

[China encourages private sector participation in weapons development](#)

The equipment development department under the Central Military Commission Friday released a document on boosting military-civilian integration in weapons development.

The document introduced a set of measures to liberalize and regulate the weapons sector, including slashing restrictions on the types of arms that private firms are allowed to develop and piloting commercial services for military procurement in the aerospace industry.

Enterprises producing substandard products, violating confidentiality policies or in poor operation should be ineligible in weapons development, the document said.

[Press release: Flood protection options being presented to Yate and Chipping Sodbury](#)

The Environment Agency is holding a public consultation in Chipping Sodbury to explain how it plans to reduce flood risk to local homes and businesses.

The Environment Agency is keen for local people to share their views on its proposals and any experiences they have of local flooding.

The consultation will take place at the Town Hall on 1 March 2017 between 2.30pm and 7.30pm.

Fiona Geddes of the Environment Agency said:

This event is an ideal opportunity for people to study the flood alleviation options. There will be officers from the Environment Agency and South Gloucestershire Council on hand to explain the thinking behind each option and the steps people can take to prepare themselves against flooding.

We'd really like to hear the views of local residents and look forward to sharing ideas on how best to reduce flood risk in Yate and Chipping Sodbury.

The last major floods in Yate and Chipping Sodbury occurred in 1968. The Environment Agency estimates up to 100 homes and 40 businesses could be at risk of flooding from the River Frome and its tributaries. There's a 1 per cent chance of serious flooding each year. The risk is expected to increase as a result of higher river flows and climate change.

Flood warnings are issued to low-lying properties in both communities. In Yate these include:

- Bennetts Court
- Station Road
- Swan Field
- Treelease
- Orchard Close
- Milton Road
- Tyndale Avenue
- Celestine Road
- Blenheim Drive
- Whitley Close

In Chipping Sodbury the part of the town most at risk is the Blanchards Farm area.

Flooding occurs because the River Frome has insufficient capacity. Improvements have been made over the years alongside new developments in the river corridor, but these haven't kept pace with the growing flood risk. Surface water run-off from heavy rain has added to the flooding problem.

The Environment Agency has carried out a preliminary study that identifies 3 options: flood storage, river channel widening and property flood-proofing. As well as exploring each option separately, a combination of all 3 is also under consideration. This final, most expensive, combined option would increase the cost of the scheme to approximately £4 million. The cost of the individual options are £3.7 million, £300,000 and £100,000 respectively.

An earlier option that involved the construction of 1.8km of flood walls was rejected on the grounds of being too expensive (£10 million). It also raised sustainability concerns.

For a successful scheme to go ahead, any benefits must outweigh the costs. In addition to reducing flood risk to a significant number of homes and businesses, the final scheme should reduce flooding on 3 local roads (A432, B4569 and B4060) and prevent flood damages estimated at £10 million.

Flood storage schemes are an effective way of providing flood alleviation. The Environment Agency has built several in recent years. Examples include Tubbs Bottom, that reduces flood risk downstream of Yate and Bruton in Somerset. Schemes are also being considered for Taunton and Wrington near Bristol.

The Yate and Chipping Sodbury scheme is still in its early stages. The Environment Agency must carry out a more detailed study before selecting a

preferred option. It is hoped a scheme could be in place by 2021, but that will depend on the Environment Agency securing the necessary funding from the Government and other sources.

[News story: SJFHQ undertake valuable maritime familiarisation visit to HMNB Devonport](#)

Standing Joint Force Headquarters (SJFHQ) was established under the last Strategic Defence and Security Review and is a new deployable, operational 2* Joint Headquarters intended to command Joint forces in response to a crises or contingency worldwide.

SJFHQ personnel come from all 3 services and the purpose of the visit to [HMNB Devonport](#) was to widen the experience of SJFHQ staff from the [British Army](#) and the [Royal Air Force](#) in particular, so they can better appreciate the significant contribution the navy can play in any future operations. This will help them to plan more effectively and understand how the Royal Navy can best be utilised in SJFHQ led Joint operations.



Lt Col James Fuller, RM, briefs SJFHQ personnel on the capabilities of HMS

Bulwark. Crown Copyright/MOD 2017. All rights reserved

The team spent 2 days at HMNB Devonport, where they received briefs on a range of topics, from amphibious operations to naval logistics and the new [Type 26 Global Combat Ship](#). They toured the assault ship [HMS Bulwark](#) and travelled in Offshore Raiding Craft for a coxswain demonstration from [1 Assault Group Royal Marines](#). After a briefing from the Navy's Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) team, the SJFHQ team then split into groups to visit 2 vessels currently undergoing FOST training and assessments. The first group travelled to [HMS Duncan](#) and watched her crew on an air assault exercise, while the second watched a damage control exercise on Norwegian frigate HNOMS Otto Sverdrup.



