviceman passes, roads are cleared and a police escort ensures a smooth passage for the vehicle. Onlookers pay their respects. Britain's authorities take an altogether different view typified by the reported refusal of a constabulary to provide an escort as they 'focus on community safety rather than ceremonial roles'.<sup>96</sup> This is embarrassing, and we believe our fallen deserve greater respect. We will look at how this situation can be improved.

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<sup>92</sup> House of Commons Library.

<sup>93</sup> *Hansard*, 30 April 2008, Cols. 13-14WS.

<sup>94</sup> See *Hansard*, 30 January 2008, Col. 364WA.

<sup>95</sup> *Hansard*, 30 January 2008, Col. 365WA.

<sup>96</sup> *The Mail on Sunday*, 13 April 2008.

## Part 4: Conclusions

The Chief of the General Staff has said that the Military Covenant is ‘clearly out of kilter at the moment’.<sup>97</sup> Academics writing for the independent left-leaning think tank Demos have been even more damning and said that the covenant has been ‘damaged almost beyond repair’ and that a new civil-military compact must be established.<sup>98</sup>

It is the view of the Commission that all the evidence points to a Military Covenant that is under serious and unprecedented strain.

**The Armed Forces and Society.** There have been some positive developments and generally the public is supportive. However, today there is less common ground and shared experience between the Armed Forces and the community that will have to be addressed by highlighting the work of our military in a deliberate way that was not previously necessary.

**The Armed Forces and Government.** The MoD has been guilty of neglect. Its well-meaning initiatives have been too little, too late and they have not tackled fundamentals such as overstretch and a complete failure to match commitments and resources. Its poor stewardship is likely to have a long tail that will challenge any future administration

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<sup>97</sup> *Chief of the General Staff's Briefing Team Report*, 30 July 2007.

<sup>98</sup> Timothy Edmunds and Andrew Forster, *Out of Step: the case for Change in the British Armed Forces*, Demos, 2007, p.13