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COALITION GOVERNMENT'S MEDAL REVIEW – THE NDM CAMPAIGN ASSESSMENT

Introduction

1. This short paper deals briefly with the commitments made by the various political parties to the Nation's veterans. It highlights correspondence between veterans, Members of Parliament and Ministers in respect of the National Defence Medal since the re-launch of the campaign and during the recent MoD Medal Review. Finally, it draws conclusions and makes recommendations in respect of the Coalition Government's Medal Review.

The 2010 General Election

2. The Iraq war and involvement in Afghanistan saw many deaths and serious injuries to members of the Armed Forces, which focussed the public's attention on the Services. Consequently, it was not surprising that 2010, the year of the General Election, saw an outpouring of support for the Armed Forces in all political party manifestos.

3. Veterans were encouraged by the significant support from Political Parties to address the injustice of the past medal system. Included in this support was a Military Covenant Commission's report for the Leader of the Conservative Party, David Cameron MP, together with a commitment by the Conservative Party to address the inconsistency in which medallic recognition of former service personnel had been implemented.

- ❖ **Military Covenant Commission's Report** – This report went to the Leader of the Conservative Party now Prime Minister Rt Hon David Cameron MP. Its recommendation on medals stated – *'A future Conservative Government should review the structure; membership and terms of reference of the Committee on the grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals (HD Committee). The reconstituted HD Committee should then review outstanding claims that 'will draw a line in the sand'.*
- ❖ **Conservative Armed Forces Manifesto – Medals** *'Awarding of medals is decided by the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and medals (known as the HD committee). But the rules governing the awarding of medals have been applied inconsistently. The Conservatives will review the*

HD Committee, as well as the rules governing the awarding of medals. As part of that review all outstanding medal cases will be examined’.

4. Further support was provided in the Liberal Democrat and UKIP manifestos.
 - ❖ **Liberal Democrats Manifesto-** Although the NDM was not specifically in the Liberal Democrat manifesto, the Party’s extensive support for the Armed Forces, veterans and families was encouraging. Ninety five percent of the Party’s MPs had signed Early Day Motion 327 calling for a working group to be established to work with the HD Committee to implement the NDM as soon as possible. In addition, the Liberal Democrats Friends of the Armed Forces had been actively working with the NDM team to re-launch the NDM campaign, which was attended by the Liberal Democrat Deputy Leader (Vince Cable MP) and their Defence spokes person in the House of Lords (Lord Lee of Trafford). Lib Dem Leader Nick Clegg MP (now Deputy Prime Minister) had written a letter of support.
 - ❖ **UKIP Manifesto** – The Party within its manifesto, clearly backed fully the Armed Forces and supported strongly the institution of the NDM. The UKIP Leader (Nigel Farage MEP) personally attended the re-launch of the NDM campaign.
5. Post the General election, the Coalition Government formed by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats included in its ‘Programme for Government’ a Chapter on Defence, which specifically stated *‘a review of the rules governing medals would be carried out.’* Veterans were further encouraged when the first policy motion agreed by the Liberal Democrats at a Party Conference, since being in Government, was the institution of the National Defence Medal.
6. Details of various key events and documents in support of a medal review and a National Defence Medal are at Appendix A.

The Medal Review

7. The MoD initiated a Medal Review on 19 November 2010 thereby meeting the Coalition Government pledge to undertake such a review. The start date of the review was not publicly promulgated nor were the terms of reference or the date it would report its findings (10 January 2011) to the Veteran’s Minister. It was not transparent in its deliberations, it relied on material already held within the MoD much of which was dated; did not consult with veterans, Service organisations or with medal campaign organisers. The terms of Reference fell far short of the Conservative Manifesto pledge and the recommendations made by the Military Covenant Commission’s report, by making a specific exemption in the Terms of Reference to a review of the HD Committee and an exemption in respect of a review of medals for Service such as the LS&GC and State medals such as Coronation and Jubilee although it encompassed the forthcoming Diamond Jubilee.

8. Despite various written requests it proved difficult to obtain a copy of the Terms of Reference for the Medal Review, to identify a date of commencement or date when the review team would report its findings. It was disappointing the information was only achieved in late March as a result of a Freedom of Information request, some two months after the review team had reported. The MoD reply also identified that on 16 February the review findings had been passed via the Secretary of State for Defence to the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, for final endorsement.

MoD reasons why a National Defence Medal should NOT BE instituted

9. Despite support for the NDM displayed by political parties; by Cross Party MPs through EDM 327; by Service organisations, by senior serving and retired officers; by public dignitaries and veteran icons such as Dame Vera Lynn the response from the Ministry of Defence was not encouraging. Parliamentary questions, an Adjournment Debate, letters to the MoD from MPs on behalf of their constituents, from Service organisations, from NDM campaigners and from individual veterans all met with negativity (See Annex B). The common MoD response was: the medal does not meet existing rules; Her Majesty's Armed Forces Veterans badge (HMAFVB) provides recognition of service and the NDM would be duplication; medals are not awarded solely for service; medals have to be earned.

10. The question raised throughout the NDM campaign by former servicemen and women, time and time again, is 'why would a government and a Nation not wish to appropriately recognise its veterans?' There is a need therefore to test the arguments for not instituting a National Defence Medal:

- ❖ **Imperial/HD Committee rules.** Government accept, and presumably the MoD, that there have been inconsistencies in the way the award of medals has been carried out in the past. The Conservative party manifesto said it would review the HD committee. The Military Covenant Commission's report to the Leader of the Conservative Party went further and recommended the Committee be scrapped. The Terms of Reference of the Medal Review also included a review of the rules. As the current rules are questionable, it would be inappropriate to use such rules as an argument for not instituting the NDM.
- ❖ **HMAFVB.** HMAFVB is continually used as the main reason why the NDM should not be instituted. It would be duplication; veterans have already had their service recognised by this badge! However, any idea the badge was authorised by Her Majesty or was introduced to officially recognise service in the Armed Forces is a myth.

