

# Speech: RUSI Landwarfare Conference

## INTRODUCTION

### CONSTANT COMPETITION

It's a great pleasure to be here and to return as the Defence Secretary.

I have a slightly strange record in that this is the fourth time in three years I've been appointed for this job.

Truly, as our conference theme reminds us, we are living in an age of constant competition!

Yet, if we really want to understand what the phrase means, we need to take a step back.

100 years ago our main dangers came from rival nations threatening us with conventional war.

The Army was expected to play a pivotal role fighting at close range.

It did so with unprecedented courage amidst the mud and blood of monumental battles such as Passchendaele which we will commemorate shortly.

But the Cold War introduced another level of threat – the shocking prospect of nuclear war.

Our deterrent relied not just on nuclear submarines, or NATO partnerships, but also we shouldn't forget the physical presence of our troops, ranging ever ready along the frontiers of the iron curtain.

Yet globalisation and the relentless advance of technology are today posing our nations a very different set of problems.

We have state aggressors like Russia testing our allies along Europe's eastern border using proxies to destabilise Ukraine and annex Crimea and deploying hybrid means to undermine democracy in countries far and wide.

And then we have non-state actors.

Those lacking the power to threaten our nation as a whole, but intent on causing us as much carnage as possible as we've seen so recently – in Westminster, Manchester, London Bridge and Finsbury Park.

And we have anonymous cyber foes – often sponsored by state or non-state entities, lurking behind a veil of encryption targeting our national infrastructure as we saw with the recent cyber strike on Parliament.

That is not a Cold War.

It is a grey war. Permanently teetering on the edge of outright hostility.

Persistently hovering around the threshold of what we wouldn't normally consider acts of war.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR LAND POWER**

What does that mean for land power?

We will still look to you to seize and hold territory to fight in close proximity with...and among the population since our willingness to employ land power is critical to our deterrent.

Yet the question is neither about how or when we respond with appropriate force since we will do so at a time and in the manner of our choosing.

Instead the real question is how we retain enough room for manoeuvre, as equipment costs escalate and the demands, from a multitude of diverse, complex and concurrent dangers, grow.

And my thesis today is that the only way our armies can prepare for the battlefields of tomorrow is by placing innovation and adaptability at their core.

## **INVESTMENT**

That will require investment.

We've chosen in UK to spend on bigger, bolder defence, increasing our budget year on year...at 0.5 per cent ahead of inflation.

In 2016 our forces received some £35bn.

This year it will be £36bn.

And next year it will be £37bn.

But having more money doesn't mean we can do everything we want

It has always been, it always will be a question of prioritisation.

Thanks to the delegated model Service Chiefs have responsibility, accountability and authority for their own budgets.

And I know that the Army feels incentivised to review its processes and structures to find more efficient, smarter and more productive, ways of doing things so they can reinvest in new projects to keep us on the cutting edge.

At the same time, the Service Chiefs know that delivering some programmes will be contingent on making efficiency savings.

This helps us focus so, by the time, we reach our Annual Budget Cycle we are concentrating not on the nice-to-haves but having more money for the things we need the most.

And thanks to those decisions we now have a much clearer sense of the things

that really matter:

## 1. PLATFORMS

First, platforms.

The history of landwarfare is punctuated by moments of brilliance, instances where innovation and imagination changed the course of operations.

So the longbow, became the musket, became the machine gun.

The chariot gave way to the cavalryman.

And then a century ago at Cambrai the tank reached the Hindenburg line, triggering another revolution in warfare.

So today we're using our £178bn equipment programme as the catalyst for a further step-change in capability as we introduce Ajax.

Ajax is more than just a piece of armour.

Ajax is an Information Age sensor. Able to Hoover up data from the ground and air for miles around. Capable of detecting the invisible signs of cyber disturbance. Able to offer a more complete picture of an increasingly dispersed battle space, while co-ordinating our response with the wider force.

And AJAX isn't the only bit of capability we're bringing on line.

