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# Land Forces Fit for the 21st Century

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## PREFACE

The government's recent review of the state of the United Kingdom's defence and security posture, and austerity measures restricting the amount of funding and resources allocated for these ends, have raised a number of questions surrounding the role of the military and its ability to realize national foreign policy objectives in the future.

With regard specifically to the British Army, the constantly evolving nature of the strategic landscape and emerging threats and challenges require a reassessment of the context within which the Army operates and the type of conflicts or operations in which it might be engaged. How can it be prepared for the unpredictable and manage uncertainty within current constraints? With which allies and partners will it operate in foreign operations, and how might these allegiances shift? And which trends and political, strategic and tactical considerations will influence and determine the decisions that have to be made about the future of the UK's land forces?

On 15 March 2011 the International Security Programme at Chatham House, in conjunction with Lt Gen Paul Newton and HQ Land Forces, addressed these topics during a roundtable event entitled 'Land Forces Fit for the 21st Century'.

Over four sessions, participants addressed topics including the future global strategic environment and the implications of the UK's recent Strategic Defence and Security Review; lessons from current operations and the nature of potential future adversaries; the level of interoperability expected between UK land forces and their allies; and how land forces should best prepare to meet the demands of the 21st century.

This event formed part of the British Army's Agile Warrior Programme and was also sponsored by General Dynamics Research Foundation. It was designed to support the British Army's efforts to develop its future forces and performance and drew on independent and critical views to complement and challenge the Army's own research. The emphasis was on a frank and informed discussion of the future direction of the British Army that would both challenge and reinforce Army thinking.

This paper comprises two distinct but related contributions, reflecting the themes and ideas discussed at the event as well as posing questions for further consideration.

The first part, by Professor Paul Cornish, is based on the presentation with which he opened the debate and set the context for the day's debate. It develops the detail of many of the ideas expressed. In particular, with a strong focus on the need for a clear strategy to guide land forces for the foreseeable future, it analyses the challenges facing Britain's armed forces and the strategic choices that must be made.

The second part, by Olivier Grouille, provides an overview and summary of the day's proceedings and outlines the different dimensions of the debate, which was held under the Chatham House Rule.

## 1 EDGING TOWARDS AGILITY: STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Paul Cornish

Britain's armed forces are confronted in 2011 by a set of circumstances that could scarcely be more challenging. For the past ten years the Royal Navy, the British Army and the Royal Air Force have all been committed, in one way or another, to demanding military operations such as those in Iraq, Afghanistan and, most recently, in Libya. The Libyan intervention is indicative of another challenge: the capacity of the strategic environment to develop in new and unexpected ways – and possibly for the long term – and in so doing to confound even the most considered and comprehensive strategic assessment. Then there is the climate of fiscal austerity to reflect upon. With an economy still trembling from the shock of recession, with a vast national debt and annual interest repayments exceeding the budgets of the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development combined, Britain is scarcely in a position to commit unlimited resources to its security and defence posture.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the armed forces must meet the demands of current operations and prepare for unanticipated challenges while seeking cost reductions and 'efficiency savings' in equipment and personnel. The regrettable outcome has been deepening rivalry between the armed forces; a foreseeable resort to 'service tribalism'<sup>2</sup> that the government should have tried harder to prevent. Finally and almost paradoxically given everything just said, the coalition government led by Prime Minister David Cameron has a foreign policy outlook that appears especially resistant to being 'downsized' or to suffering the indignity of 'strategic shrinkage'.

With the armed forces being pulled in so many different directions there is considerable interest in identifying the most convincing explanation – or 'paradigm' – for future international insecurity and conflict in order to guide strategic thinking, decision-making and planning. However, given that the costs of a mistaken assessment could be very high – this is, after all, a matter of national security and defence – this essay takes a contrary approach, arguing instead that what is needed is an approach based on the *anti*-paradigm of 'strategic eclecticism'.

The term strategy, though much used, remains resistant to a succinct and unanimously acceptable definition. For the purposes of this essay I take strategy to mean the set of ideas, preferences, procedures and norms that form a bridge between policy objectives and practical activity, military or otherwise. The task of the strategic process, it might then be said, is to provide policy with its *ways and means*, and activity with its *purpose*.

Strategy has its origin in the sphere of security and defence policy and military activity. Within this environment, strategic planners must take account of a very wide range of considerations that shape the strategic environment: national ambitions and vulnerabilities, adversaries and their intentions, commitments to allies as well as the national ambitions and vulnerabilities of these allies, geographical and climatic conditions, cultural *mores*, and of course the future and its unpredictability. Indeed, to a large extent strategy is *about* the future. The test of good strategy lies in its ability to cope not only with the present – a difficult enough task as it is – but also with gradual change (which might be expected) and then with dramatic shocks (which by definition cannot be expected). In 2011, as strategic planners peer into the future, they are all too aware that there is a good deal of the 21st century left to run. And they must equally be aware that already, at the start of only its second decade, the new century seems to be moving rather fast and in several unanticipated directions.

