



House of Commons  
Defence Committee

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# On Thin Ice: Defence in the Arctic: Government Response to the Committee's Twelfth Report

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Thirteenth Special Report of Session  
2017–19

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## The Defence Committee

The Defence Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Ministry of Defence and its associated public bodies.

### Current membership

[Rt Hon Dr Julian Lewis MP](#) (*Conservative, New Forest East*) (Chair)

[Leo Docherty MP](#) (*Conservative, Aldershot*)

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### Powers

The committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### Publications

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/defcom](http://www.parliament.uk/defcom) and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Committee staff

Mark Etherton (Clerk), Dr Adam Evans (Second Clerk), Martin Chong, David Nicholas, Eleanor Scarnell, and Ian Thomson (Committee Specialists), Sarah Williams (Senior Committee Assistant) and Arvind Gunnoo (Committee Assistant).

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# Thirteenth Special Report

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On 15 August 2018, the Defence Committee published its Twelfth Report of Session 2017–19 [HC 388] *On Thin Ice: UK Defence in the Arctic*. The response from the Government was received on 12 October 2018. The response is appended to this report.

## Appendix: Government Response

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The Government welcomes the House of Commons Defence Committee’s report into UK Defence in the Arctic. The Government recognises that the Arctic is a region in flux, both environmentally and economically, and potentially politically, and that UK Defence policy must be responsive to these changes. It recognises that the Arctic is a region where the UK holds no territorial claims, but where the UK has a strong interest in maintaining peace. It highlights the strong position Russia maintains in the region, and the challenges that it could present NATO.

The Committee’s focus on the future of Arctic security mirrors the Government’s own deliberations, reflected in the Secretary of State for Defence’s recent announcement of the new Defence Arctic Strategy. This Strategy is currently in development and will be completed in early 2019.

The Government’s formal response to the Committee’s recommendations and conclusions is set out below. The Committee’s findings are in bold, with the Government’s responses in plain text. For ease of reference, paragraph numbering follows that in the “Conclusions and Recommendations” of the Committee’s report.

### Conclusions and recommendations

#### *The Arctic and the High North*

1. **Since the end of the Cold War the Arctic States have been successful in maintaining the Arctic and High North as an area of low tension, and the region has been generally characterised by continuing close international co-operation amongst states which may have taken divergent positions on crises occurring elsewhere in the world. However, it is clear that the natural environment in the Arctic is going through a period of fundamental change, giving rise to issues which are bringing about a similar change in the security environment. (Paragraph 16)**

There is no doubt that the Arctic is undergoing rapid change. Climate change effects that see the region warming at twice the rate of elsewhere in the world are fundamentally changing the Arctic landscape and its ecosystem. As a result, the region is more open to human activity. Economic and commercial interests have increased through the exploitation of the region’s natural resources, while new trade routes are emerging as sea-ice levels decline. The Government agrees that the ability to respond to these changes, while maintaining a “low tension” region, should not be taken for granted.

2. **There is a risk that the perception of the Arctic as an area of exceptionalism where unique considerations of governance apply and where the application of general norms of international law are disputed, could be exploited by nations who have shown an**

**increasing disregard for the rules-based international order elsewhere. The Svalbard archipelago is an example of this, where the possibility of further adventurism by a resurgent and revisionist Russia cannot be discounted. (Paragraph 17)**

The Government notes the Committee's concern and agrees the risks as described. The Government remains in regular dialogue with its Arctic allies, and is vigilant in monitoring the actions of potential disruptors in the region, such as Russia, but to date has not seen any disregard of the rules-based international order in the Arctic.