We are using our rising budget to invest in a whole raft of high-tech capability, unmanned aerial systems, autonomous vehicles and Apache attack helicopters.

Today I'm delighted to announce we have awarded a £48m six-year contract extension with Aviation Training International, to enable our ground crews to master all there is to know about this mighty flying machine. From avionics and armaments, to refuelling and rearming.

In a couple of months' time we will be showcasing some of this next generation kit at DSEI.

These investments are not just about replacing old kit.

We now are buying equipment that gives us far more bang for our buck.

In a data driven era investment in vehicles of course must go hand in hand with an investment in networks

That's why we're enormously augmenting our processing power to handle the massive upload of new information

We've already taken the first step.

We are investing in MORPHEUS, a next-generation tactical communication and

information system that will give us faster and easier connectivity.

In the longer-term, our Land environment tactical command and information system will eventually connect all of our sensors and systems.

## **2. PEOPLE**

Of course, great kit alone doesn't guarantee an agile and adaptable Army.

So the second major investment has to be in people.

Before I continue I want to say that our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of Corporals Matthew Hatfield and Darren Neilson of the Royal Tank Regiment who died after a live firing exercise in Castlemartin on 14th June, and the other two soldiers who were injured in the same deeply sad incident.

The investigation is on-going but we are determined to get to the bottom of this tragic accident because our people are our greatest asset.

That's why we remain committed to maintaining the overall size of the Armed Forces and an Army capable of fielding a warfighting division.

Mass will always be a vital part of our deterrence.

So we will maintain an Army that remains one of the very few nations in the world capable of fielding that warfighting Division.

And when it comes to Reserves our confidence in our Reserves plans is reflected by the fact that the Infrastructure and Projects Authority has recently taken the Army Reserves Programme off its books – the only programme to be so assured in the last 5 years.

But, in a more competitive labour marketplace, it becomes even harder to retain, retrain and recruit the right people with the right mix of skills.

So let me say a word on each of these.

On retention – our flexible engagement reforms championed by Sir Nicholas Carter...are key. Our new legislation will be published tomorrow.

We are going to make it easier for personnel to temporarily change the nature of their service, to give them a chance to work part-time or be temporarily protected from deployment to support an individual's personal circumstances where operational need allows. That's retention.

On to training.

The battle for information and influence will increasingly matter, so our soldiers will need to have a raft of new skills.

Becoming more adept at crunching the data churned out by their equipment.

More aware of what that information means.

More able to make swifter, better informed decisions

And we will need to increase our training in counter reconnaissance, because the information environment is far from being a passive space is now a hotly contested battleground, where we are constantly competing to correct the false narrative of our adversaries with a faster truth.

For that to happen, the Army will need to keep adapting its structures.

We're starting today.

I can announce that we are now bringing the Royal Signals and Intelligence Corps together under a shared command.

The Intelligence Corps off course packages, collates and analyses vital information on the battlefield.

The Royal Corps of Signals provides the state-of-the-art technology to disseminate information quickly, in an agile way.

Working together those two Corps will bring a laser-like focus and co-ordination to our cyber efforts.

That's retention and retraining, finally to recruitment.

There is a challenge here that I want to set before this conference.

We know we will need to reach out to the brilliant brains of tomorrow

Those who put apps above artillery, who pride brains above bayonets.

We know we have to maintain the Army as an attractive proposition for those who might not have normally considered a military career – the cyber geeks and tech wizards.

The question is how do we attract that element in the new generation?

Let me put forward a few initial thoughts to frame your discussions.

We'll need to do more with our Reservists, more with our Whole Force of civilians and industrialists because they bring a fresh injection of new ideas, new approaches and outside expertise.

Second, we must also be more open to challenge from the younger generation

The Army is an institution. rightly reveres its great traditions but when they tell us, for example, that there are savvier ways for us communicate – let's listen.

I'm glad that in the earlier session we laid down a marker here by inviting our juniors delegates to come up and show us a thing or two.

### 3. PARTNERSHIPS

My final point is that an agile Army of the future requires strong partnerships sharing the burden of complex global challenges.