Although it is difficult to describe with very much confidence and accuracy, early indications are that the 21st-century strategic environment is characterized by increasing complexity, volatility, uncertainty and diversity. I would go further to suggest that there is so much diversity that it makes

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<sup>1</sup> Dr Liam Fox, Secretary of State for Defence, 'Strong Economy, Strong Defence, Strategic Reach: Protecting National Security in the 21st Century', speech at Chatham House, London, 19 May 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Cornish and Andrew Dorman, 'National defence in age of austerity', *International Affairs* (85/4, July 2009), pp. 737–9.

little sense to talk of *the* strategic environment when it appears to be in more of a state of flux than is usual or when there appear to be several equally plausible strategic environments in contention. In some ways this level of diversity could be seen as a structural response to complexity, volatility and uncertainty on a global scale. And in an ever more interconnected world these diverse strategic responses cannot be held apart for long, suggesting that tension and even conflict will be inevitable between the national, regional and international strategies of numerous countries.

Strategic diversity thus becomes one of the two most significant features of the strategic environment (loosely defined) of the early 21st century. The other is the prevailing climate of fiscal austerity mentioned above, which has resulted in the United Kingdom and in other Western economies in rapidly shrinking defence budgets, the cancellation of equipment programmes, sharp reductions in personnel strengths and in cuts to investment in research, technology and development. Diversity and austerity both act upon the mind of the planner, practitioner and analyst, shaping their understanding of the strategic environment in different ways; sometimes beneficially, but not always.

A climate of austerity is one that insists priorities be set and choices made. This imperative is generally to be welcomed: it can never be possible in strategy to do everything and to meet every conceivable challenge, and so it is essential to think, plan and allocate resources carefully in order to ensure that what is to be done is that which gives most value and is most effective. It might even be argued that strategy *requires* resource constraints if it is to be as efficient and effective as it should be. In controlled doses, therefore, resource scarcity can have the effect of pushing planners along a more strategic path. This has always been the case: it is difficult to imagine a strategic planner remaining long in position if his plans were based on the assumption of limitless resources. Any such plans would be flaccid, under-analysed, short of priorities and decisions and unlikely to correspond with reality – possibly with disastrous results.

While fiscal austerity can have a valuable forcing function on the strategic process, the concern nevertheless remains that choices will be made and options foreclosed just at the moment – of expanding strategic diversity – when the environment calls for a broad outlook and a responsive posture rather than one that is narrowly focused, committed and inflexible. More worrying still is that there might come a point at which consideration of resources does not merely influence strategy, as it properly should, but determines it. This could result in the decision to abandon major parts of a national force posture or to cancel major equipment procurement programmes, not necessarily as the result of strategic analysis but simply in order to reduce expenditure. Sometimes, of course, the pressure of resource constraints can all too easily be disguised behind a rather weak but nevertheless ostensibly strategic rationale. For example, the argument that the United Kingdom should expedite its withdrawal from Afghanistan as a result of the death of Osama bin Laden in May 2011 could be compelling from a resource-constrained perspective, but it is facile in strategic terms.

Resource constraints could also give weight to a preoccupation in strategic and military circles: the search for an overarching explanation – or paradigm – for the strategic choices that must inevitably be made. Like most other human beings strategic planners look for patterns in what they see about them, partly in order to explain that environment and partly in order to reduce uncertainty – to the extent that is possible – by identifying key trends, decisive influences and so on. In the best case, the chosen paradigm can validate strategic choices and can even allow cost savings to be made in an ostensibly rational manner. But in the worst case the trajectory is reversed and a paradigm is selected not on the grounds that it offers the best explanation of the prevailing strategic environment, but simply because it gives the most convincing explanation for the cuts and savings that must be made.

