



Westminster Round-Up | July 2018

Edited and compiled by Liam Walpole and Megan Karlshoej-Pedersen

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While July has been a short parliamentary month – nearly shortened further by an [impromptu early recess](#) for MPs – it has not been a boring one.

The most significant development of the month—aside from the theatrics of ministerial resignations and the near-collapse of the May Government over her Chequers proposals—was supposed to be the long-awaited release of the [Modernising Defence Programme \(MDP\)](#). Having missed the deadline of releasing the MDP by the NATO Summit on the 11th July, the MoD aimed to publish the headline conclusions of the MDP by the beginning of recess on the 24th July.

As promised, Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson announced the headlines in the form of a [written ministerial statement](#) on Thursday 19th July. However, to say it mildly, the findings do not reveal much. The three main conclusions are that

1) the UK armed forces should work at a pace where they can respond to adversaries;

2) the UK fighting force should be “fit for the challenges of the 21s century”, and;

3) defence should be robust and affordable.

These are not exactly ground-breaking conclusions given the review was announced over a year ago. RWP ran a [series on the costs of remote warfare](#) in

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anticipation of the announcement and are left unconvinced that the MDP will address many of the concerns we raised.

The other main defence development in July was the NATO summit, at which President Trump chastised NATO members for falling behind on their pledges of spending 2% of GDP on Defence and suggested that NATO members should increase spending to as much as 4%. While this provoked criticism from a wide range of MPs at PMQs during the week of the summit, Theresa May was quick to point out that the UK already spends the NATO target of 2% and Trump's statements only encouraged other countries to spend more. Interestingly, during Trump's visit to the UK after the NATO Summit, he and Theresa May watched a demonstration of how UK and U.S. Special Forces work closely together on counter-terrorism operations.

Focus Points

Defence Secretary announces 440 additional troops to Afghanistan

| 11.07.18 | Gavin Williamson announced that Afghanistan is at a crossroads, and the UK would be responded to a request from NATO for the UK to send an additional 440 troops to the capital, Kabul. The troops are to be deployed in a “non-combat” role, which does not require advanced parliamentary approval. Williamson was asked about the strategy for these forces. However, he failed to offer any meaningful clarity about how they would offer the Afghan government a strategic advantage over the Taliban to bring them to the negotiating table.

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Headline Conclusions of the Modernising Defence Plan announced

| 19.07.18 | The long awaited MDP remains elusive, but Gavin Williamson announced the headline conclusions shortly before Summer recess starts. As Professor Malcolm Chalmers, Deputy Director of RUSI [pointed out](#), the headlines are vague, and while it was hoped that the government would offer some clarity on the future of British defence, it was simply presented as the first stage in a wider review. Underwhelming given that the review began over seven months ago.

House of Commons

Defence Secretary gives update on Counter-Daesh struggle

| 03.07.18 | Gavin Williamson updated MPs on the progress made in Operation Shader against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Several MPs highlighted recent elections as a sign of the stabilisation in Iraq since the expulsion of ISIS. However, when MP Martin Docherty-Hughes, the SNP member of the Defence Select Committee, enquired about the consistent use of Special Forces as part of the anti-ISIS coalition—who are precluded from parliamentary oversight—he was met with the “no comment” response that tends to follow questions on UKSF.

Defence Secretary defends government’s spending on Defence

| 07.07.18 | In response to questions from the Shadow Defence Secretary, Nia Griffith, on the timing and contents of the long-awaited MDP, Gavin Williamson admitted that the review would not be ready by the time of the NATO summit, but suggested that headline conclusions would be published by the end of recess (see above). He also defended the government’s spending on defence, arguing that the UK should be proud of its defence spending.

Prime Minister’s update on the NATO Summit

| 16.07.18 | In her update to the House of Commons on the NATO summit (11-12th July), the PM emphasised the UK’s sizeable defence-spending as well as

the growing threat posed by Russia. She also reaffirmed that the UK would remain “unconditionally committed” to European security after Brexit. In response to questions from Jeremy Corbyn, Labour Party leader, about President Trump’s request for NATO countries to increase spending on defence from 2% to 4%, she stated that the President’s intervention had made a positive impact.



Image credit: North Atlantic Treaty Organisation/Flickr.

Extra funding to support Jordan's security and stability

| 19.07.18 | Jordan will receive £9 million over two years through the Conflict Stability Security Fund (CSSF), to support its security by bolstering its counter-terrorism capabilities, among other things. This support is representative of the UK's engagement in the military security of other countries through the CSFF fund.

Committee News

Foreign affairs Committee questions Alistair Burt on Yemen and Syria

| 03.07.18 | In regard to Yemen, the Minister of State for the Middle East emphasised the Human Rights atrocities committed by the Houthis in Yemen and insisted that continuing to support the Saudi-led coalition – which has been accused by a multitude of NGOs of serious human rights abuses – is vital for the region. Read RWP's analysis of the UK's influence in Yemen [here](#). In regards to Syria, he lamented the lack of intervention by the UK in 2013.

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Defence Committee hearing highlights strength of Anglo-Franco relationship

| 12.07.18 | In the first joint sessions between the UK and French Defence Committees, members of both committees highlighted the strength of the Anglo-Franco relationship. When French MPs asked about the findings in the MDP, for their planning purposes, (now former) Defence Procurement Minister, Guto Bebb, emphasised that we should not expect to see the MDP until Autumn.

House of Lords

Quests for answers as more troops are deployed to Afghanistan

| 11.07.18 | After Williamson announced that a further 440 troops would be deployed to Afghanistan, Lord Tunncliffe the Shadow Spokesperson for Defence in the Lords, referenced the Chilcot Inquiry as he argued that there had to be a strategy behind the deployment and questioned the role these troops would be fulfilling. Baroness Smith asked if the timing of the announcement of these additional troops, on the eve of the NATO summit, was deliberate. Earl Howe confirmed that it was.

Lords question President Trump's statements from the NATO summit

| 16.07.18 | In their debate on the NATO Summit in July, the Lords were focused on questioning Trump's comments about Britain's contribution to NATO, as well as his claim that the US contributes to 70% of Europe's security,

which Baroness Smith declared “fake news”.

Government Announcements

Alistair Burt travels to Riyadh for discussions with Saudi and Yemeni officials

| 12.07.18 | Minister Burt travelled to Washington, D.C. for meetings with his American counterparts and subsequently to Riyadh to meet with the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Yemeni Foreign Minister. The purpose of the talks was to discuss possible solutions to the ongoing war. The Oxford Research Groups’s Strategic Peacebuilding Programme has recently started facilitating a [series of dialogues with Yemenis](#) in Marib and Hadhramout to promote a broader peace across the whole country. Read more about the UK’s influence in Yemen [here](#).

About the editors

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