Our 2015 SDSR set us the challenge of becoming more international-by-design.

So, even as we step back from the political framework of EU, you will find us sticking by that plan and stepping up to confront those global challenges.

That's why we will strengthen our commitment to NATO, the cornerstone of defence.

By increasing our budget year on year, we're not just about fielding a division but to put our troops at the service of the Alliance.

Currently, the Army is heading up NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Taskforce.

A couple of weeks ago I saw it in action in Romania, partnering with 14 other nations in Exercise Noble Jump.

At the same time, our troops are leading our Enhanced Forward Presence in Estonia and Poland.

By the end of this month we'll have 10,000 soldiers supporting the NATO Alliance in one way or another.

Yet our efforts here show how we're getting smarter as we adapt to the new era of competition.

We are not just using training and exercises to get our people in shape, but to deliver strategic effects

Messages of reassurance to our allies.

Messages of deterrence to our adversaries.

But if we want to be really smart we have to be able to spot a crisis before it turns into a catastrophe.

Or better still before it even arises.

That's why we're creating those Specialised Infantry teams.

Invested with specialist skills relevant to different parts of the globe.

There to sense danger, to provide early warning, to build the partnerships that head off trouble down the track.

And for proof of our commitment to keep reaching out you only need to look around the room.

This might be a UK land warfare conference, but we have here a huge number of guests drawn from our allies around the world.

You're very welcome.

## **PUBLIC**

So platforms, people and partnerships are the key to us, the agile edge we need in this era of constant competition.

But we need to take the public with us on this journey.

Since the end of our Afghanistan and Iraq fighting campaigns, the public no longer has the same level of awareness about what our Armies are up to.

As the threats become ever greyer and murkier, as our responses necessarily become sometimes more opaque, as our adversaries become ever more effective at using misinformation to play upon public fears, it's all the more incumbent on us to shine the light of transparency.

On this new greyer dawn, reassuring people that we're on the case, showing them we do have the means to respond, that there is not simply a cost but a real value to what we do.

That's why the public discourse, why open debate and why conferences such as this are so vital.

## **CONCLUSION**

A century ago, after years of stalemate, that Mark IV tank burst through the Hindenberg Line.

An event that wouldn't just lead to the Allied Armies winning the war but to war itself being transformed.

Today we are living in an age of instability, an age of constant competition.

But the answer is for our Armies keep adapting, to keep becoming truly agile.

## **ENDS**

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## **[Press release: Defence Secretary announces £48 million Apache training contract](#)**

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon today announced a six-year £48 million Apache helicopter training contract at the annual Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) Land Warfare Conference.

This investment in Apache air and ground crew will support around 70 jobs in Dorset, Hampshire and Suffolk with Aviation Training International Ltd (ATIL). Around 700 Army personnel will go through the training scheme per year, including around 50 pilots and 400 ground crew.

While addressing the challenges which face today's armies, the Defence Secretary also announced new measures to meet global information and cyber threats by bolstering and reorganising the Army's Royal Corps of Signals and Intelligence Corps.

The Royal Signals will receive an additional regiment to enhance its cyber capabilities, so it can distribute information rapidly and effectively; while the Intelligence Corps will be organised to focus on counter-intelligence, security, and cultural understanding.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

This £48 million contract will support UK jobs and provide world-class Apache training for our personnel. The Apache is a vital part of the British Army's fighting force that is helping to keep this country safe.

We are also preparing our forces for the battlefields of tomorrow in an era of complex global challenges by ensuring our formidable Signals and Intelligence Corps are ready for the information warfare of the 21st Century.

This investment is only possible thanks to a rising defence budget and a drive for efficiency and innovation which will help our Armed Forces stay at the cutting edge.

The Land Warfare Conference is the annual forum for Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Nicholas Carter, to discuss the global challenges facing land forces. This year's theme is Using Land Power Decisively in an Era of Constant Competition.

Yesterday, General Carter opened the conference with discussion about the value and future of land power in a changing, increasingly complex world. He challenged the conference to address issues of information warfare, recruitment training, and innovation to keep land forces relevant on the 21st Century battlefield.