There are other reasons to be wary of paradigms. Already by late May 2011, the death of Osama bin Laden is being seen by some commentators to be the basis for a shift in interest from counter-insurgency to counter-terrorism as the most relevant and reliable paradigm for national and international security.<sup>3</sup> Force postures and resource allocation would, presumably, be influenced by

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<sup>3</sup> See Jim Lobe, 'U.S.: Bin Laden's Killing Could Alter Af-Pak, Other Policies', *Global Issues*, 2 May 2011: <http://www.globalissues.org/news/2011/05/02/9479>.

the outcome of this 'battle of the paradigms'. I have discussed elsewhere the risks of what I describe as 'paradigm hunting' or 'paradigm optimism', arguing instead for 'paradigm scepticism' whereby the paradigm for international security and strategy in the early 21st century might be that 'there is no paradigm: anything goes.'<sup>4</sup>

Others have been similarly cautious. David Fisher, for example, warns that 'the supposition that we have now discovered the new, enduring paradigm of war is historically unlikely. It also carries the risk that, if we confront contemporary experiences as if they were entirely novel and without precedent, we will fail to learn the lessons of the past.'<sup>5</sup> Complexity and diversity are so challenging, in policy-making and planning terms, that there must be a temptation to reduce the scope of analysis and to simplify the outlook. Paradigm hunting can serve precisely that purpose, permitting a narrowing of the strategic vision and allowing us, for ethnocentric or geographical reasons, to overlook important features of the strategic environment because they are distant from us either conceptually or physically, or simply because they do not conform to the patterns we expect and prefer. As a result, as Stephen Chan notes, we might fail to 'measure the distribution of recent wars and hunger: why it is that famine seems to stalk Africa in particular, while the industrialised world is curiously entitled to food; why it is that wars seem now to take place on the borderlands of the industrialised world, and that world wears the diamonds and burns the oil that come from the borderlands but, otherwise, cares little for all their other wars.'<sup>6</sup> I would add that we might also fail to measure the *character* of recent wars and hunger.

As well as seeing and hearing only that which we are willing to receive, another form of simplification is to project our own strategic paradigm and military self-image upon other situations and then, following a circular logic, to use what we find to validate our initial position. By 'paradigm projection' we seek less to understand the strategic environment than to inoculate ourselves from whichever parts of it seem most complex, different and challenging. 'Westerners', observes Patrick Porter, 'have made accurate insights into others' warfare, and they have also made distorted judgments about enemies, judgements which reflect the Western self-image refracted through Orientalism. Throughout, they have debated about themselves – their own warfare and society – through visions of the Orient.'<sup>7</sup>

Fortunately for the paradigm sceptic, help is at hand in the form of Rudra Sil's and Peter Katzenstein's *Beyond Paradigms: Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics*. 'Because it is not invested in either intra-paradigm progress or inter-paradigm competition,' they argue, 'analytic eclecticism can respond to calls for a more "public social science." [...] Without a dose of eclecticism, scholarship based on a single paradigm risks mistaking some trees for the forest. [...] analytic eclecticism offers opportunities to enhance our collective ability to communicate across paradigmatic boundaries, and to engage normative and policy issues of interest to a broader public.'<sup>8</sup>

But if eclecticism can offer analysts a way out of the terminal obsession with strategic paradigms, is there anything that it can offer to strategic policy-makers, practitioners and planners? I have suggested that for the foreseeable future the strategic environment will be characterized by strategic complexity, uncertainty and urgency. The most appropriate way to meet such a future is probably to avoid being too simple, too certain or too complacent. Complexity calls for intellectual adaptability on the part of strategists; uncertainty calls for practical agility on the part of the armed forces; and urgency calls for the government to ensure that a broad enough range of capabilities and skills is in place and ready for use. Strategic eclecticism can thus be summarized in three words: adaptability, agility and risk.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Cornish, *Strategy in Austerity: the Security and Defence of the United Kingdom* (London: Chatham House, October 2010), pp. 16–18.

<sup>5</sup> David Fisher, *Morality and War: Can War be Just in the Twenty-First Century?* (Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 156–57.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Chan, *The End of Certainty: Towards a New Internationalism* (London: Zed Books, 2010), p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (London: Hurst & Company, 2009), p. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Rudra Sil and Peter J. Katzenstein, *Beyond Paradigms: Analytic Eclecticism in the Study of World Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 212, 217–18.

*Adaptability* requires that strategists should be open-minded and should resist the siren call of this or that paradigm. In the past 25 years there have been many contenders for the title of most convincing, sophisticated, fashionable, relevant or durable strategic paradigm or model of armed conflict: follow-on forces attack, air-land battle, offshore balancing, fighting in built-up areas, peacekeeping, peacemaking, peace enforcement, military operations other than war, network enabled operations, network-centric warfare, counter-terrorism, counter-insurgency-terrorism, hybrid warfare, war among the people, cyber warfare and so on. It is not that these ideas lack relevance or conceptual or practical authority, it is simply that their explanatory power is not sufficient, or sufficiently durable, to be the basis for long-term strategic decisions. As reflections upon different aspects of the evolving strategic environment, these doctrines and ideas might be better understood as endorsements of Clausewitz's argument that while the *nature* of war – being the act of force or the duel – remains constant and universal, its *character* can change.<sup>9</sup>

