



House of Commons
Defence Committee

**Future Maritime
Surveillance:
Government Response
to the Committee's
Fifth Report of Session
2012–13**

**Fifth Special Report of Session
2012–13**

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 12 December 2012*

Defence Committee

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Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Alda Barry (Clerk), Dougie Wands (Second Clerk), Karen Jackson (Audit Adviser), Ian Thomson (Inquiry Manager), Christine Randall (Senior Committee Assistant), Shane Pathmanathan (Committee Assistant), and Sumati Sowamber (Committee Support Assistant).

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Fifth Special Report

The Defence Committee published its Fifth Report of Session 2012–13 on *Future Maritime Surveillance* on 19 September 2012 as House of Commons Paper HC 110. The Government's response to this Report was received on 10 December 2012. This is appended.

Government response

The Government welcomes the House of Commons Defence Committee's inquiry into 'Future Maritime Surveillance' and the findings set out in the Committee's report published on 19 September 2012.

The Government recognises the detailed work the Committee has undertaken and the Ministry of Defence was grateful for the opportunity to brief the Committee in April and May. Our formal response to its recommendations and conclusions is set out below. Where appropriate, we have grouped together related conclusions and recommendations to respond with a single coherent narrative that addresses both the specific recommendation and the wider underpinning arguments. The Committee's findings are highlighted in bold, with the Government's response in plain text. For ease of reference, paragraph numbering follows that in the 'Conclusions and Recommendations' section of the Committee's Report.

The Government fully recognises the importance of maritime surveillance to the UK. In the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) we acknowledged that no single department or body had the capacity or capability to deliver what is required to monitor the maritime environment and counter threats the UK faces both in territorial waters and internationally. The Ministry of Defence's relationships with its Allies and the civilian authorities are very important and we are pleased that the Committee has commended the Government for the establishment of the Maritime Security Oversight Group (MSOG) and the National Maritime Information Centre (NMIC).

The inquiry examined the current and future contribution of the MoD and UK Armed Forces to the provision of maritime surveillance capabilities and at the outset the inquiry decided not to revisit the Nimrod MRA4 decision, but instead to focus on how the MoD manages its current portfolio of assets and planned future requirements. The Government acknowledges the Committee's concerns about capability gaps and we are pleased that the Committee acknowledged the work we are undertaking to explore fully all options and alternatives for providing maritime surveillance. The Air ISTAR Optimisation Study (AIOS) will form part of that work.

Following the Government's evidence on the importance of military capabilities such as Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) and the acknowledgement that UK maritime capabilities will include ISTAR based on network-enabled warships, submarines and aircraft, we are pleased that the Committee welcomes the Government's decision to include an ISTAR work stream for the next SDSR. Given the HCDC's stated intention to maintain an enduring interest in Maritime Surveillance, we intend to provide an update on the initial findings of the AIOS and other significant developments in maritime surveillance in the summer of 2013, with a further update in the summer of 2014 when the AIOS has completed its work.

Strategy and threats

1. The UK has a strategic requirement for maritime surveillance as an important enabler to operations to protect UK home waters and UK global interests and

commitments in both the military and non-military arenas. This requirement has developed to meet the evolution of greater non-military threats such as counter-terrorism, border control and non-state threats. This evolution is illustrated by events such as the terrorist attack in Mumbai on 26 November 2008 which was launched from the sea. We note witnesses' suggestions that the difficulty of restricting movements at sea had not gone unnoticed by the UK's potential enemies. The Government must ensure that the requirement for maritime surveillance is an integral part of the assessment of progress on the National Security Tasks in the National Security Strategy and the Military Tasks in the Strategic Defence and Security Review. This continuous assessment is essential as UK Armed Forces evolve towards Future Force 2020. (Paragraph 19)

The National Security Strategy (NSS) and the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) come as a package. The NSS describes the strategic context and confirms our policy objectives, or 'ends', and the threats to them. The SDSR describes the 'ways and means' which we will adopt to address them, and it is here that the issue of maritime security is addressed.