Service personnel, when they join the Armed Forces, take the oath or affirmation of allegiance to the sovereign. It therefore would seem logical for the sovereign to be the one to formally recognise their service, as in Australia and New Zealand. Many recipients are under the impression the HMAFVB is a badge that has been approved by Her Majesty, they are wrong. However,

Veterans are, in the main, pleased to receive their badge as in many cases the badge is all they have to show for their service to 'Queen and country'.

A Freedom of Information Act request identified the badge was first introduced in 2004 by the Labour Government's MoD Veterans Minister Rt Hon Ivor Caplin MP. It was to be an identification lapel badge issued to Second World War veterans, who were returning to Theatres of operations where they had fought, to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the ending of WW2. As it was an identification badge and not a medal it did not require HD Committee approval, did not require Her Majesty's approval and did not need Parliamentary approval – it was a MoD 'ID' badge. It is however, well designed and the WW2 veterans, many who have the pre 1945 Defence Medal, were delighted to receive it for everyday wear on their overseas visits.

The badge later became available to World War One veterans and to those who had served between the two wars. A pilot scheme was also held in 2005 to issue it to all Service Leavers. Although 27% of badges were either refused or returned, the pilot was deemed a success, and now all service leavers are issued with the HMAFVB in their leaving packs.

Service within Her Majesty's Armed Forces is a prerequisite to be issued with a Veteran's badge. However, it would appear only in the past few years have statements, emanating from the MoD, indicated the badge is awarded in recognition of service. Indeed as late as June 2008 an MOD document, obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, stated, *'the extended availability of the UK Armed Forces badge was to raise the profile of veterans by assisting the wider public to recognise them. It's symbolism is intended to unite all veterans in recognising the commonality of service, to encourage a sense of unity and community between surviving veterans and to ignite public recognition of current veterans and their continuing contribution to society.'* It is a badge for day-to-day wear and serves a totally different function to that of a medal in recognition of service.

To date, no document has been forthcoming from the MoD in response to a FOI request for information, which officially discusses and/or authorises the change of a lapel identification badge to a badge awarded in respect of recognition of service.

- ❖ **Medals are not awarded solely for service.** The terms of Reference of the Medal Review exempted the Long Service and Good Conduct medal/equivalents from review. These medals are issued solely for service. It is one group of medals that is in desperate need of review as there are so many anomalies. For example the Regular Army's LS&GC was initially issued for 18 years service, and later reduced to 15 years, but not awarded to officers. However, the Volunteer Reserve Service Medal (VRSM) is the Reserve Forces equivalent of the LS&GC, awarded for 10 years (this could equal as little as 280 days) service in the TA/Reserve and issued to all ranks, including officers. The Cadet Service Medal requires 12 years qualifying

service. As these medals are solely for service it is difficult to understand the MoD argument that medals are not issued solely for service. As the 'Long Service' medals are the group with the most anomalies surrounding their issue and in need of review, it is surprising they should be specifically exempt from being included in the MoD's Medal Review!

- ❖ **Medals must be earned.** Despite the MoD claim that medals must be earned, one group of medals are not. They are the Coronation and Jubilee medals. In the past, rules surrounding their award have caused much concern within the Armed Forces. A typical example was a Regiment serving on the streets of Belfast, when the Silver Jubilee medal was struck. It was 500 strong but only six Silver Jubilee medals were allocated. The CO and Adjutant received one; the Captain running the accounts was allocated one because he did not have the same opportunity as other officers in the Regiment of patrolling the streets; lots were drawn between the rank and file for the remaining three!

There is a difficulty in using the reason 'Medals must be earned' for not awarding the NDM. Those who take the oath or affirmation of allegiance to Her Majesty the Queen do so in the knowledge that by so doing, they accept they may be required to put their 'life on the line' in keeping the UK safe and secure. It is also difficult to understand how the Jubilee medals whose award has been so questionable were specifically exempt from the Medal Review!

- ❖ **Cost-** One factor was always going to be cost. From documents received under the Freedom of Information Act, cost played a significant part in how the HMAFVB was initially distributed. A proposal has already been put forward by the NDM campaign that avoids taxpayer's money being used in this current climate of austerity. However, MoD have made it clear that cost would never be the sole factor in determining not to award a medal.

Conclusion

11. The Conservative Armed Forces Manifesto, the Military Covenant Commission's report, and Coalition Programme for Government raised the hopes of former servicemen and women that past injustices of medallic recognition would be addressed through the Medal Review. However, the conduct of the review process, its lack of transparency, openness and failure by MoD to consult with or involve veterans has let them down. This should be of enormous concern and embarrassment to the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Defence.

12. In addition, there appears to have been a concerted attempt within the MoD to devalue the NDM campaign, which seeks medallic recognition by Her Majesty and the Nation for those who have served Her Majesty and the Nation since the ending of the Second World War. It is time for the Coalition Government and the MoD to treat the 'veterans and their families with the dignity they deserve.'

Recommendations

13. The MoD should revisit the discredited Medal Review and establish a working group that involves veterans and leaders of various medal campaigns to address all outstanding medal grievances so that a 'line in the sand ' can be drawn, prior to Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee in 2012.

(Signed on original)

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