**3. As the 'globalisation' of the region continues, an increasing number of states which are more geographically distant from the Arctic are declaring that they have an interest in Arctic affairs and wish to share in the benefits which might come from a more accessible Arctic. This is to be welcomed, as long as these interests continue to coincide. We should nonetheless be aware, in this new age of 'great power competition', that this state of affairs may not last indefinitely. *The Government should work closely with allies to establish a common position on all aspects of international law in the Arctic to ensure that disputes active amongst states in the region are not aggravated or exploited.* (Paragraph 18)**

The Government's stated ambition is to maintain the Arctic as a peaceful and stable region, one that is well-governed and in line with international law. We agree with the Committee that forming a common legal understanding among our allies on contentious issues is highly desirable. We seek to raise with our allies and in multinational fora, and, where possible, resolve potential contests. Dialogue, cooperation and practical collaboration are cornerstones for building trust and confidence between partners. We therefore welcomed the Foreign Ministerial Declaration at the 2017 Arctic Council (in Fairbanks, Alaska) that foremost reaffirmed the Arctic States' commitment to maintain the Arctic as a place of peace, stability and constructive cooperation.

As strong advocates of the international rules-based system, the Government also recognises the importance of negotiated and consensus-driven agreements through multilateral organisations, treaties and conventions. The recently negotiated Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean, agreed between the five Arctic coastal states, as well as China, Iceland, Japan, South Korea and the EU, is a clear demonstration that such agreements are achievable.

As active participants in most of the legal frameworks that span the Arctic region we will continue to work closely with our allies and partners, through our bilateral relationships and in multilateral fora, to encourage dialogue and, where possible, seek to resolve emerging disputes or conflicts.

### ***The UK, the High North and the North Atlantic***

**4. The strategic importance of the High North and the North Atlantic to the security of the UK and Europe cannot be overstated. During the Cold War a huge amount of effort was invested in the development of plans and capability to counter the threat that existed to NATO's Northern Flank and the wider North Atlantic. Although we are not facing challenges on the same scale today, the prospect of Russian power being projected from the High North into the North Atlantic has returned and a comprehensive strategy is needed to meet this threat. (Paragraph 27)**

The Government agrees the Committee's assessment of the importance of the High North and North Atlantic, and that it is a strategically important area. The Government remains vigilant in monitoring Russian action in the High North region. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) considers potential Russian threats in the High North region as part of its broader assessment and approach to the Russian security threat. The prospect of Russian power projection in the region will be considered in the forthcoming Defence Arctic Strategy.

The UK has played a leading role in discussions within NATO regarding the security of the North Atlantic. It is an issue the Alliance is taking seriously, with the recently established Joint Forces Command Norfolk, in the United States, serving to better co-ordinate the NATO approach to the region.

**5. We repeat the concerns voiced by the House of Lords Arctic Committee about the way in which UK Arctic policy is prioritised and co-ordinated. The Polar Regions Department's considerable responsibilities in respect of the Antarctic place Arctic affairs at risk of being made a lower priority, and the dispersal of policy responsibility for Arctic affairs across Whitehall has the potential to frustrate co-ordination. We ask the Government to reconsider its decision not to appoint an Arctic Ambassador to improve co-ordination of policy in Whitehall and bolster UK representation in Arctic affairs. (Paragraph 32)**

The Government's response to the 2015 House of Lords Report *Responding to a Changing Arctic*<sup>1</sup> noted that the appointment of an Arctic Ambassador would not add significant value to existing structures and roles currently in place, nor justify the additional costs, at a time of economic constraint.

The Government has reviewed this approach at regular intervals since the report was published and remains of the view that the appointment of an Arctic Ambassador is not the right approach for the UK. We are confident that the steps taken subsequently provide an appropriate level of strategic oversight and coordination across Government.

The Minister responsible for the Polar Regions is the Rt Hon Sir Alan Duncan MP, Minister of State for Europe and the Americas at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). He is supported by the Head of Polar Regions Department, a senior FCO official who: oversees and coordinates the development of the Government's policy towards the Arctic; chairs biannual cross-government Arctic Network meetings, and; ensures that the UK has appropriate representation at the Arctic Council and in other international fora. To aid policy development, Government departments also regularly share analysis and understanding of emerging trends in the Arctic.