2. We note that due to the broadness of the areas covered by maritime surveillance there is currently no one individual within the MoD who is responsible for this capability. We feel that this is a weakness which should be rectified. The new Joint Forces Command (JFC) has been established to strengthen the focus on joint enablers and on joint warfare development with a key role of being responsible for Information, Surveillance, Targeting, Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) and for Command, Control, Communications and Computers which are key elements of maritime surveillance. The JFC should play an important role in coordinating, strengthening and delivering maritime surveillance capabilities. We welcome the intent of this improved focus that the JFC is intended to bring, but will seek assurance as the JFC develops that it is delivering the necessary coordinated output and that appropriate safeguards are in place. In response to our Report, the MoD should set out how it will assess the progress of the JFC in delivering the tasks set for it, particularly in terms of maritime surveillance. (Paragraph 21)

The Government notes the Committee's recommendation. The nature of the maritime domain means that maritime surveillance is spread over many different platforms and functional areas. The Government does not consider this a weakness, however, and welcomes the Committee's acknowledgment of the role that JFC will play in coordinating, strengthening and delivering joint enablers, including key ISTAR capabilities that will support surveillance in the maritime domain. JFC's mission includes:

- Command, direct and prepare assigned joint capabilities in readiness for use by the designated Joint Force Commander, and in support of Defence Outputs.
- Act as the unifying Joint User for single Service enabling capabilities in order to ensure their effective delivery as part of a balanced and coherent joint operational capability.
- Inform and advise on joint operational capability in order to shape future Joint Force design.

In so doing, JFC will take account of the evolving character of conflict and the international context, working closely in conjunction with other parts of Defence such as the Security Policy area, and will lead on joint warfare development.

This does not mean, however, that JFC should be responsible for overall maritime surveillance, or be seen as the home for all activity that requires input from multiple parts of the MoD. Although surveillance is part of the Command, Control, Communications, Computing, Intelligence, Surveillance & Reconnaissance (C4ISR) joint enabling capability for which JFC is now established as the Defence Authority, the environmental domains remain the primary concern of the individual services. JFC, being responsible for C4ISR, should play an important role in strengthening and delivering maritime surveillance capabilities but JFC is not responsible for routine maritime surveillance, especially in UK home waters. For those areas where Commander JFC has responsibility, as set out in the Defence Plan, his progress will be measured as a Top Level Budget holder in the normal manner.

For the Royal Navy, COMOPS exercises OPCOM/OPCON on behalf of the Fleet Commander for all RN assets within UK waters and is the global Maritime Component Commander for Commander Joint Operations (CJO). Noting that the ability to perform maritime surveillance is an inherent attribute of all RN platforms whatever other roles they are performing, were JFC to exercise OPCOM/OPCON for maritime surveillance this would introduce friction and potential confusion over the control of maritime assets. However, as proven on current operations with multiple surveillance assets, there is a model for effective tasking via the use of a cooperation/deconfliction cell staffed by subject matter experts from individual cadres. Intelligence is now available to all surveillance assets from the cross-Government NMIC which garners information from multiple sources.

Capability gaps

3. The MoD has stated that it regrets cancelling the Nimrod MRA4 programme and that in an ideal world it would have preferred to acquire a maritime patrol aircraft. We repeat the serious concerns raised in our Report on the National Security Strategy and the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) regarding the capability gaps that the Nimrod MRA4 decision has created in the UK's ability to undertake the military tasks envisaged in the SDSR and remain unconvinced that UK Armed Forces can manage this capability gap within existing resources. The MoD told us that its intention was to mitigate the impact of the Nimrod cancellation by the use of other military assets on a case by case basis, but acknowledged that there was currently no single asset or collection of assets that offset the resulting capability gap. We agree with the National Audit Office's (NAO) assessment that using other existing assets would provide a reduced capability and diverting resources from other tasks would have wider implications for defence. Indeed in the MoD's own assessment in the NAO Report there would be significant shortfalls without significant investment, and the coordination of such assets at the right place and the right time might prove very risky. (Paragraph 31)

The Department has accepted a capability gap and increased risk by deleting Nimrod. We assess that other assets, used as part of a layered approach, can reduce this risk to some degree, and it remains within tolerable levels. This situation is kept under review in the

light of emerging threats, and longer term strategic risk assessment is a constant process between the Capability area and Defence Intelligence, reviewed annually.

