



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

<b>Reference Code:</b>	2021/45/121
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs
<b>Accession Conditions:</b>	Open
<b>Copyright:</b>	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

775/2

IMMEDIATE

(19)

SECURE FAX NO. 775

TO: HQ FROM: Belfast  
FOR: D. Donoghue FROM: Nason  
DATE: 23 July, 1991

I attach text of Secretary for Defence's statement ("Britain's Army for the 90s") as received from British side.

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE: BRITAIN'S ARMY FOR  
THE 90s

With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the restructuring of the Army.

For more than 40 years the British Army has stood in the front line in Europe with our NATO allies. For more than 40 years we have had to maintain, even in peacetime, very substantial force levels on the continent of Europe, against the risk of a massive surprise attack across a wide front by the huge military strength of the Warsaw Pact.

But suddenly, after all these years of confrontation, the Warsaw Pact has collapsed; East Germany is no more; and Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and others all seek closer links with the West. Only last week in London at the G7 Summit, President Gorbachev came, not as an adversary, but in search of support for his economic reforms.

Nonetheless, tensions and risks remain and the Soviet Union is still the largest military power in Europe. That underlines the importance of maintaining the NATO Alliance.

NATO's strategy for the Cold War was built on deterrence and strong defence. NATO's new strategy is to sustain these policies that have served us so well, but to achieve them within lower levels of forces, which will be more flexible and mobile.

NATO's decisions in May opened the way for us to make changes to our own force structure. Since the greatest threat previously came in the Central Region in Europe, it was on Germany that the major part of our army was focused and it is from this area that the largest part of our reductions now comes.

775/4

NATO decided in May that the UK should join and lead the new multi-national Rapid Reaction Corps. This challenging role is welcomed by the Army and well suited to our all volunteer professional forces. In addition to providing the Commander and a significant proportion of the Headquarters we shall also be providing some Corps troops, a powerful armoured division based in Germany, a more flexible, mechanised division based in the UK and a strong air-mobile brigade based in a separate multi-national division.

This NATO decision was the essential component in deciding the future strength of the Army and enabled me to announce on 4th June that by the mid-1990's the strength of the Army would be 116,000. In deciding this, we also took account of our needs for the direct defence of the United Kingdom; for responsibilities overseas in our dependent territories and elsewhere; and to help the Royal Ulster Constabulary to uphold the law in Northern Ireland.

It was then possible to start consulting widely within the Army on how the restructuring should be achieved. I would now like to report to the House on the outcome of this consultation.

I turn first to the supporting Corps, often less noticed but which play a vital role in the fighting effectiveness of our Army.

We have already announced our plans covering personnel and administration. We will be bringing together in a new Adjutant General's Corps the Royal Army Pay Corps, the Womens Royal Army Corps, the Royal Military Police, the Military Provost Staff Corps, the Royal Army Education Corps and the Army Legal Corps.

We now intend to concentrate the support functions into two new Corps. The first, for service support, will comprise much of the existing Royal Corps of Transport, the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, the Royal Pioneer Corps and the Army Catering Corps, and will handle all aspects for keeping combat forces supplied in the field. The second, responsible for equipment support, will be centred upon the

775/5

existing Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. The effect of these changes will be to reduce the number of support Corps from 18 to 10.

There are ten Army Districts in the United Kingdom each commanded by a General. This number will be significantly reduced; as a first step, a new combined Wales and Western District will form in September replacing three existing Districts. We shall also rationalise the Army's training organisation, concentrating training on a much smaller number of larger and more efficient establishments.

We are anxious to manage this reduction of more than 40,000 in the Army over the next four years in the most considerate and fair manner. Most of the reductions will be achieved by natural turnover, but there will be significant redundancies particularly affecting middle rank officers and senior NCOs. As far as possible, we shall seek voluntary redundancies but some may need to be compulsory if we are to maintain a proper balance of ages, ranks and skills in the Army for the 90's. The normal redundancy terms will apply; all those leaving the Army will have access to full resettlement assistance. My Rt hon friend the Minister for the Armed Forces is giving details of redundancies in the other Services in a separate Written Answer today.

I turn now to a subject that concerns both those leaving and those continuing to serve in the Army. Under this Government there has, over the last decade, been a major extension of home ownership, including new forms of co-ownership and part-ownership, made available through new organisations in the voluntary housing sector. These developments have not been matched by new opportunities for Service personnel. The proportion of home owners in the Army is on the whole low. We intend to make comparable changes in the housing opportunities open to Servicemen and women, and to bring Service housing policy up to date with developments in the community.

775/6

This Government has always ensured that Service personnel are properly rewarded for the work they do. We also wish Servicemen and women to have the best possible insurance cover for serious injury as well as death, off duty as well as on; and we are planning new initiatives to bring such arrangements within the reach of all our Services.