### ***The new security environment***

**6. There is little doubt that the Arctic and the High North are seeing an increasing level of military activity. There is much greater divergence in the evidence we have taken on what the reasons behind this are, particularly in relation to Russia. One view is that there is no offensive intent behind Russia's military build-up and that it is simply trying to regenerate military capacity in order to reassert sovereignty. The opposite view is that this is just one more part of Russia's aggressive reassertion of great power competition. We have received a range of views in between. (Paragraph 68)**

<sup>1</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldselect/ldarctic/118/118.pdf>

The Government agrees with the Committee's summary of evidence. Since 2008, Russia has modernised its armed forces and procurement. It now fields a full spectrum of capabilities and is judged to be the most capable potential adversary to NATO. It has greatly increased its capabilities and forces in the High North Region, including reinstating a new Northern Joint Strategic Command. As has been publicly reported, Russian submarine activity in the North Atlantic has almost reached Cold War levels after Russia has nearly doubled the number of its submarine patrols. Views from experts on Russian intent for the region remain inconsistent and a matter of debate. The Government maintains vigilance of Russian activity in the region and adjusts its assessments accordingly.

**7. Our view is that the UK and its allies should be extremely wary of Russia's intentions in the region. It is difficult to credit that the scale and range of military capabilities being deployed by Russia in the Arctic fulfil solely defensive purposes. Russia has shown itself to be ready to exploit regional military advantage for political gain. While the Arctic remains a region of low tension, this could change quickly, particularly given Russia's increasingly revisionist attitude to the rules-based international order. (Paragraph 69)**

The Government notes the Committee's assessment. The Government's assessment is that, to this point, Russian military build-up in the High North region is proportionate to a nation defending its sovereign territory. Russian military presence and activity in its Arctic territory has been legal within existing conventions. Given energy resources and transit routes, and that 30% of Russian territory is within the Arctic Circle, the region is a priority for Russia and will likely continue to be one of Russia's regional priorities in the future. However, the Government is not naïve to the threat Russia may represent; we remain vigilant in monitoring any further changes in Russian capacity and activity in the region, and will act accordingly.

**8. NATO's renewed focus on the North Atlantic is welcome and the Government should be congratulated on the leadership the UK has shown on this issue. We encourage the Government to show similar leadership in bringing NATO to a common position on its role in the Arctic and the High North. We further encourage the Government to lay out its strategy on the future role of defence partnerships outside of NATO in the region. (Paragraph 70)**

The Government notes and agrees with the Committee's recommendation. The Government believes that a shift in NATO's approach to the Arctic should be led by NATO's Arctic members, and the Government will encourage its allies toward this end.

Outside NATO, the Government will use its bilateral relationships to promote co-operation in the region. The MOD has bilateral defence co-operation agreements with all of the Arctic Nations, bar Russia<sup>2</sup>, and close relationships with each of the seven, which provides a strong basis for facilitating partnership on the Arctic and High North. At a political and policy level, the Government will use these strong relationships to ensure that UK priorities and outcomes are strongly advocated for.

Practically, the cold weather training with Norwegian and United States personnel in Norway remains our most important Arctic-focused partnership, and will remain so for the foreseeable future; however, we have also received offers to conduct cold weather

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2 Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the United States

training in Canada, Finland and Iceland, which the MOD is currently considering. We will use the trilateral capability agreement with Norway and the United States regarding P8 Maritime Patrol Aircraft to ensure that our collective situational awareness of the High North region is optimised.

The Government also considers that both the Northern Group and Joint Expeditionary Force provide opportunities for High-North-focused co-operation with our allies, and will continue to explore those opportunities in future.