We must remember that maritime surveillance covers a wide array of platforms and capabilities that work together in a layered approach and we will continue to prioritise maritime (and air and land) assets against perceived national priorities. As previously mentioned, the National Security Strategy inherently recognises the importance of the seas, and in the SDSR we confirmed our commitment to the provision of future maritime surveillance assets.

4. We note that no option appears to have been considered for either a sponsored or a volunteer reserve element within the crews for the new commercial arrangement [for search and rescue provision], despite the fact, that at least initially, it is widely expected that most of the pilots will be ex-Armed Forces. (Paragraph 36)

5. We note the impact of the Nimrod MRA4 decision on the UK search and rescue capability. While we accept that the UK remains committed to the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue and that no bilateral arrangements are required, we are surprised that the Government has not discussed the impact of the Nimrod MRA4 decision with European neighbours. It would seem prudent to do so to ensure that cooperation is maximised. (Paragraph 37)

6. We will monitor the planned changes in the provision of UK search and rescue to a new civilian-led capability and expect Ministers to play a central role in its delivery, settling disputes and ensuring coordination between departments. The Government should guard against the loss of the valuable experience that exists within the Armed Forces and we request that the Government detail the measures it has taken to prevent this. We believe that this should include considering options for retaining expertise through some form of reserve service for the pilots employed. Another concern is the impact on the provision of search and rescue for the Falkland Islands. We may wish to return to this in future years. (Paragraph 38)

Use of Sponsored Reserves is strongly endorsed as a generic concept within Defence and the environmental areas. The provision of SAR in the Falklands after 2016 is currently under consideration. This should include an analysis of the full range of options including military capability, contracted service or potential hybrids. This analysis should include the challenge of maintaining sufficiently experienced crews.

In terms of discussions with allies and bilateral arrangements, please see our response below to recommendation 20 which explains our AIOS will include investigating the potential for collaborative and cooperative MPA/MMA projects within NATO and we will continue to have representation at those NATO meetings where maritime surveillance is on the agenda.

7. We repeat the concerns expressed in our Report on Operations in Libya regarding the Royal Navy's ability to continue to deliver the required high levels of standing maritime commitments with fewer platforms. It is likely that risk taking will occur more frequently as the outcomes of the SDSR are implemented and the smaller number of available assets is stretched more thinly. We note that the Minister asserted that the Royal Navy was not abandoning any of its tasks. However he also accepted that the

Navy is undergoing a “lean period”, being heavily used and accepting a degree of risk. Maritime surveillance assets are an essential component of maritime security and these additional requirements such as Libya and the Olympics pose a potential risk to maritime security due to this overstretch and possible competing demands for those assets. This is illustrated by the UK not contributing any vessels this year to the international counter-piracy missions and the necessity to use assets and personnel between operations in the Gulf or Afghanistan for the London Olympics. (Paragraph 46)

As covered above in our response to recommendation 3, we take a layered approach to maritime surveillance and prioritise assets against national priorities. The Home Office is currently leading a cross-government assessment of maritime risks, which will inform the development of a National Strategy for Maritime Security.

