

The resignation of John Healey MP as Defence Secretary marks the end of a period in which, whatever one's political views, Defence had at its head someone who had prepared thoroughly for it in Opposition and, when the time came, did not disappoint.

I haven't met Mr Healey personally, but I've heard him speak a couple of times at RUSI events, and came away impressed by both his grasp of the issues and the evident work he had put into understanding the challenges facing Defence and Armed Forces personnel. In a field where easy slogans can sometimes substitute for detailed knowledge, he struck me as someone who had done his homework.

BAFF has not always agreed with every policy of successive governments, nor would anyone expect us to. Our role is to represent and promote the interests of our members – Service personnel and veterans – irrespective of party politics. However, it is only fair to acknowledge those ministers who engage seriously with Defence and who make the effort to listen.

Mr Healey inherited a department which inevitably faced significant personnel, recruitment and retention challenges, whichever party was in power. Although much of today's reporting understandably concentrates on the crucial defence investment aspect, [RUSI's Ed Arnold has highlighted Mr Healey's efforts on defence reform](#):

'For the MoD, it is a very rare case of a senior minister taking a principled stand against the hollowing out of the UK armed forces, rather than complaining about it with hindsight when out of office. Healey's tenure was focused on defence reform. Multiple organisational charts were redrawn but the problems persisted as the MoD needs a fundamental cultural transformation to become more effective in a darkening world. This resignation will hopefully be a catalyst for wider departmental reforms, the introduction of genuine accountability and transparency, and a narrowing of the rhetoric versus reality gap that has plagued UK defence for decades.'

I also noticed [the tribute paid in an 'X' post by Minister of State for the Armed Forces, Al Carns MP](#):

I worked alongside him closely. I saw the hours, the care, and the seriousness he brought to every brief, including the hardest ones. There are issues facing this Department that do not lend themselves to easy answers. The work on funding, on veterans, on Legacy, on the welfare of those who serve.

Mr Healey's resignation feels seismic.

After reports that the Chief of Defence Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard Knighton, had himself written to the Prime Minister to say that the offer of an additional £13bn defence spend over four years was not enough, it is hard to see where this ends.

BAFF is neither politically-partisan nor a defence spending lobby but for myself, I would like to express best wishes to Mr Healey, and the hope that a sustainable budgetary resolution can be found.

Since this blog article was first posted, it has been reported (2030 hrs) that Al Carns has also resigned, from his position as Min AF.

*Douglas Young*