General Sir Nicholas Carter said:

The global strategic context is complex and dynamic; indeed its defining condition seems to be one of instability. The pervasiveness of information is changing the character of conflict opening new ways for state and non-state adversaries to exploit ambiguity, blurring the boundaries of peace and war.



This conference has seen an impressive group of panel chairs, speakers and serving personnel tackling some of the key issues surrounding the utility of land power in this era of constant competition.

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## Speech: Defence Secretary's speech at Cyber 2017 Chatham House Conference

Good afternoon, and thank you again to Chatham House for putting on this very timely event at a timely moment. Last Friday we saw the United Kingdom hit by yet another cyber attack, this time directed against our Parliamentary IT facilities.

Investigations so far have found that the hackers were attempting to carry out a sustained and determined attack on all parliamentary user accounts in an attempt to identify weak passwords and to gain access to users' emails.

Immediate steps have been taken to address that particular problem.

It has meant that some Members of Parliament and staff have been temporarily unable to access their email accounts outside of Westminster.

As MPs, some have been unable to answer constituents' emails on a Sunday, and we've had to live with that.

Since then, the National Cyber Security Centre has been working around the clock with our UK Parliamentary Digital service to understand the nature of the attack, to contain it, and to put in place mitigation measures to prevent possible future breaches.

Now, this latest attack is far away from being an isolated incident.

It follows hot on the heels of the Wannacry virus that didn't just shut down NHS operating theatres, but in the end affected more than 200,000 people over 150 different countries.

So here was yet more evidence that cyber is a truly global phenomenon, evidence that has been piling up following the attacks on Germany's lower house of Parliament.

Bulgaria has also suffered, and I quote from them, according to their President, "the heaviest and most intense cyber attack...conducted in south-east Europe."

And of course, there have been attacks on America, with

the United States Office of the Director of National Intelligence concluding that Russia had targeted the Presidential election.

I quote, its “intelligence services conducted cyber operations against targets associated with the 2016 US presidential election, including targets associated with both major US political parties.”

All these attacks point to our adversaries becoming more diverse, becoming better at what they do, and becoming more adept at using virtual attacks to inflict very real damage.

One in five British businesses has been hacked by cyber criminals in the last year according to the British Chambers of Commerce.

Analysts put the cost to our economy already in the billions, while it's been estimated that the United States lose up to 3 per cent of GDP to Intellectual Property theft.

For the military, the consequences of cyber disruption are equally devastating.

Reuters has reported that Russia used malware implants on Android devices to track and target Ukrainian artillery.

That's why back in the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review we put cyber up there with terror and major natural hazards as a Tier One threat to this country.

To date, alarming as some these attacks have been, our people have proved equal to the task of defending against them.

Fewer than 1 per cent of the 9,000 email accounts on the parliamentary network were compromised.

But there is absolutely no complacency here.

We are investing a huge chunk of money – some £1.9bn – into boosting our cyber security

And Defence, in particular, has a three-fold role to play in this national cyber security effort.

## **Keeping our house in order**

First and foremost, we're keeping our digital house in order.

We're not just working closely with the National Cyber Security Centre to ensure that our military and civilian systems are robust.

We have networks of information risk and asset owners embedded in our organisation to properly police data and to deal with problems.

And we are encouraging all our staff to observe good cyber etiquette.

They must now complete mandatory information handling refresher training annually and they must take personal responsibility for their data.

We're also doing more to recruit the cyber savvy.

There's our cyber reservists, experts from industry and academia who are putting their high tech skills at the service of the nation by weeding out network vulnerabilities.

At the same time, we're building up a new 21st century Cyber Corps, a band of expert volunteers, leaders in industry, who are going to advise us on how to keep ahead in the cyber space race.

Finally, cyber is becoming now a core part of our military training.

In January, we will open a dedicated state-of-the-art Defence Cyber School at Shrivenham, bringing together all our military joint cyber training into one place.