Future maritime surveillance and regeneration

8. We note that the MoD asserted it has robust risk assessment and management procedures in place to spot any risk escalation in the maritime surveillance area. However, in practice the robustness of these procedures cannot be proven until such risks materialise and are identified and dealt with or are missed with potentially disastrous consequences. We are also less sanguine than the Minister that if an urgent need to regenerate the maritime surveillance capability arose this could be achieved quickly. We accept that regenerating the complex capabilities of the Nimrod MRA4 would be more difficult and take longer than purchasing a platform off the shelf or putting something together that could perform an urgent maritime surveillance function. However, as the MoD has admitted in evidence that it is not currently considering the rapid regeneration of any maritime patrol aircraft platform and that it is not in discussion with industry about the regeneration of specific maritime surveillance capabilities, and given the complexities and testing required of maritime patrol aircraft platforms, we require further evidence that a sufficient level of capability could be regenerated as quickly as the Minister suggests. (Paragraph 49)

Defence contributes to maritime surveillance in order to reduce national risk in the maritime domain. The Government recognises this, and supports the ongoing work by the Home Office (for MSOG) to understand maritime risk better, through the Maritime Risk Assessment. This process builds on the risks identified in the annual National Security Risk Assessment work conducted by the Civil Contingencies Secretariat which shaped the SDSR in 2010. Furthermore, the MoD's own Force Development process is structured specifically to support the 4-5 yearly SDSR cycle and, in the nearer term, its Annual Budgetary Cycle and Capability audits. It identifies risks and capability gaps across all environments and considers how these might be mitigated, including by a cross-environmental approach. Its Future Force Development develops, tests and analyses the Force Structure provided by SDSR out to 10-15 years and identifies how it can be used to meet the demands placed on Defence by the National Security Strategy. By the next SDSR, the MoD will have a comprehensive evidence base to support a maritime surveillance work stream.

As previously stated, the Department currently has no defined requirement for an MPA capability. The study into Wide Area Maritime Underwater Search (WAMUS) concluded that in the near term the most appropriate solution to a potential underwater surveillance

requirement was a manned aircraft, but the Department's longer term objective is to merge as many surveillance requirements as possible into single equipment builds (e.g. radars that can operate in multiple modes and in all environments) and to further refine platform types, capabilities and numbers to achieve maximum effect at minimum cost. As such, those requirements previously covered by the Nimrod MR2/MRA4 capability are now integrated in the Air ISTAR portfolio and work is underway in the form of the AIOS to understand how these requirements can be best covered from the current and planned Air ISTAR Fleet.

The initial findings of the study will be reported to the Military Capability Board (MCB) in April 2013. Those options that appear to merit further investigation will then be developed to inform a MCB Genesis Option Decision Point prior to CSR15/SDSR15. As set out above, we will keep the Committee informed of our work in this area. In the meantime, we have investigated what military off-the-shelf capabilities exist. For comparison, generation of the AIRSEEKER airborne signals intelligence capability, replacing Nimrod R1 through an extension to the US RIVET JOINT aircraft production line, will have taken just under five years from the identification of the requirement to reaching Initial Operating Capability. Should the situation warrant it, adoption of off-the-shelf platforms, coupled with the Seedcorn personnel, could establish a capability in significantly less time.

9. The provision of maritime surveillance should be considered as a whole taking into account the different, competing requirements and the risks associated with gaps and non-provision in the capability. Capability and platform decisions must be coherent and informed. We are aware that the capability gaps that exist in maritime surveillance are not limited to a maritime patrol aircraft, and include, for example, the withdrawal of Sentinel and the loss of the four Broadsword-class Type 22 Frigates' information and intelligence gathering capabilities and towed array sonar. We also note that there is the potential for other capability gaps to occur, such as when the Sea King (SKASaC) helicopter is withdrawn in 2016 to be replaced by Project CROWSNEST operating from the Merlin Mk 2. In response to our Report, the MoD should set out how it intends to deal with the increased risk caused by these emerging capability gaps. (Paragraph 53)

10. We remain concerned about the MoD's capacity to manage the risk created by the capability gap in maritime surveillance and about its ability to react to demand in the short and medium term. (Paragraph 54)

The responsibility for Long Range Maritime Surveillance is now included in the Air ISTAR portfolio. These capabilities are included in the AIOS to understand how these requirements can be best covered from the current and planned Air ISTAR Fleet. The initial findings of the study will be reported to the Military Capability Board (MCB) in April 2013 after which those options that appear to merit further investigation will be developed with sufficient detail to inform a MCB Genesis Option Decision Point prior to CSR15/SDSR15.