### **UK Defence Capabilities in the High North**

**9. The willingness of the UK to play a greater role in the security of the Arctic and the High North is tempered by the concern that Defence does not have sufficient resources to establish a meaningful presence in the region. Platforms and capabilities which might have a role in the High North are heavily committed elsewhere, and, with the Modernising Defence Programme still to be completed, there is no indication of new resources being applied. We ask the Department to explain how the Arctic and High North has featured in the strategic analysis undertaken in the course of the National Security Capability Review and the Modernising Defence Programme and how these will be represented in future policy. (Paragraph 72)**

The Government confirms that thorough threat assessments were conducted as part of both the Modernising Defence Programme (MDP) and the National Security Capability Review (NSCR). Neither featured a specific strategic analysis of the High North and Arctic, but both considered state competition in detail, and covered those state actors for whom the Arctic and High North are or could become a significant region. The policy and capability work being conducted under the MDP is fully informed by this assessment.

While the Arctic and High North have not been specifically featured within the work of the NSCR or as part of the MDP process, the MOD has identified a need for greater internal strategic analysis capability.

This has been delivered through other strategic analysis work the MOD has carried out on the High North Region, which has produced 2 reports:

- A Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre-produced *Strategic Implications Report: High North 2050*, that assesses the likely developments in the High North Region and the strategic implications for the UK, projecting out to 2050.
- An Innovation and Research InSight Unit (IRIS) report *The Technology that Unlocks the High North*, a paper which assessed the changing Arctic environment, and assessed the potential current and future capabilities required to effectively operate in the region, projecting out to 2050.

These reports were presented at a Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Strategy Forum in September which assessed the current state of the UK's approach to Defence and Security in the Arctic. The Government thanks the Defence Committee for also attending the event, with the Rt Hon Mark Francois MP presenting the Committee's findings to the Forum. The Forum identified a need for the MOD to produce a Defence Arctic Strategy, recently announced by the Secretary of State for Defence, which will ensure that future Defence policy regarding

the Arctic and High North maintains coherence and is effectively integrated with Her Majesty's Government's broader objectives for the region. This Strategy is in development and will be completed in early 2019.

**10. The historical importance of the maritime space stretching from the Arctic to the North Atlantic is well established, but we can see that many of the strategic considerations which were present in the recent past are now re-emerging. The marked increase in Russian naval activity in the waters around the British Isles and the entrances to the Atlantic is clearly a matter of concern to the Government. We are equally concerned about the United Kingdom's ability to match this threat adequately. The reduction of the UK's anti-submarine warfare capability, which has been a core task of the Royal Navy for decades, has been noted in recent Committee reports and we repeat those concerns here. While the capability of the surface and sub-surface vessels the Royal Navy operates is world class, there are not enough platforms available for the task in hand, and vessels that are in service are often committed to standing tasks elsewhere. (Paragraph 76)**

The Government welcomes the Committee's observations and agrees with its assessment of the quality of UK Naval capability. The Royal Navy maintains an excellent Anti-Submarine Warfare capability. While the Navy does operate under the realities of resource constraint, the Government is consistently assessing its capabilities to ensure that they are capable of delivering the tasks required. The Government also notes that threats to the North Atlantic and surrounding regions are a matter of NATO concern and that, while UK assets might form part of a NATO response to any Russian threat in the region, the UK is unlikely to be required to provide all capabilities unilaterally.

**11. The threat to undersea data cables is a real one, and the consequences of such networks being disrupted would be serious. We accept that the Government shares this concern and is aware of the associated risks. But this risk further reinforces the need for effective situational awareness to support maritime security and a credible anti-submarine detection capability to deter hostile activity. (Paragraph 79)**

The Government regards undersea cables as part of the UK's critical international infrastructure and monitors a variety of threats to them, including from possible hostile maritime activity. For security reasons, we do not comment on specific assessments. Any threat to UK infrastructure is taken extremely seriously. We are continuously working with industry to ensure our subsea cable network is secure and have a variety of tools to monitor potentially hostile maritime activity. The programme to protect the UK's communication infrastructure includes assessing the physical, personal and cyber risks to subsea cables and offering recommendations to cable operators to mitigate them. This commitment to ensuring UK infrastructure is also reflected in the development and purchase of new capability, such as the P8 Maritime Patrol Aircraft which can help mitigate against maritime threats.