And we look forward to that first class of 2018 emerging with the digital X-factor to transform our future cyber capability.

## **Creating a culture of resilience**

Second, the interconnected nature of the web, the way it blurs the boundaries between military and civilian, between public and private, means we all have a responsibility to look after ourselves online.

A stronger password here, a Windows update there, and we would have stood an even better chance of warding off the Parliamentary and Wannacry attacks. So my second point is that the MOD has a key role to play in contributing to a culture of resilience.

That's why we set up the Defence Cyber Partnership Programme (DCPP) to ensure that companies with whom we have defence contracts are properly protecting themselves and meeting a host of cyber security standards.

## **Strengthening our deterrence**

But there's a third way in which we can protect our national infrastructure, and that's by strengthening our deterrence.

So we're using our rising budget to invest our £178bn in full spectrum capability, from carriers to Ajax armoured vehicles, fifth generation F35 to the latest UAVs, signalling to potential cyber strikers that the price of an online attack could invite a response from any domain, air, land, sea or cyber space.

And when it comes to the latter, we're making sure that offensive cyber is now an integral part of our arsenal.

We now have the skills to expose cyber criminals, to them hunt down and to prosecute them, to respond in kind to any assault at a time of our choosing.

Our National Offensive Cyber Planning allows us to integrate cyber into all our military operations.

And I can confirm that we are now using offensive cyber routinely in the war against Daesh, not only in Iraq but also in the campaign to liberate Raqqa and other towns on the Euphrates.

Offensive cyber there is already beginning to have a major effect on degrading Daesh's capabilities.

We're determined as a coalition to maintain our advantage in this arena and that is why we are investing with our allies in the sort of kit capable of data use.

To help create a picture of the virtual battlefield we have recently here in the United Kingdom launched a multimillion pound competition to develop machine learning algorithms and Artificial Intelligence which will assimilate this wealth of new data and will free up our personnel to deliver a more coordinated, targeted response.

The first contracts from that investment have already been awarded to a variety of UK suppliers including from academia and innovative micro-scale businesses and other SMEs, all of whom are working on a range of solutions from rapid sensor integration to predictive cognitive control systems.

## **International partnerships**

Cyber deterrence is obviously stronger when we stand together with our like-minded allies.

And that's why we're working hard, in particular, to get NATO, the bedrock of our security, to do more to defend effectively online.

At last year's Warsaw summit we achieved a breakthrough in getting the Alliance to recognise cyber as a distinctive domain of operations.

We also succeeded in persuading NATO nations to sign the cyber pledge, committing Allies to enhance their national defences as a priority and to strengthen their capability, collectively and individually, to resist cyber attacks in any form.

There remains work to be done to share our data to deal with major incidents together and to improve the underlying infrastructure of the Internet.

At the same time, we will also need new doctrine to clarify our response within NATO to anonymous cyber activity which often takes place now in that grey zone below the previously understood threshold of war.

And all the while we are developing the effects, covert and overt, cognitive

and physical, to help provide a proportionate response to those cyber attacks.

But Alliance effectiveness in the virtual world would be immeasurably enhanced if national capabilities were made ready to deploy in support of NATO operations.

So having honed our own UK pioneering cyber techniques against Daesh in Iraq and Syria, I can confirm today that United Kingdom is ready to become one of the first NATO members to publicly offer such support to NATO operations as and when required.

### ### Conclusion

So let me say in conclusion that cyber is a serious problem. It is a growing problem.

But my message to you is that Government here and Defence, in particular, is on the case.

Over the next few years we're going to be redoubling our efforts to strengthen our resilience against our adversaries, to strengthen our hand against our cyber adversaries and to ensure those who mean to do our country harm, offline or online, have nowhere to hide.

