

The United Kingdom's Armed Forces continue to experience a high operational tempo: 17% of regular forces were deployed on operations and undertaking military tasks in the third quarter of 2008/9¹. The UK currently has 8,300 personnel in ISAF, Afghanistan, approximately 4,100 personnel in Iraq and 150 forces supporting NATO in Kosovo and Bosnia. A further 300 forces support the UN in Cyprus, Georgia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Liberia and Nepal. The UK is: a major contributor to the NATO Response Force (NRF); the Framework Nation for NATO's Headquarters Ace Rapid Reaction Corps (HQ ARRC), current based in Germany; a lead nation for, and major contributor to, EU Battle Groups; providing a 2-star Multi-National Operation HQ for the EU's anti-piracy operation, Op ATALANTA.

UK land forces exceed NATO's 50% usability figures target. The 2008 reported land forces strength, including 6,652 Marines, is 115,962 personnel, of which 77,287 (67%) are deployable and 38,267 (33%) sustainable². In the short to medium term, further adjustments to Army and Marine strengths will maintain similar levels of deployability and sustainability.

The Army's total strength at 1st January 2009 was around 110,000 of which approximately 17% were deployed on operations and undertaking military tasks. Army personnel deployed on operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Kosovo and supported a variety of worldwide UN operations. British forces after 31 May 09 in Iraq will number less than 400 and will focus on training the Iraqi Navy and assisting in Officer Training.

The Royal Navy total strength at 1st January 2009 was 38,760 of which 23% were deployed on operations and undertaking military tasks. The RN maintained the continuous at sea deterrent and the integrity of UK territorial waters and economic zones. It contributed to wider UK security through supporting commitments in Iraq, the Gulf, the North and South Atlantic, and to the NATO Response Force Maritime Component, and sustained the national strategic deterrent. The Royal Navy will command Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 from July 09 until July 10. 3 Commando Brigade has been deployed in Afghanistan in 2008/9 and the Naval Service has provided a significant proportion of personnel in Afghanistan. Aircraft from the Fleet Air Arm supported coalition activity in the Gulf and ISAF operations in Afghanistan.

The Royal Air Force total strength at 1st January 2009 was 43,510 of which 12% were deployed on operations and undertaking military tasks. The main areas of overseas commitment are the Gulf and Afghanistan where it provides tactical reconnaissance and close air support, in-theatre airlift, air-refueling, ISTAR and tactical mobility, force protection of airbases and airspace management and deconfliction. In the Gulf, the RAF provides key air force elements in Iraq and elsewhere. Both theatres are supported by the RAF's Strategic Air Transport fleet.

The UK's 2008 defence expenditure, at an estimated 2.3% of GDP, is above the 2% benchmark set by 2006 Ministerial Guidance. The proportion of that expenditure planned for procurement of major equipment, estimated at 23% in 2008, also exceeds the NATO 20% benchmark.

For more information go to –

<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/CorporatePublications/AnnualReports/MODAnnualReports0708/>

¹ The UK reporting year runs from April 1st.

² These figures will be confirmed in the 2009 NATO Usability Exercise