**12. The Royal Navy's under ice missions in the Arctic are one of the less well-known aspects of UK operations in the Cold War, largely due to the level of secrecy which surrounded them. This contribution was crucial to NATO's defensive strategy, and the Submarine Service developed a world-leading capability in these operations. As the strategic focus moved elsewhere after the Cold War, under ice exercises ceased altogether. We are very encouraged to see that with the mission of HMS Trenchant that**



**this presence has been re-established, and hope that this is part of a permanent cycle of activity in the Arctic. *Understanding that the Government does not comment in detail on submarine operations, we ask the Department to lay out its policy on the future of under ice exercises. We also ask the Department to outline the comparative under ice capabilities of Royal Navy submarines currently in service.* (Paragraph 85)**

For operational security reasons the Government does not release information on the specifics of Royal Navy submarine capabilities or future programmes; however, the Royal Navy remains committed to ensuring that our submarines and their crews are competent to operate in every area of the world. This includes undertaking further deployments under the polar ice cap.

13. The Department should fully explain the concept of operations for carriers operating in North Atlantic and High North, including training and exercise arrangements, and the opportunities for working with allies. **(Paragraph 88)**

The Government cannot provide the operational concept at an unclassified level. However, it is continuously developing and reviewing the Tactics, Training and Procedures and options to deal with an ever changing and evolving threat environment.

The Government naturally tests and adjusts these concepts incrementally over time within the context of the threat and geographical areas of UK strategic importance, such as the High North. To feed the Defence Operating Concept, scenarios involving High North/North Atlantic and a planned wargame in the autumn will be vital to inform this subject.

The Navy regularly conducts staff talks with six of the Arctic Nations<sup>3</sup>, where they explore opportunities for working together, in both the High North and other regions. The Government will continue to pursue opportunities for co-operation through these fora, as well as continuing to pursue opportunities presented by the Joint Expeditionary Force, the Northern Group and NATO.

**14. We have received substantial evidence that nine Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft are not enough for the UK to provide sufficient anti-submarine warfare coverage in the North Atlantic. The extent of the current threat is openly acknowledged by Ministers and airborne anti-submarine warfare capability is a crucial part of the response. *The Department should provide the Committee with a detailed justification of the planned maritime patrol aircraft establishment.* (Paragraph 94)**

The Government carried out extensive operational analysis work prior to the decision to purchase a new maritime patrol aircraft for the UK. The decision taken by the MOD in the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR15) to buy a fleet of nine P-8A aircraft was based on this work, which recognised the need to procure an affordable capability.

Also important was the urgent operational pressure to introduce a capability as soon as possible, recognising the security situation in the maritime environment; this led to the decision to purchase P-8A, which was already proven in service with the US Navy and available in the timeframe required. The affordability and establishment number of the

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3 Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden and the United States

UK P-8A Programme also took into account the maintenance and sustainability costs of the aircraft, including its very high level of serviceability, meaning that down-time due to system failures is very low compared to other aircraft types.

The Government also notes that monitoring of the North Atlantic and High North is a matter of NATO concern, and that the UK P-8A establishment should be seen in the context of a broader NATO Maritime Air Patrol (MPA) capability, incorporating additional P-8 assets from the US and Norway, and further MPA capabilities from other allies. The UK is not required to provide all capabilities for the security of the High North and North Atlantic unilaterally.

**15. *The Department should provide reassurance that air platforms have the range and resilience to sustain operations in the High North, and give evidence that proper testing has taken place of the capability of equipment in cold temperatures and at high latitudes. (Paragraph 98)***

The high-level air environment is very similar whether overflying the tropics or the Arctic and operational aircraft are fully able to operate in that environment including anti-icing equipment where necessary. During aircraft certification, manufacturers will conduct environmental testing for Arctic conditions. For example, in 2015 Lockheed Martin tested the F-35 Lighting down to -40° Celsius in a special Climate Testing Laboratory at Eglin Air Force Base, with a subsequent operating condition testing deployment during winter at Eielson Air Force Base in Alaska.