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## [News story: Nation's flagship takes to sea for the first time](#)

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

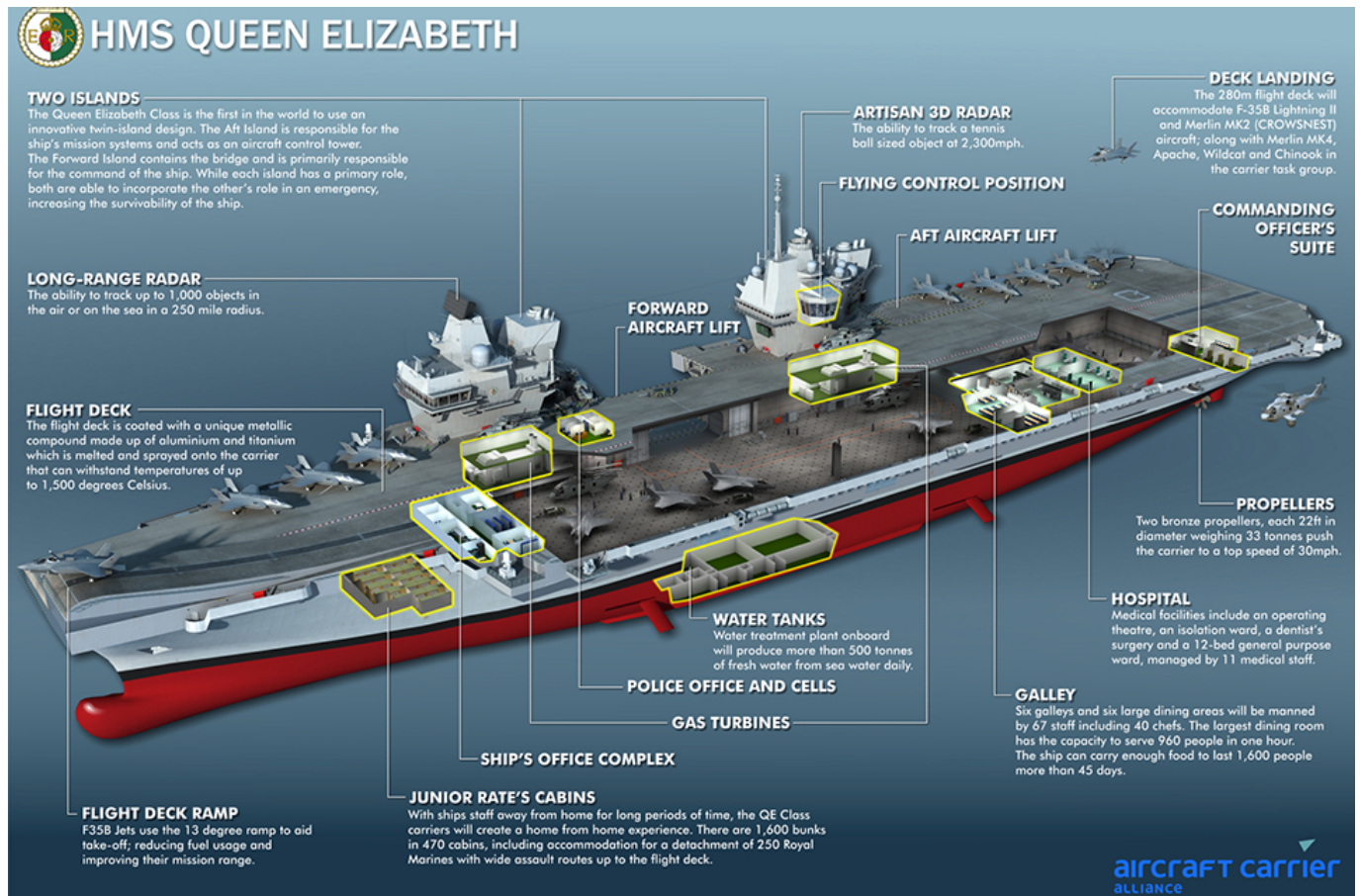
This is a historic moment for the UK as our new aircraft carrier takes to sea for the very first time. This floating fortress is by far the most powerful ship ever built in Britain that will enable us to tackle multiple and changing threats across the globe.

HMS Queen Elizabeth is an enduring example of British imagination, ingenuity, invention that will help keep us safe for decades to come. She is built by the best, crewed by the best and will deliver for Britain.

