

UK strategic defence review signals change

Richard Gardner reports from London



*An F-35B fighter jet lands on the flightdeck of HMS Prince of Wales. (Image credit: James Clarke/Crown Copyright)
Inset: Cover page of the Strategic Defence Review. (Image credit: UK Government).*

June 2025 saw the UK's long awaited Strategic Defence Review (SDR 25) finally breaking cover with an announcement by Prime Minister, Kier Starmer, of a very wide ranging list of planned changes in policy direction and a significant uplift in across-the-board operational capabilities. This will shift the UK defence priority back to home and NATO defence, in the face of the growing Russian threat in Europe, while maintaining support and investment in countering Chinese military expansion across the Asia Pacific region.

The review was welcomed as a recognition of the fact that the post-Cold War status quo was no longer relevant for realistic and relevant defence planning in a climate of such massive geo-political uncertainty. The recent full-on skirmishes between India and Pakistan in recent months indicate how this trend is truly international. Since the return of President Trump in the United States long established defence and trade alliances are being turned upside down and few experts can predict with

any certainty how this will impact on longer term global agreements. The UK is caught between still evolving post Brexit relations with Europe and the ages old Special Transatlantic relationship with the USA. The enduring NATO safeguards are now being challenged as never before by a US President who keeps talking of putting America first.

This latest SDR was stated to be “transformational” in its approach, designed to go well beyond just a reversal of two decades of UK military shrinkage following the post-Cold War Peace Dividend. This false degree of confidence was finally laid to rest in February 2022 when Russian tanks swarmed into Ukraine.

The UK was quick to react in sending war materials and provide operator training to help Ukraine resist the Russian invasion, but it did not provide a direct intervention, and in the process has seen a serious depletion of national ammunition and weapon stocks. This has now become a potential threat to the ability of its own forces