Sentinel does not have an endorsed maritime role and was procured and is optimised for wide area surveillance over land. Overall, although we are carrying increased risk, we believe we have sufficient coverage for what we need to do, using a wide range of platforms:

surface ships and submarines as well as allied MPA and other aircraft (Merlin, Sentry and Hercules). We have also changed tactics and procedures as necessary.

11. While we commend the MoD for undertaking studies that will help inform future decisions on the provision of maritime surveillance, we believe it would have been beneficial if these studies had been undertaken before or as part of the SDSR especially given that the MoD has admitted that the Nimrod MRA4 decision was primarily financially driven and in the short to medium term a maritime patrol aircraft would be the solution for maritime surveillance requirements. (Paragraph 58)

The MoD completed some 40 individual policy and capability studies for the SDSR, each led by a senior officer or official. A separate review was conducted of force structure and capability implications for each of the three single Service environments: maritime, land and air. Maritime Surveillance capabilities were reviewed as part of the Maritime and ISTAR environmental studies rather than as a separate study in its own right. Capability studies drawing on existing analysis were conducted prior to SDSR; the analysis at the time showed that the deletion of Nimrod was the 'least worst' option. Capability studies undertaken since then are looking at ways to address the capability gap, should it be decided that it is necessary to do so.

12. Given that the MoD described the Nimrod MRA4 decision as the most difficult in the SDSR, it is unacceptable that the MoD did not think it appropriate to inform us that it was undertaking long term capability investigations into areas directly related to the UK's maritime surveillance capabilities whilst we were undertaking our inquiry into the National Security Strategy and the Strategic Defence and Security Review. Our concerns were not limited to what the MoD was currently doing to mitigate the capability gap as we asked the Government to outline its plans for the regeneration of this capability. These studies would have been relevant to that. Indeed, the MoD told us in evidence that when responding to the concerns on Nimrod in our SDSR and NSS Report it would have been helpful if it had thought more broadly about that particular topic. Parliamentary scrutiny is not an optional extra. We are concerned that had parliamentary questions not revealed the existence of the Wide Area Maritime Underwater Search (WAMUS) study we could have remained in ignorance of it. We expect the MoD to be more proactive and forthcoming in its provision of information to us. (Paragraph 61)

The Department takes Parliamentary scrutiny very seriously. The MoD undertakes a multitude of studies, often at quite a low level with the Department, and these are not always visible throughout the organisation to enable seamless information flow. In this case, a study of a capability such as surveillance was not explicitly linked to a HCDC enquiry into the previous SDSR. As stated above, given the Committee's intent to maintain an enduring interest in this area, we will provide updates in 2013 and 2014.

13. We note the 2010 SDSR's acknowledgement of the importance of military capabilities such as Intelligence, Surveillance, Targeting, Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) and that UK maritime capabilities will include ISTAR based on network-enabled warships, submarines and aircraft. The capability studies already undertaken by the MoD are a good starting point and we welcome the commitment to an ISTAR work stream for the next SDSR. However, given the Secretary of State for

Defence's statement that there will be a decision to be made in the next SDSR about the capability gap in maritime patrol aircraft, we recommend that work on the next SDSR should include a specific maritime surveillance work stream, involving all those, military and non-military, who make use of these assets. (Paragraph 64)

The Government notes the Committee's recommendation, which will be taken into account in preparations for the next SDSR in 2015, which includes the Air ISTAR Optimisation study (AIOS) into future equipment decisions.