For the next fifty years she will deploy around the world, demonstrating British power and our commitment to confronting the emerging challenges from a dangerous world. The whole country can be proud of this national

achievement.

Three years after she was officially named by Her Majesty The Queen, the Nation's future flagship will spend an initial period of around six weeks at sea to test the fundamentals of the ship. The sea trials will monitor speed, manoeuvrability, power and propulsion as well as undertaking weapons trials and additional tests on her levels of readiness.



Key facts and figures. Crown Copyright

Following this initial period, HMS Queen Elizabeth will return to Rosyth for further testing and maintenance before heading back to sea for a second stage which aims to test her Mission Systems. She will transit to her home port of Portsmouth Naval Base to be handed over to the Royal Navy later this year.

Admiral Sir Philip Jones First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff said:

This is a hugely significant moment for the Royal Navy, for all our Armed Forces and for our island nation. Once in service HMS Queen Elizabeth will be the largest aircraft carrier in the world outside the United States, and the first designed from the outset to operate a fifth generation aircraft.

Already this ship represents the best of the UK's industrial and engineering expertise, and once in service she will symbolise our military power and authority in the world for

decades to come. There is still much work to do between now and then, but be in no doubt: a new era of British maritime power is about to begin.

HMS Queen Elizabeth is the largest and most powerful warship ever constructed for the Royal Navy. The ship will operate with a crew of approximately 700, increasing to the full complement of 1,600 when aircraft are in operation. The Ship's Company moved on board earlier this month. Working alongside industry colleagues, they have been familiarising themselves with the new ship and the high tech systems on board as well as undergoing training.

Jon Pearson, Ship Delivery Director HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH said:

The QE Class programme demonstrates our pride and commitment to deliver these highly capable aircraft carriers to the Royal Navy.

The departure of HMS Queen Elizabeth marks an exciting stage in the programme and is the first real opportunity to put the carrier's outstanding capability to the test, demonstrating the best of British engineering and manufacturing.

HMS Queen Elizabeth's sister ship, HMS Prince of Wales is structurally complete and is currently in the outfitting phase of her programme. The Class will be the centrepiece of Britain's maritime capability. Each aircraft carrier, coupled with the F-35B Lightning aircraft, will form an integral part of the UK's Carrier Strike capability. The vessels will transform the UK's ability to project power around the World, whether independently or working closely with our allies, on operations ranging from high intensity warfighting to providing humanitarian aid and disaster relief.

Images and video files can be downloaded [here](#)

The aircraft carriers HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH and HMS PRINCE OF WALES are being delivered by the Aircraft Carrier Alliance, a unique partnering relationship between BAE Systems, Thales UK, Babcock and the Ministry of Defence.

A national endeavour, at its peak the programme directly employed 10,000 people across six build yards. While manufacturing and commissioning is now solely focused in Rosyth, the skilled and diverse workforce is sourced from across the country.

## Key Facts

- Each carrier weighs 65,000 tonnes
- Each carrier is 280 metres in length
- Top speed is upwards of 25 knots
- The carriers will have a crew complement of c.700, increasing to c.1,600

when a full complement of 36 F-35B aircraft and four Crowsnest helicopters are embarked

- The flight deck is 70 metres wide and 280 metres long – enough space for three football pitches
- Each carrier keeps 45 days' worth of food in its stores.
- Each carrier is made up of 17 million parts
- There are 364,000 metres of pipes inside each of the Ships
- 51 million hours have been spent designing and building the Queen Elizabeth Class.
- The entire Ship's Company can be served a meal within 90 minutes, 45 minutes when at action station
- The QE Class aircraft carriers are the first Royal Navy vessels to have piped oxygen within the medical complex

## **Key efficiencies include:**

- Highly mechanised weapons handling system: At the push of a button pallets of munitions can be moved from the magazines deep in the weapons preparation area to the flight deck where they can be loaded onto aircraft.
- Storage: The location and design of the storage facilities enable 20 people only half a day to replenish the ship's stores.
- Visual surveillance system: 220 cameras allow monitoring of engine and machinery spaces, external catwalk, aircraft hangars, ship entrances and access to classified areas.
- Galley: Technologically advanced equipment and layout of the galley makes maintenance and service more efficient. The entire crew can be served meals in 90 minutes and 45 minute when at action stations.