I turn now to reserves. Our volunteer and other reserves will continue to make a vital contribution to our defence effort. They too will need to adapt to changes in the Army as a whole and have regard to how many they can realistically expect to recruit and retain given the unfavourable demographic trends. We have taken no final decisions on the Territorial Army, and we do not wish to turn away willing volunteers, but we envisage that the long term future strength will settle at between about 60 and 65,000 against 75,000 today. We are studying the best mix of regulars and reserves and we are consulting with the Territorial Army Associations - I hope to make further announcements on the way ahead for the TA later this year.

Turning to the changes in front line forces. I deal first with the particular issue of the Gurkhas. In May 1989, my Rt Hon Friend the member for Ayr announced the plan to retain some 4,000 Gurkhas following withdrawal from Hong Kong. But he also made clear it might be necessary to reconsider this if circumstances changed, such as the size of the British Army as a whole. This is now the position and we have reviewed our plans for the Brigade along with those for the rest of the Army. The Gurkhas play an important role in Hong Kong and Brunei. We intend to retain Gurkhas within the British Army after 1992, but we believe, subject again to any major changes in circumstances, that a smaller force of around 2,500 based on two infantry battalions and support units would be more appropriate. As a first step, two battalions will amalgamate in 1992.



Reductions in the combat arms will reflect the needs of the new force structure. There will, for example, be no change to the present number of six Army Air Corps regiments, reflecting the increased importance of the armed helicopter on the future battlefield. By the mid-1990's there will be 11 armoured or armoured reconnaissance regiments compared with 19 today. ~~The Army will reduce from 50 United Kingdom and 5 Gurkha infantry battalions to 46 and 4 respectively by the end of 1992 and progressively thereafter until by 1997 there will be a total of 38 battalions of which 2 will be Gurkha. Together with the three Royal Marine Commandos we shall then have available a total of 41 infantry roled units.~~

The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment will remain unchanged and The Life Guards and The Blues and Royals will form a combined armoured reconnaissance regiment retaining their separate identities. In the Royal Armoured Corps, the 1st Queen's Dragoon Guards, The Royal Scots Dragoon Guards and the 9/12 Royal Lancers will be unaffected.

The six regiments of Hussars will amalgamate to form three regiments, the two regiments of Lancers will amalgamate and the four Royal Tank Regiments will amalgamate to form two regiments.

The Royal Regiment of Artillery will reduce from 22 regiments to 16, the Corps of Royal Engineers will reduce from 15 regiments to 10 and the Royal Corps of Signals will reduce from 15 regiments to 11.

Turning to the infantry we plan to make changes over the next 4 years as follows. In accordance with precedent, the second battalion of each of the Grenadier, Coldstream and Scots Guards will be placed in suspended animation. The Irish and Welsh Guards are not affected. The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, The Royal Anglian Regiment, The Light Infantry and The Royal Green Jackets will all reduce from three battalions to two. The Queen's Regiment will amalgamate with The Royal Hampshire Regiment and form a

775/8

regiment of two battalions. The Parachute Regiment is unchanged.

Within the Prince of Wales' Division recruiting from Wales, the Midlands and the West Country, The Cheshire Regiment will amalgamate with The Staffordshire Regiment; and The Gloucestershire Regiment with The Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment. The following will be unaffected:

The Devonshire and Dorset Regiment

The Royal Welch Fusiliers

The Royal Regiment of Wales

The Worcestershire and Sherwood Foresters Regiment.

In Scotland,

Queen's Own Highlanders and The Gordon Highlanders will Amalgamate as will The Royal Scots and The Kings Own Scottish Borderers. The Royal Highland Fusiliers, The Black Watch, and The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders are unchanged.

In the King's Division we are taking the opportunity to bring the Ulster Defence Regiment more fully into the Army by merging it with The Royal Irish Rangers. The new regiment will comprise one battalion for world wide service and up to seven battalions for service in Northern Ireland only; its recommended title is the Royal Irish Regiment.



775/9

In the remainder of the King's Division covering the North of England,

The King's Own Royal Border Regiment,  
The King's Regiment,  
The Prince of Wales' Own Regiment of Yorkshire,  
The Green Howards,  
The Queen's Lancashire Regiment and  
The Duke of Wellington's Regiment are unchanged

Mr Speaker, the restructuring of the Army along the lines I have described has inevitably required painful choices and difficult decisions. While there are no actual disbandments in the armoured or infantry regiments, nonetheless I recognise that there will be sadness at the amalgamations and at the possible loss of some famous names. Everyone who recognises the great benefits that flow from regimental loyalty and tradition understands that, but also understands that, as with amalgamations in the past, that same spirit is carried forward into the reformed regiments. That has been the strength of the regimental system which we are determined to maintain.

The Army which emerges in the mid 1990's will meet the challenges for the next Century. It will have a new and demanding role. It will be fully manned. It will be properly supported. And it will be well equipped. I am in no doubt that it will continue to offer an attractive career to the high quality young men and women who have served us so well in the past and whom we shall continue to need in the future.

I commend my statement to the House