



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
The Correspondence & Enquiry unit
1 Horse Guards Road
London, SW1A 2HQ

Wednesday, 14th February 2024

Dear Chancellor,

Having served as Chair and as a member of the Defence Select Committee, before joining the Government, I have in my time in Parliament taken a keen interest in the defence capabilities of the UK and our reputation as a key player in the world order.

Ahead of the upcoming Budget, I am writing to you today to ask that this Government put more money into defence spending, to ensure that the UK remains equipped and able to deal with an increasingly volatile geopolitical landscape.

While I am very pleased that the UK continues to fulfil our NATO obligation of spending over 2% of our GDP on defence, I am afraid to say that this current budget does not go far enough. As you will know, the global inflationary pressures have taken a toll on our defence budget and it is deeply concerning that our international allies see our Armed Forces as overstretched and unable to properly defend our interests.

At a time when the Middle East becomes increasingly unstable, as a result of the Israel-Hamas war, and when Europe itself sees Putin continue to rage a barbaric war against our Ukrainian allies – it has never been more essential in recent history to provide our Armed Forces with the proper financial backing that they need to keep our country safe.

It was deeply concerning to see that the UK's participation in the largest maritime NATO exercise since the Cold War, was delayed as a result of difficulties with the aircraft carrier, HMS Prince of Wales. This comes after our other aircraft carrier, HMS Queen Elizabeth, was ruled out of the exercise as a result of damage to her propeller. Furthermore, this comes under the backdrop of the news that both of our aircraft carriers are unable to simultaneously be out in service as our Royal Navy does not possess enough frigates to properly defend them.

In my capacity as the Member of Parliament for Witney, I have the privilege of representing many of our RAF personnel, with RAF Brize Norton falling within my constituency. I have a particular interest in the UK's Air Mobility Force, which I am afraid to say has recently seen the withdrawal of the C-130 fleet. This was a decision taken as a result of funding issues and has served to weaken our task lines, at a time when our ability to move personnel and goods around the globe is of paramount importance.

I have also been struck by the recent comments of the outgoing Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Patrick Sanders, who noted that all of our Armed Forces are currently seeing their lowest levels of serving personnel and that this is greatly impacting the UK's ability to defend itself at a time in which it has never been more important to do so in recent memory.

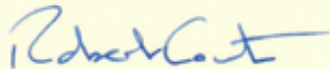
Indeed, as part of my work as the constituency MP for RAF Brize Norton and having led the sub committee inquiry into military housing, I know full well that our serving personnel are not afforded the living conditions that they need, nor the salaries that our countries finest deserve. I am sorry to say that without adequate funding, our ability to attract more people into our Armed Forces will be impossible.

I know that you will agree with me whole heartedly that our service men and women do an outstanding job both at home and abroad. It is, however, our job as politicians and as a Government to provide our Armed Forces with the necessary funding that they need to ensure that British interests can be protected in the increasingly unstable world in which we find ourselves. It is only by increasing our spending on defence, that the UK can continue to be a global power and a force for good around the world.

I look forward to your Budget next month with anticipation and the hope that you will ensure that this Government increases the amount we spend on defence.

Best wishes,

Robert

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Robert Courts', written in a cursive style.

Robert Courts MP