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## **News story: A record Armed Forces Day celebrated across the country**

A record 300 plus events including parades, military displays and community fetes are taking place right across the country to say thank you to the Armed Forces community for the outstanding work they do; Sailors, Soldiers, Airmen and women, both Regulars and Reservists are being recognised alongside the wider defence family such as Cadets and veterans past and present.

Today the National Event was held in Liverpool attended by His Royal Highness The Earl of Wessex representing The Queen and the Royal Family.

Prime Minister Theresa May, who attended the event, said:

Our world-leading Armed Forces work day and night to defend our country and our way of life, both at home and abroad.



In the aftermath of the Manchester attack, military personnel played a vital role on UK streets, providing visible reassurance to our communities. And further afield they continue to take the fight to Daesh in Iraq and Syria, helping to drive the terrorists back and give ordinary people in those countries the chance to rebuild their lives.

I am proud to have attended the Armed Forces Day celebrations in the great city of Liverpool this year, joining thousands of people in expressing our gratitude to the men and women who do so much to preserve our freedom.

Other guests in Liverpool included Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon, Vice Chief of the Defence Staff General Sir Gordon Messenger, Mayor of Liverpool Joe Anderson, hundreds of Service personnel, Cadets, veterans and thousands of members of the general public.

Defence Secretary Sir Michael Fallon said:

Today is a valuable opportunity to give something back to the Armed Forces community, which works so hard to keep us safe each and every day.

We have much to thank them for. In the last few years alone, our Armed Forces have fought Daesh terrorism, rescued thousands of migrants in the Mediterranean and helped protect us here at home.

I commend Liverpool for a spectacular event and thank organisers across the country for their efforts to mark Armed Forces Day.

The National Event began at 11am, with gun salutes heralding the start of the parade from St George's Hall, accompanied by a flypast from an RAF Typhoon and ending with a flypast from the Red Arrows. The military villages then opened and visitors enjoyed an afternoon of exciting displays along the Pier Head including planes, helicopters, diving tanks, inflatable boats, tanks, a field hospital, simulators and marching bands. The Royal Navy's type-23 frigate HMS Iron Duke has been docked in the city for the celebrations.

Later in Liverpool there were due to be flypasts by a Royal Navy Wildcat helicopter and the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. Gun runs, Dragon boat racing and spectacular closing performance of Beat Retreat.

Liverpool's Assistant Mayor and Cabinet Member for Culture, Tourism and Events, Councillor Wendy Simon, said:

What an incredible event! It truly is a day of celebration, and from the start it has been a sea of colour and sound – a fantastic

spectacle for everyone. It was wonderful to see serving personnel, side by side with cadets and veterans marching through Liverpool, cheered on by the crowds lining the streets.

This city has risen the occasion and I'm delighted to say we are giving the armed forces the 'thank you' they deserve.

As well as the national event in Liverpool, significant events have been organised across the country including in Caerphilly, Plymouth, Bangor (Northern Ireland) and Edinburgh. A number of smaller events from fetes to film screenings will take place, some of which will be held as far afield as the Falkland Islands and Cyprus.

UK Armed Forces are currently involved in over 20 operations in more than 25 countries, from South Sudan to Iraq. But many of those back at home will be in attendance at events across the country.

Also present will be many veterans that make-up the estimated 2.56 million Armed Forces veteran community living in the UK. Young Cadets will be present too; together the Sea, Army, and Air cadets have almost 100,000 members, many of which will be at events up and down the country.

UK businesses have showed their support too. The Royal Mail is postmarking Saturday's mail with "Armed Forces Day 24 June 2017", supermarket chain Morrisons is offering free drinks to Service Personnel and Toby Carvery are offering a free meal.