SJFHQ personnel ready to experience a ride on Offshore Raiding Craft, courtesy of 1 Assault Group Royal Marines. Crown Copyright/MOD 2017. All rights reserved

Lt Col Nick Morton RA, SJFHQ, said:

As a Joint Headquarters, it's essential that we all have a good understanding of the capabilities and specialisms of each of the 3 branches of the armed forces, not just our own. Visiting Devonport has really helped me to develop and embed my knowledge of the Royal Navy and the reality of how it operates.

SJFHQ also has embedded staff officers from the UK's partner nations in the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Latvia,

Lithuania and Estonia, and the Anglo-French Combined Joint Expeditionary Force, several of whom took part in the visit. The visit to HNOMS Otto Sverdrup therefore also provided an opportunity to see a JEF partner nation in action.

Captain Peter Olive RN, Assistant Chief of Staff (Operate Branch), SJFHQ said:

Our visit was enormously valuable to the team, especially those from the army and RAF. It has really brought the Royal Navy to life for the staff and helped them to understand more about the limitations and difficulties of maritime operations, as well as the enormous benefits maritime power can provide to any future deployments.

Everyone here at HMNB Devonport and on HMS Bulwark, HMS Duncan and HNOMS Otto Sverdrup has been extremely helpful and accommodating, so thank you to them.

The visit followed an earlier familiarisation visit to the Army's Land Warfare Centre and plans are underway for a similar event with the RAF.

[News story: UK troops on NATO mission join Estonian national celebration](#)

Ahead of the deployment of 800 British troops to lead part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in Estonia, an advance team from 5th Battalion the Rifles already in country today joined the Estonia Independence Day Parade, marching through the capital of Tallinn to a crowd of thousands.

The event marks the Estonian Declaration of Independence in 1918, after Britain played a key role in helping the Estonians to gain their independence.

The UK and Estonia have a long history of working together across Defence, including standing side by side in Afghanistan, and next year marks 100 years since the earliest co-operation between the Royal Navy and Estonia.

In November 1918, to support the independence of the Baltic States, a Royal Navy Squadron was deployed to the region. This close relationship continues today, and in January this year, HMS Ramsey joined NATO's maritime group, commanded by ENS Admiral Cowan, an Estonian ship named after the Royal Navy commander in the Baltic in 1919.

The ENS Admiral Cowan, a former Royal Navy mine hunter, was formally handed

over to the Estonian Navy in 2007, and is now the lead vessel of its division.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Today's landmark in Estonia's history is an opportunity to celebrate our defence ties that stretch back over a century to when they gained independence.

Britain is playing a leading role in European security by deploying forces to Estonia, alongside our allies, to defend NATO.

Backed by a defence budget rising every year, our deployment will be defensive but fully combat capable, from armoured fighting vehicles to communications specialists who can deal with cyber threats.



Photo Source: EESTI KAITSEVAGI Credit:TKE

At the NATO Warsaw Summit last year, the UK committed to leading one of four battlegroups in NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic States and Poland. In addition to the 800 UK troops, France and Denmark will also deploy personnel to Estonia.

The main body of UK troops are due to arrive in April and will arrive with Warrior Armoured Fighting Vehicles and Challenger II tanks. British personnel have been exercising with Estonian, French and Danish colleagues in Germany

recently to prepare for the deployment. The UK will also be deploying troops to Poland in support of the US-led battlegroup there.

The Defence Secretary discussed the deployment with NATO Defence Ministers in Brussels recently and also called on NATO to modernise its structures to be able to deal more effectively with current and future threats, including the threats from terrorism and cyber.

Earlier this week, Colonel Giles Harris, Commander British Forces in Estonia, met with Prime Minister Juri Ratas, who personally welcomed him to Estonia. During their meeting Col Harris and the Prime Minister discussed the historic deployment of a multinational NATO contingent to the region.

Col Harris said:

It is great to have NATO troops parading here on Estonian Independence Day. It reminds us of our shared history and values.

Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid also attended the celebrations, which in addition to the parade, included a formal flag-raising ceremony at the Tall Hermann tower, wreath-laying at the Monument of War of Independence on Vabaduse Square, and a church service.



Photo Source: EESTI KAITSEVAGI Credit:TKE

To find out a bit more about the NATO enhanced Forward Presence mission, watch the short explainer video below:

[Jonathan Reynolds comment on RBS results](#)

Jonathan

Reynolds MP, Labour's Shadow City Minister, commenting on RBS's reported £7bn annual loss today, said:

"Today's results show RBS still has much to do to overcome the legacy of the financial crisis.

"Whilst the core banking business of RBS is improving, the financial burden caused by the errors of the past has generated a significant loss.

"British taxpayers have had to stump up huge support for RBS – they need to know that there has been a significant change in the regulation and culture of banking to prevent this happening again.

"The scale of the taxpayers' support also means there needs to be a conversation about what the long-term future of RBS should look like, to best protect the public's money."