For Arctic operations, the RAF would primarily look to undertake forward basing to partner nations within operating range of intended areas of operation. Our ISTAR platforms have sufficient range to enable long transits and loiter time. Our Combat Air assets can utilise Air-to-Air refuelling aircraft to undertake missions at long range from their deployed operating base. The key operating limitation at a deployed operating base is adequate snow and ice clearance and de-icing at aerodromes. Arctic aerodromes of our NATO allies are used to daily operations in those conditions. During pre-flight briefing every MOD pilot has access to predicted Space Weather and satellite navigation and communication performance data from the Met Office and RAF Space Operations Centre, to enable effective flight planning and operations.

**16. *The winter training exercises in Northern Norway each year led by the Royal Marines are crucial to maintenance of the cold weather warfare specialism. The level of training required to survive, move and fight in this environment is high and these skills fade if they are not maintained by regular training cycles. As these exercises are already taking place at low levels of mass, reducing them further will do more damage to their tactical utility and reduce the numbers of personnel completing cold weather training. The fact that this has been done on financial grounds is particularly unacceptable. The Government should ensure that cold weather training exercises return to normal levels in 2019. (Paragraph 103)***

The Government confirms that Royal Marines Cold Weather Training in 2019 is returning to recent norms in order to prepare for the largescale NATO exercise, COLD RESPONSE 2020. Between January and March 2019, 805 ranks will deploy to Norway to conduct Exercise AQUILA 19, which includes 100 Reservists. As in previous years the Royal Marines will deliver training to 220 US Marine Corps personnel, bringing the

total number of personnel conducting training with 3 Commando Brigade in 2019 to 1,025. Exercise COLD RESPONSE 2020 will see 3 Commando Brigade build back to Lead Commando Group scale of Mountain and Cold Weather Warfare capability, increasing the numbers of UK personnel conducting training to over 1,000. It will also include the Royal Navy's amphibious assets, presenting the opportunity to develop NATO's collective amphibious capability.

**17. *The Government should explain how cold weather training exercises are integrated with NATO's Graduated Response Plan for the reinforcement of Norway. (Paragraph 104)***

Exercises conducted during Winter Deployments will be developed in Joint Planning Groups alongside Norwegian Joint Headquarters to ensure that training objectives are aligned to operational requirements. Crucially we are not just training 'in' Norway, we are training and rehearsing 'with' the Norwegians and our other NATO Cold Weather partners. Aspects of NATO Response Plans are exercised through events such as TRIDENT JUNCTURE and COLD RESPONSE, within which the UK is taking an active role.

**18. *The pressure on the defence budget combined with the annual process of allocating uncommitted spending on training restricts the ability to plan training over the long term, limiting its strategic effect and reducing the ability to integrate more closely with allies. The Department should explore how it can be more flexible in programming multi-year cold weather training arrangements, instead of conducting the process on an annual basis. (Paragraph 105)***

The Government has developed a 10-year plan to cohere and further develop both Maritime and Royal Marine activity in the High North. This was announced to the Norwegians in August 2018 and is now under further development. This plan will be constructed with stakeholders across Defence and key partners in the region, with Norway at the heart of the project. It will articulate the equipment, activity, infrastructure, support and doctrine requirements and key milestones across the period to reaffirm UK Defence's commitment to the region and contribute to NATO's conventional deterrence.

**19. *As the owners of the cold weather warfare specialism within UK Armed Forces, the Royal Marines have been able to transfer expertise to the British Army to support the deployments in Estonia and Poland. The high quality of the cold weather training that the UK provides also makes it a sought-after commodity amongst our allies. The training that has been provided to the United States Marine Corps since 2015 is a particularly valuable example of defence co-operation and we were struck by the positive feedback we received from the Americans. Co-operation of this nature is at the core of the UK/US defence relationship and is a reminder of what the UK stands to lose if the capability which supports it is run down. (Paragraph 110)***

The Government notes the Committee's conclusion, and agrees with its assessment of the quality of UK Cold Weather training and its value to defence co-operation with the United States.