14. We are encouraged by the rigour expected to be applied to the spending of the £8 billion unallocated reserve that was announced by the Secretary of State on 14 May 2012. However, we are disappointed by the MoD's assertion that there is no requirement to buy maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) at present and that it is not currently funded in the programme. We are concerned that the MoD has not decided whether to fill the capability gap especially as the Chief of the Defence Staff has stated it was a capability that MoD wanted to have and it is still its view that a MPA is the solution for the next 20 years. (Paragraph 72)

We cover in our responses to recommendations 8 and 15 the work that is currently underway to examine future requirements, in relation to both the next SDSR and beyond.

15. We are worried about how ISTAR capabilities will be funded after the withdrawal from Afghanistan, in particular ISTAR provided under Urgent Operational Requirements, and how this will be incorporated into the core programme. We recommend that the MoD consider this matter urgently and, in response to our Report, provide details of the investment decisions on the unallocated £8 billion announced by the Secretary of State for Defence that were due to be made in July. (Paragraph 73)

Where an enduring requirement for a UOR is identified and the funding is available, MoD will bring that capability into core; work is underway to cost and prioritise the implications of doing so, for all equipment brought under the UOR process, against existing and future capabilities as part of Annual Budgetary Cycle 13.

In terms of investments decisions following the PR12 outcome the Department's primary focus, so far, has been on the delivery of the core programme and current operations. Therefore, in July 12, a number of decisions affecting in-year spending were taken. The Department has yet to make any decisions on investment from the unallocated £8 billion which predominantly lies in the latter years of the planning period.

16. We note that the Minister does not think it is an essential prerequisite for maritime surveillance and the attack prosecution capability to be delivered by the same asset. In response to our Report the MoD should set out the supporting evidence and likely costs of this split assets approach. (Paragraph 79)

The statement given was not intended to imply that any detailed assessment of costs has been conducted, or a decision taken to follow this approach, but simply that there is the potential for the attack capability to be delivered either from the same platform or from an alternate.

17. We support the principle of the MoD's Seedcorn initiative as an attempt to maintain the ability to sustain both the capability to operate high level fixed-winged maritime patrol aircraft and the skills of its crews. This is an important initiative given the MoD's statement that in the medium term another model of maritime patrol aircraft will be required to fill the capability gap left by the Nimrod MRA4. However, we doubt that the Seedcorn initiative is sustainable as far as 2019, let alone to 2030, given the continued uncertainty over the long term plans for a fixed-wing MPA. The MoD should explain what work it has done to identify the point at which this initiative will no longer be effective in sustaining the ability to regenerate the capability. We recommend that the MoD undertake a lessons learned exercise for sustaining the ability to regenerate other capabilities in the future. (Paragraph 83)

The ISTAR Force Commander within Air Command has taken responsibility for the Seedcorn initiative on behalf of the MoD. Representatives from the ISTAR Force HQ, MoD Air Staff and Air Manning meet regularly to highlight issues with the sustainability of the programme. The point at which the initiative will no longer be useful has not been identified, but Seedcorn should be sustainable until a decision on a future MPA replacement is decided, at which point the initiative will be re-focused in light of the decision that is made at that time. Therefore, long term sustainability of the initiative (until 2019) is less of a concern as the programme is unlikely to endure in its current form. Lessons can be identified in the longer term, but the Seedcorn initiative is at an early stage and could only provide limited lessons at the moment.

18. We welcome the Minister's statement that the MoD intends to explore fully all options and alternatives for providing maritime surveillance. We agree that in the longer term unmanned systems such as unmanned aerial vehicles and lighter-than-air vehicles may well be a way forward, but also note the reported concerns regarding the limitations of using satellite technology. There are several obstacles to overcome and the MoD should keep us informed of progress on this. (Paragraph 90)

The Department will consider this issue as part of the updates to the Committee proposed for 2013 and 2014.