*Agility* requires that armed forces should train to be versatile, to have a number of skills, to have a broad range of weapons and equipment, and to be able to reorganize and reconfigure as circumstances demand. This is scarcely a novel proposition and it prompts very familiar questions: which skills, weapons and equipment might be required? What forms of reorganization and transformation are envisaged? In other words, the call for 'agility' has often merely emphasized the problem of strategic diversity without offering much of a solution to it. If Clausewitz was correct in drawing a distinction between the nature and the character of war, then paradoxically one way to achieve agility might be first to do the opposite. Agility in warfare, as in politics and as in gymnastics, requires balance and must begin from a solid and stable position. It is essential for the protagonist to know who and where they are, and of what they are capable. Only then can agility be connected to capability: without substance and stability, agility is nothing more than ineffectual motion in one direction or another. This is the point at which to suggest a return to a simple yet currently unfashionable idea: armed forces should be trained first and foremost in the nature of war – as Clausewitzian duellists and experts in organized, purposive and politically constrained violence. Armed forces might be better able to respond to changes in the character of war and violent conflict if they understand and can capitalize on its nature.

Finally, strategic eclecticism requires familiarity with the concepts and practices of risk management. When plausible future commitments exceed likely resources, risk management – the ability to identify and assess exposure to risks as they emerge and then to mitigate those risks by the timely reconfiguration and deployment of capabilities (or, indeed, by offloading the risk onto others) – offers the only possibility of a comprehensive and credible strategy. But risk management should be understood as a 'force multiplier'; it is a means with which to ensure that limited capabilities can be deployed and used more cleverly and accurately, and to best effect. Particularly in times of fiscal austerity it is important to note that a risk management strategy should augment a force posture (even one that is facing reductions) and should not be considered a substitute for a force posture.

Strategic eclecticism, which I have elsewhere described as a 'higher form of muddling through',<sup>10</sup> does not provide a particularly convincing framework for strategic planning for the next 10–20 years. But that is precisely its point: strategic eclecticism should be an antidote to the obsession with paradigms and models dominating so much of the strategic debate. It is an anti-paradigm that insists that in the circumstances of the early 21st century it is important for strategic and military planners to be able to ask the right questions at the most appropriate moment, and to be able to respond accordingly, rather than be locked into a dogmatic framework of analysis.

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<sup>9</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, Princeton University Press, 1976), Book One.

<sup>10</sup> Cornish, *Strategy in Austerity*, pp. 25–27.

## 2 LAND FORCES FIT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

**Olivier Grouille**

### Introduction

Over the course of the last decade, as a result of two high-tempo and demanding wars and a Strategic Defence and Security Review, the British Army has witnessed a rate of change in its capabilities and structures not seen since the Second World War. The 2007–08 global financial crisis has ushered in an era of drastically reduced public spending, set against the backdrop of an uncertain and complex strategic environment. Not for the first time, the Army has found itself being asked to do more with less.

On 15 March 2011 an event was hosted by the International Security Programme at Chatham House in conjunction with the Army's AGILE WARRIOR programme, its new process designed to define its view of its future force structure and capability requirements. Approximately 50 high-level delegates drawn from the military, academic, media and industrial communities came together in a closed forum to challenge established British Army thinking. The forum was held in the spirit of an objective and critical evaluation of the assumptions the Army makes about its future, about the character of the conflicts it may become involved in, and about the allies and partners with whom it will operate. This is a synthesis of the speakers' prepared remarks and the ensuing discussion, all held under the Chatham House Rule.<sup>11</sup>

### The Army's unique role as part of the UK's armed forces

The United Kingdom remains committed to the global involvement of its armed forces as an instrument of foreign policy. An understanding of the global context is therefore crucial for all concerned with the maintenance and employment of these forces. Four points of particular relevance were noted. First, over 90% of the country's trade and energy supplies are transported by sea in a 'just in time' model, and the Royal Navy (RN) makes an invaluable contribution to the maintenance of the free flow of goods through the world's shipping lanes, as well as carrying the nation's nuclear deterrent. Second, recent events in Libya have demonstrated that the expeditionary reach, readiness and precision strike of the Royal Air Force (RAF) represents a potent national capability that few other countries can match. Third, while the Army will always form the core of any land-centric intervention undertaken by the British government, it will rarely, if ever, operate alone or in isolation. Fourth, operations will continue to be joint (i.e. tri-service) and therefore the support and contribution of the RAF and the RN, including the Royal Marines (RM) will be crucial. However, there will be occasions of last resort when there can be no substitute for the Army.