**20. *We are pleased to see that further work has been done to improve the supply and maintenance of equipment which is vital to sustaining cold weather warfare capability. We ask for further details on the funding that has been provided for cold weather equipment, and the contractual arrangements which will flow from this to***

***deliver an operational stock by 2021. We also ask that the Department provides details on the role of the Royal Marines Mountain Leader cadre in setting the requirement and specification for this equipment. (Paragraph 113)***

The Government confirms that the RM Mountain Leader Cadre remains the authority for equipment requirements, and has overseen the statement of requirements that have been drafted for current and future personnel equipment updates.

The 10-year plan, as previously noted, is still under development, with precise funding and figures still a matter of internal discussion. The Government fully expects to have an operational stock by 2021.

**21. Our report of February 2018 underlined the current and future importance of amphibious capability to UK Defence. One aspect of this is the role this capability plays in the defence of NATO's Northern Flank. Reducing this capability by disposing of the Royal Navy's amphibious assault ships would make it more difficult, if not impossible to reinforce Norway swiftly in the event of a crisis. The wider challenges being faced by the Royal Marines which we highlighted in the February 2018 report also have the potential to compromise the amphibious and cold weather warfare specialisms that are sustained by the Corps. *The interaction between the UK's amphibious and cold weather warfare specialisms should be a central factor in the Department's consideration of the future of amphibious capability, as should the risk to the UK's NATO commitments if the capability which supports this commitment is reduced. (Paragraph 116)***

The Government's developing ten-year plan for Maritime and Royal Marine activity in the High North has strong implications for the future of amphibious capability. The UK Amphibious Task Group and its Naval and Royal Marines Commanders will lead the NATO Immediate Follow On Forces Group for 2019 with Dutch support, under the long established relationship between the UK and the Netherlands. This force will deploy to the region in 2019 as part of a Joint Expeditionary Force (Maritime), providing a clear demonstration of the utility of amphibious forces in the Baltic and High North region. Additionally, the UK is an active member of the Amphibious Leaders Expeditionary Symposium (ALES) and works closely with the US and other NATO amphibious nations to cohere and enhance NATO's collective amphibious capability.

**22. It is clear from our inquiry that the changes in the natural environment in the Arctic and High North are having a significant effect on the security environment. Although the region is characterised by low tension, it cannot be taken for granted that it will remain this way and the renewed presence of a revisionist state in the region gives rise to the risk that the situation could change swiftly. (Paragraph 117)**

The Government notes the Committee's assessment and agrees that there is scope for the current peaceful status quo of the Arctic region to change.

**23. Military activity is rising in the region in response to this new uncertainty and its strategic importance to the UK requires the Government to react. The UK sustains a range of capabilities which could play decisive roles. The recent focus on expeditionary operations in hot weather climates has however reduced the focus on the importance of sustaining specialist capability needed to operate in the Arctic and High North. New efforts should be made to regenerate this expertise. (Paragraph 118)**

The Government welcomes the Committee's assessment and agrees with it. This is reflected in the renewed focus on Marine Cold Weather Training over the next 10 years.

**24. If the definition of a leading defence nation is one which has the ability to deploy a range of capabilities anywhere in the world, then this includes the unique operating environment of the Arctic and the High North. Being able to do so is ultimately a question of resource and a question of ambition, and we call upon the Government to show leadership in providing both. (Paragraph 119)**

The Government agrees that the ability to operate in the Arctic and High North is important to maintaining the UK's role as a leading defence nation, as is the ability to operate in all regions. The Government will continue to maintain the capability to operate in the region, and to co-operate with its Arctic allies, and within NATO, to ensure that the region remains one of peace and relatively low-tension.