19. We note the MoD's confirmation that the requirements for unmanned aerial systems were taken into account prior to the decision to revert to a STOVL system on the new carriers and that the capability to undertake maritime surveillance using unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) launched from carriers would not be affected by this decision. We also note the concerns expressed to us on the limited number of UAVs that can operate in a STOVL manner and expect the MoD to keep this under review particularly if it becomes a requirement for future carrier launched UAVs undertaking maritime surveillance to have a weapons capability. We expect the MoD to keep us informed on progress of the possible use of carrier based UAVs for maritime surveillance. (Paragraph 94)

The Department notes the concerns about the limited number of UAV that can operate in a STOVL manner, however, flying UAVs from a carrier without catapults does not necessarily mean they have to be STOVL; they are generally lighter than manned aircraft and are therefore less constrained by performance in the launch and recovery phase than

their manned counterparts. This area will be included in our updates to the Committee as stated above.

20. We note the MoD's acceptance that since the SDSR the Department's reliance on allies to provide maritime surveillance has increased, though because of the range of capabilities and sources of information still available to the Department it had not done so markedly, and that the withdrawal of Nimrod had required greater reliance on other nations to provide maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) cover. We are concerned that the Government has not thought it necessary to try to secure any additional agreements to ensure the provision of maritime surveillance capabilities. Part of the MoD's examination of future maritime surveillance requirements should include an examination of those areas where a sovereign capability would be desirable and this should feed into the Department's consideration of a new MPA and the investigation of other options such as UAVs. We support the UK's participation in the NATO Tier Two proposal for maritime surveillance and expect to be regularly updated on its progress. (Paragraph 99)

The Government notes the Committee's concerns but would emphasise that Defence's collaboration with its allies and partners is enduring. We rarely act alone and work hard to ensure that initiatives such as NATO Smart Defence or the European Union's pooling and sharing initiatives maximise collective capability. In addition to these initiatives, Defence seeks to improve bilateral cooperation, where appropriate, in order to provide additional capabilities. A good example of this is the Memorandum of Understanding signed on 6 March 2012 between our Secretary of State for Defence and the Norwegian Minister for Defence. Specifically this MOU calls for increased cooperation in air surveillance, including Maritime Patrol.

The desirability of a purely sovereign maritime surveillance capability will be considered within the scope of the AIOS. The work will include investigating the potential for collaborative and cooperative MPA/MMA projects within NATO and we will continue to have representation at those NATO meetings where maritime surveillance is on the agenda. We will provide the Committee with updates on progress when appropriate.

Cross-Government cooperation

21. We commend the Government for the establishment of the Maritime Security Oversight Group (MSOG) and the National Maritime Information Centre (NMIC) which have improved cross-government cooperation on maritime surveillance issues. The MSOG's work on the development of a National Strategy for Maritime Security is an important piece of work that should be prioritised across Government. In response to our Report the Government should provide us with an update on this work and its planned timetable for it being brought to a conclusion. It must not become a stop-start endeavour. We endorse the work of NMIC as a valuable element in enhancing the national security of the UK. We will take a close interest in its work and how it develops in the future. We are not currently persuaded by the suggestion that NMIC could evolve to become a decision making centre. This would represent a considerable change in the way Government undertakes maritime security and safety operations particularly at a time of major change in the defence arena. (Paragraph 115)

The Home Office, on behalf of the membership of the MSOG, is currently leading a cross-government assessment of maritime risks. This risk assessment is expected to be completed in December 2012. The findings and conclusions will need to be considered by MSOG and will, on current plans, be used to inform the development of a National Strategy for Maritime Security by next summer.

The Government notes the Committee's recommendation. The role and remit of the NMIC is currently subject to a review within the Home Office as an integral part of a wider review, of 'border intelligence'. The review will seek to learn lessons from NMIC's operational role to date before proposing options for its long term strategic role and remit, and outline implications for future oversight and governance. We propose no changes should be made to NMIC's role and remit in advance of the conclusion of this work.