### Will the United Kingdom intervene again?

It was agreed that the United Kingdom's political willingness to use its armed forces was driven both nationally and internationally, specifically by the readiness to participate in alliance operations that fulfil a United Nations Security Council Chapter VII resolution authorizing the use of force. However, some participants argued that adverse perceptions associated with operations in Iraq should not lead decision-makers and officials to assume that the country should forever renounce

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<sup>11</sup> The Chatham House Rule asserts that: "When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.", <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/about/chathamhouserule/>

the capabilities that would allow it to intervene in conflicts of that type in future. While it was agreed that the doctrine of 'liberal interventionism' had diminished in popularity among the political class, the coalition government's commitment to a 'hard-headed approach' to national interests as well as its responsibilities to the maintenance of a rules-based international order may see UK forces in action sooner than some commentators might expect.

### **Multilateralism, partners and allies**

The United Kingdom will almost certainly only use force in an alliance context. One commentator suggested that the Army should not assume this necessarily means a repeat of the US–UK dynamic experienced in recent conflicts. While it is highly likely that the United States would be involved, it might not necessarily want to assume an unequivocal leadership role and could instead seek shared leadership. Operations in Libya were again cited as an example of a more cautious US approach. Another participant supported this point by questioning prevailing assumptions about the submission of UK national or grand strategy to that of America, leaving Britain with little choice but to fill the role of 'junior partner of first choice'. Several participants were sceptical that the United States would necessarily continue to view the United Kingdom in such a light and would seek at all times to include it in a coalition effort. The same participants suggested that a different approach might be for the UK contribution to be that of a 'critical friend'. In this role, the United Kingdom could offer support to US policies in the international system by acting as a more unilateral and independently operating national power, albeit on a lower scale of effort. This would, however, not preclude bilateral and multilateral relationships with other nations.

It was observed by a US participant, however, that the close relationship between the two countries' armies was a powerful example of the practical success of the partnership. In particular, the manner in which their Special Forces work together was underscored as a case study in successful military integration. More broadly, strengths were identified in terms of interoperability, encompassing technical, procedural, doctrinal and conceptual elements. Some commentators identified a number of challenges that require more attention including attitudes and policies towards border control, lethal and non-lethal targeting and population control.

British participants concurred, and both nations' representatives also agreed that the re-emergence of France as a more militarily active partner was an extremely welcome development. The similarities between Britain and France in terms of military expenditure, post-colonial responsibilities, expeditionary posture and quality of armed forces were highlighted. Participants observed that the 2010 Franco-British defence treaties presented an excellent opportunity for the United Kingdom to do more with a partner that operates on a similar level, without undermining the closeness of the US–UK relationship. One participant observed that attitudes and mindsets towards greater military involvement with France were changing for the better within the ranks of the British Army: it is increasingly understood that doing more with France does not necessarily mean doing less with the United States. Another participant questioned the extent to which Britain and France should seek interoperability of their forces with US forces. Particularly in the technical domain, it was observed that full interoperability came at a high financial price. Given that British and French defence expenditure is shrinking, the resultant reductions en masse were highlighted as a potential cause for concern. One participant made the point that modern conflict, particularly in counter-insurgency, was manpower-intensive. The United Kingdom and France should therefore each wholeheartedly embrace a 'people first' approach and seek to strike a more enduring balance between quality of equipment and quantity of personnel, with more of an emphasis on the latter. It was noted that even the much larger US defence establishment had begun to question the relevance of 'exotic' capabilities.

Once again, the question arose of the value of junior partner nations to US grand strategy. One participant reiterated the earlier point that Britain needs to re-examine its assumptions regarding the scale of its effort in a US-led coalition. Another suggested that these assumptions were currently based on the perception that a certain level of effort was perceived to 'buy' influence for the UK among the US political and military leadership. It was suggested by a third participant that a more productive approach would be based on the United Kingdom more accurately identifying and



articulating achievable mission success within more closely defined parameters. Over-promising and struggling to deliver was observed to be of less utility to the United States than a slightly smaller scale of effort that could be relied upon to work and that would not require US resources to sustain it.