22. We believe that there is room for further improvement in cross-government cooperation in maritime matters. We are not convinced that an “informal group of Ministers” is the appropriate forum for taking forward the debate on maritime surveillance issues. Although decisions may ultimately be made in Cabinet or the National Security Council, we recommend that there should be a greater level of ministerial involvement in maritime surveillance as an issue particularly given the number of cross-government interests involved and as a way of arbitrating disputes between departments and ensuring that the differing interests are focusing on the right areas at the appropriate time. In response to our Report the Government should also provide us with an update on progress on the Maritime Security Oversight Group's work towards a single air surveillance contract. This should include the alternative options that the Government is considering as a potential model for the UK in this area. (Paragraph 116)

The maritime domain spans the interests of a number of government departments and agencies. The MSOG comes together to consider cross cutting issues including aerial and surface surveillance. The Home Office is in the process of determining an appropriate ministerial oversight and governance framework to ensure that maritime security issues are prioritised and considered appropriately. These oversight and governance arrangements will need to be informed by the maritime risk assessment, the balance of interests across the maritime domain and related maritime threat levels, and border intelligence review as noted above.

A sub-group of the MSOG is working to progress a single air surveillance contract. Scoping work has been undertaken to consider market intelligence, business requirements and technical specification. Further work is now being started on considering potential models for procurement, and cross-government command and control, planning, tasking, prioritisation and data sharing.

Conclusions

23. We agree with our witnesses that there is a risk associated with the capability gap in maritime surveillance. We acknowledge that the Government accept this and we welcome the work being undertaken to investigate how to mitigate the risks inherent in the gap and ensure the longer term provision of maritime surveillance. The MoD asserts that it has robust risk assessment and management procedures in place to spot

any risk escalation in the maritime surveillance arena, but we remain unconvinced it has the capacity to respond to any sudden escalation in that risk. Furthermore we believe the risk is likely to worsen in the medium term as further maritime surveillance capabilities are withdrawn or not yet filled. The UK's maritime flank is likely to be increasingly exposed: this risk must be kept under close and continuous review, and we will continue to take a close interest in the MoD's work in this area. (Paragraph 117)

24. The MoD has acknowledged that there is a strategic and national security requirement for maritime surveillance. We are concerned that the MoD is sending mixed messages in respect of the need for a maritime patrol aircraft (MPA). On one hand it says that there is no requirement for such an aircraft and that it is not funded or in the programme but on the other hand it acknowledges that its absence is a risk and something may need to be done. The MoD must explain why it is satisfactory to wait until 2015 or beyond before deciding how to close the capability gap in maritime surveillance particularly as the MoD acknowledge that a MPA is the solution in the short to medium term. We commend the work that the MoD is undertaking to explore the wide range of possibilities such as unmanned aerial vehicles, lighter-than-air vehicles and space technology, for the future long term provision of maritime surveillance capabilities. This work must not be allowed to lose momentum, particularly as no one individual is responsible for maritime surveillance in the MoD. (Paragraph 118)

25. There is a wide demand across Government departments and agencies for maritime surveillance capabilities. The establishment of the Maritime Security Oversight Group and the National Maritime Information Centre are welcome first steps towards a more strategic and coordinated output and as a way of mitigating some of the capability gaps. The challenge is to develop these further and we are keen to see a more prominent ministerial role particularly given the number of cross-government interests involved and as a way of arbitrating disputes between departments and ensuring that the differing interests are focusing on the right areas at the appropriate time. (Paragraph 119)

The Government fully recognises the importance of maritime surveillance to the UK. The Department has accepted a capability gap and increased risk by deleting Nimrod and we assess that other assets used as part of a layered approach can reduce this risk to some degree, and it remains within tolerable levels. This situation is kept under review and our steps to manage the risk are discussed in the above response. As previously discussed, the AIOS will inform future capability decisions and we will be giving an update to the Committee in 2013 as initial findings from the AIOS and other developments are considered.