The US perspective was that integrated operations, which are multi-institutional as well as multinational, are now the norm. An American participant emphasized that this was regarded as a strength, as different players were able to bring different areas of expertise to bear to help address the complexity of modern conflict. In particular it was noted that today's adversaries employ a range of techniques that are not wholly military. Thus the outside expertise of criminal investigators, financial analysts, cultural specialists, linguists, media personnel and political officials – all skill sets traditionally seen as non-military – was seen to be a boon to countering current and emerging adversaries. Other participants observed that the US and UK militaries were unlikely to be able to institutionalize these capabilities to the extent necessary to undertake large-scale operations. Thus the enduring nature of interdepartmental and inter-agency operations was reinforced, alongside recognition that the armed forces have a responsibility to institutionalize the practice of working with these other organizations and to continue to educate their people to do so effectively. Another participant reminded the group that Reserve Forces were crucial in this regard, often employing personnel who have such expertise from their civilian employment and who are more used to working with a diverse range of agencies and institutions. It was emphasized that 'people first' defence policies must include Reserves from the outset, rather than as an afterthought.

Discussion turned to NATO and its pre-eminence as the defence alliance of first choice for the United States, the United Kingdom and France. With this in mind, a re-examination of certain assumptions about the nature of coalitions was proposed. One participant suggested a reassessment of the mindset of the 1991 Gulf War, placing greater emphasis on 'coalitions of the relevant' rather than 'coalitions of the willing', with the latter encapsulating the erroneous approach taken during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Coalitions should seek to convey international political legitimacy and determination and to attract the support of regional multilateral organizations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the African Union (AU) and the Arab League (AL). In addition to political support, individual coalition members should ideally be able to provide militarily useful capabilities as well as personnel and equipment commensurate to their size and wealth. Current operations in Libya were again cited as constituting a positive example of an internationally politically relevant coalition, albeit one in which several Middle Eastern and European nations were not providing sufficient military assets to the air campaign.

While one participant lamented that NATO is all too often viewed through the lens of the '*opération du jour*', another observed that for many member states the campaign in Afghanistan represented an extraordinary transformative experience that completely changed the paradigm of their overall defence posture. Other participants debated whether the Afghanistan experience had bolstered the Alliance's conventional deterrence posture and to what extent overall deterrence relied on nuclear weapons. Discussion also turned to the question of cyber-warfare, and participants were divided as to whether it represents a fundamental shift in the nature of war or whether it will instead merely be a feature of the character of most modern wars, and to what extent conflict in cyberspace could ever be viewed as decisive.

Further discussion on NATO's role in Afghanistan centred on the Alliance's leadership of the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF). Most participants agreed that the Iraq war had for too long starved ISAF of resources and political attention. The current ISAF strategy and command and control arrangements were viewed positively, although concern was voiced over the length of time taken to reach the present status quo. One participant linked his remarks to an earlier discussion of the relative contributions of ISAF member states, identifying instances of useful commitment of even small contributions, especially in the realm of Special Forces. The need to balance the political legitimacy of a broad coalition with operationally significant contributions was reiterated, but one commentator urged caution when examining the controversial subject of national caveats within ISAF. He suggested that a careful distinction be made between caveats that arise as a result of personality differences between military commanders and those than being issued from the 'national control tower'. It was further noted that one of the most operationally significant military contributions to ISAF comes from Australia, a non-NATO member. One

participant identified this as a key point for consideration when building future coalitions. He noted that, as the sixth largest troop-contributing country out of a total of 42 in ISAF, Australia has a legitimate desire to be considered a full partner rather than an ally and thus to be fully involved during the planning stage of the campaign. This observation is consistent with the new NATO Strategic Concept, which states that 'operational partners' who contribute to NATO-led operations are henceforth to be given 'a structural role in shaping strategy and decisions on NATO-led missions to which they contribute'. One participant suggested that NATO should seek to keep ISAF alive as a coalition beyond its involvement in Afghanistan, subject to the relevant UN Security Council authorization. Another recommended that NATO improve its ability to act as a gateway for more bilateral defence arrangements between members, especially where the provision of private security is concerned. This point raised questions as to the future role of private contractors on the battlefield. A US participant observed that the ratio of American uniformed personnel to American contractors in Afghanistan is 1:1 and that the US presence there were utterly dependant on the private sector. A British participant noted that the United Kingdom's equivalent ratio was 1:3, while a French participant underscored his nation's deep misgivings about private security companies and their virtual absence from the French contingent in Afghanistan. It was argued that this is a subject area that merits further analysis.

### **Conflict paradigms, future adversaries and hybrid threats**

Major combat operations (MCO) and counter-insurgency (COIN) are often incorrectly viewed as the mutually exclusive elements of a binary choice. Instead, most participants agreed that the greatest likelihood lay in the commitment of land forces to conflicts that lie closer towards the centre of the 'spectrum of conflict', which runs from non-combat operations such as humanitarian assistance through peacekeeping and counter-insurgency to total war. It was also suggested that the 'spectrum of conflict' itself might be changing, with modern warfare encompassing elements of MCO and COIN simultaneously, rather than representing discrete parts of a linear escalation of violence and complexity. One participant emphasized that this ethos should be applied to the Army's equipment as well as to its conceptual thinking. Thus systems such as heavy armour, originally procured for Cold War-era conventional interstate conflict, remain relevant to today's conflicts and those of the future, albeit in novel ways. The use of main battle tanks in Afghanistan for purposes of deception was cited as a case in point.

When considering the development of land forces 'fit for the 21st century', it is important to remember that there is a rather large amount of the century left. Therefore the Army must recognize the limitations of its ability to plan for the future and remember the old adages that 'no plan survives contact with the enemy' and that 'the plan is nothing, but the act of planning is everything'. One participant questioned whether the Army was able look further ahead than 2015 without clearer political direction on the likelihood of budgetary changes past the timeframe of the Comprehensive Spending Review. A second reinforced the argument concerning the need for the Army to become a continuously agile and adaptable organization in order to respond effectively as much to financial and political uncertainty in Westminster and Whitehall as to unpredictable future battlefields.

When discussing the range of threats land forces are likely to face, one participant noted that the distinction between natural hazards and man-made threats may erode if the former generate enough fear to provoke political action which fuels the latter. Furthermore, while General Sir Rupert Smith's point that the 20th-century paradigm of interstate industrial warfare is probably correct, land forces must be prepared for the fact that the new paradigm for conflict in the early 21st century may be that there is no singular paradigm, or that it is at best a fluid and ill-defined set of possibilities. Armies must therefore prepare to meet the unexpected by remaining open-minded, and must train their people in the unchanging nature of war as a foundation and then teach them how to think, in order to respond to the demands of the conflict of the day. They must also re-examine their attitude to risk and not over-extrapolate from contemporary assumptions. It may, for example, prove necessary in future to undertake a land operation with lower levels of force protection than are currently deemed minimum requirements, so as to achieve greater speed of response.

Several participants discussed the sorts of adversaries the Army is likely to face and case studies were presented of hybrid wars. These represent conflicts in which elements of conventional, industrial interstate warfare are blended with irregular tactics and formations, guerrilla techniques, terrorism and organized crime. The examples cited were the battles of Grozny in 1994, Lebanon in 2006 and Afghanistan in 2010. Israeli, US and UK participants noted that their respective armies use slightly different definitions of hybrid wars. Nonetheless, it was observed that the scholarly debate, largely driven by Frank Hoffman's early work on the subject, has not yet reached consensus as to precise definitions and terms of reference. It was suggested that the changeable character of hybrid threats and adversaries represented a concept that was not easily identifiable or neatly explained. One participant maintained that the attempt to define hybrid wars too closely and to afford them the status of a tightly defined and pigeonholed doctrinal proper noun ('Hybrid Wars') was unhelpful, as it would undermine the level of intellectual enquiry needed to engage properly and fully with the changeable character of modern conflicts.

It was further argued that the UK Ministry of Defence's 2010 *Future Character of Conflict* study had produced a useful, but by no means comprehensive, set of criteria by which hybrid conflicts might begin to be analysed. The set is informally known as the 'five Cs', describing the battlefield as cluttered, congested, contested, connected and constrained. The discussion settled upon a number of common ideas despite occasional divergences concerning a working definition of hybrid conflict:

- Combined arms manoeuvre, both physical and conceptual, remains valid in modern warfare.
- As it has always been, asymmetry must be understood as a 'normal' approach in future conflict as agile adversaries will seek to turn relative sources of strength into points of weakness, and vice versa.
- Armies must therefore not become over-reliant on technological networks or be incapable of functioning without them.
- The 'swirling mist' of media interest and influence is and will continue to be a powerful resource and/or constraint for both sides in a conflict.
- The urban environment will be decisive terrain and armies must be used to operating 'among the people' from day one.
- Adversaries may have multiple identities, some of which may be legitimate societal entities while others are illegal or criminal under national and international law.
- Adversaries may be sub-national in character but enjoy transnational sources of support.

### **Adaptive armies and people as the 'agile edge'**

The Army needs to become a more adaptive organization capable of adaptability from 'day one' of any conflict. Recent experience suggests that although both the US and British Armies have shown themselves capable of adaptation, the process was more difficult and ponderous than it should have been. The wealth of lessons identified and success stories achieved in Iraq and Afghanistan must be institutionalized in the Army. The majority of participants agreed that only then can it truly consider itself an adaptable learning organization that is organizationally, bureaucratically and intellectually flexible enough to respond to the fluid, complex and ever-changing character of conflict. Some participants added a note of caution, reiterating that trying to predict precisely the character of future conflict was an impossible task. However, the point was made that because the behaviour of adversaries is impossible to predict, the Army must be attitudinally willing to change to the degree required for campaign success. It was argued that this ability lies entirely within the capacities of the Army's personnel, and that people, not technology or equipment, would be the Army's 'agile edge' in future conflicts. One participant emphasized the need for a deeper understanding of the difference between the training and the education of the Army's leaders. In particular it was questioned whether military staff colleges are capable of producing the sort of

lateral-thinking officer the Army needs, or whether greater emphasis should be placed on educating officers in civilian environments where they are out of their intellectual 'comfort zones'. Another participant agreed, but made the point that education in civilian universities must be a complement to military staff training, not a replacement for it. A comparison was made with the Royal Navy's approach to developing Warfare Officers, with a suggestion that the Army might consider a similar scheme. The crucial role of the Reserves was emphasized, with a need to institutionalize further specialist conflict-winning capabilities such as advanced language training, cultural and regional expertise and information operations and its subset of psychological operations.

### **Conclusion: challenges for the Army**

The demands of recent operations in Iraq, ongoing operations in Afghanistan and the impact of the October 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review all pose unique challenges for the Army. One commentator cautioned that despite recent governmental assertions that defence spending will rise from 2015; the economy may not be in a position to allow this to happen. Furthermore, public opinion may demand a peace dividend as UK troops in Afghanistan make the transition out of a combat role. The Army should be wary of thinking that the era of manpower reductions is over. One participant went further and suggested that in Whitehall the Ministry of Defence has no allies. In the Treasury's eyes, defence is not a zero-sum game and the potential deletion of non-Army capabilities such as Trident would be unlikely to result in a reinvestment in the ministry that would lead to greater availability of funds for land forces. By contrast, the US perspective was that as potential threats from the Western Pacific become the dominant mindset among American political leaders, US land forces will have to fight harder for a share of the defined resources within the Department of Defense's budget.

Discussion of the effort that the Army must make to remain a politically relevant instrument of national power and influence was characterized by the sense that the pressures on it represent an opportunity for genuine and long-lasting reform that it cannot afford to waste. Strains of optimism discernible in the discussion were tempered by a feeling that recent steps in the right direction remained tentative and could yet be undermined by institutional obstacles to reform and unwise procurement decisions. Indeed, the sense of fiscal gloom currently discernible throughout the public sector was manifest more as a fear of inappropriate change being done *to* the Army rather than *by* the Army. The need to reconnect with British society through the military covenant was a strong undercurrent to the day's discussions, and this covenant was recognized as a key provider of fighting power in its wider sense.

Yet a note of caution was sounded in ensuring that returning soldiers, their families and the families of those killed and injured in action are not perceived as victims of an unpopular politicians' war. The Army needs to find a way to continue to embrace the Afghanistan conflict, yet to take the British people with it, and to manage the inaccurate perception that it sees the future only through the lens of operations in Afghanistan.

## **BRITISH ARMY: THE AGILE WARRIOR PROGRAMME**

The Army programme AGILE WARRIOR provides an authoritative, evidence-based Force Development process. It seeks to define the Army's view of its future force structure and capability requirements. It consists of an annual programme of activities to support the future Planning Round and Defence Review. Evidence is drawn from experimentation using techniques such as simulation, operational analysis, field exercises and military judgment, supported by lessons from operations and training in order to inform and drive land force transformation.

Engagement with industry, academia, allies and partners is an essential element in establishing the credible evidence base and support necessary to underpin recommendations for change. The Chatham House Conference on 'Land Forces Fit for the 21st Century' therefore afforded an opportunity to challenge and critique conventional Army thinking and in so doing contribute to land force transformation.

## **CHATHAM HOUSE: INTERNATIONAL SECURITY PROGRAMME**

Chatham House provides a neutral and independent forum for frank and open discussion.

The International Security Programme at Chatham House has a long-established reputation for independent and timely analysis on matters of national and international security and defence. With increasing awareness among policy-makers, practitioners, academics and the wider public about the diverse threats and challenges faced in the field of international security, the mission of the programme is to provide high-quality, intellectually coherent, political and strategic insight and policy-relevant analysis on international security issues.

The programme aims to be an internationally recognized and respected research area that is accessible to both the public and private sectors. Its Associate Fellows, who are based around the world, cover a range of international security-related topics including UK defence and security policy; military operations; European security and defence policy; Anglo-French defence cooperation; post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization; arms control; counter-terrorism; cyber security; and ethics and international security.

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