TRANSFORMATION TRANSFORMED: THE 'WAR ON TERROR' AND THE MODERNISATION OF THE BRITISH MILITARY

By

SAMUEL LYON

B.A., University of Oxford, 2005

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS
in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Political Science)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
August 2006
© Samuel Lyon, 2006
ABSTRACT

This thesis assesses the transformation of the British Military from the mid-1990s up until the current day. It addresses how the end of the Cold War brought a change in what was demanded of the British Armed Forces, and that since then, those Forces have adapted to that changed demand, altering their structure, tactics and equipment in order to deal with these new tasks and to exploit technological changes. Yet, as this thesis explores, transformation has not proceeded at a uniform pace, with the British experiencing several stages of transformative progress, and some of regress.

Starting with the Strategic Defence Review of 1998, this thesis traces the overall picture of transformation in the United Kingdom, looking at how it is managed, why it occurred, and where it is going. In particular though, it focuses on the stops and starts in the transformative process, and connects these primarily to the consequences of the Blair Government’s most important decision of all its time in power – being America’s closest ally after the terror attacks of September 11th 2001. Following these commitments, Britain committed to an even greater transformation of its military, set out in the Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter in 2002. The involvement of British troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, as the closest and most significant allies of the United States, drove transformation through co-operation with the much more transformed American Forces, and also had the support of greatly increased funding from the Treasury, enabling leaps in equipment technology. Those same commitments have placed a strain on transformation, however, as the requirement on troops has become that of occupation, rather than advanced warfighting. Thus we see the tale of transformation as one greatly impacted by Britain’s involvement in the American-led ‘War on Terror’.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................... ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS ......................................................................................... iii
LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................. v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ...................................................................................... vi
DEDICATION ......................................................................................................... vii
INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................. 1
  Introductory Context ......................................................................................... 2
  Research Questions and Hypotheses .............................................................. 4
  Methodology .................................................................................................... 4

CHAPTER ONE - Literature Review ................................................................. 5
  Britain’s Military Post-Cold War ..................................................................... 5
  The Revolution in Military Affairs and the US Military ............................... 8
  Technological Change and Strategic Planning .............................................. 11
  Bureaucratic Management ........................................................................... 14

CHAPTER TWO - The Strategic Defence Review ............................................. 17
  Prelude to the 1997 General Election ............................................................ 17
  Process Behind the SDR ................................................................................. 22
  Transformational Moves in the SDR ............................................................... 23
  Assessment of the Policy-Making Process .................................................... 29
  Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 36

CHAPTER THREE - Transformation Transformed ....................................... 39
  US Moves Towards Transformation ............................................................ 39
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 ........................................................................................................... 46
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks go out to Colin Campbell, who introduced me to this field, and who has been a mentor this year. Thanks also go to Brian Job, who stepped in to help out when it was needed. Finally, there are my friends and colleagues here: Rodolfo, Andrea, James, Nathan, Jamie, Tim and Robert, all of whom stepped in to help and to keep me sane. Last but certainly not least, my parents, my sister Nina, and Susan. Thank you all.
DEDICATION

To Fang.
INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to assess the transformation of the British military. The end of the Cold War brought a change in what was demanded of the British Armed Forces. Since that point, those Forces have adapted to that changed demand, altering their structure, tactics and equipment in order to deal with these new tasks and to exploit technological changes. This is a simplistic account of an exceedingly complex process, however. Firstly, transformation has not finished yet. The American military, undergoing similar changes, expects never to be fully finished with the transformative agenda\(^1\) – as much as anything, the process of transformation is an end in itself, rather than merely a means. Above all, transformation has not proceeded at a uniform pace, with the British experiencing several stages of transformative progress, and some of regress. This thesis will trace the overall picture of transformation in the UK, looking at how it is managed, why it occurred, and where it is going. In particular though, it will focus on these stops and starts, and investigates how transformation came to reflect the consequences of the Blair Government’s most important decision of all its time in power – being America’s closest ally after the terror attacks of September 11th 2001.

Within a year of the New Labour government coming into power in 1997, the transformation of British defence was underway. The process set out to determine, as one observer of the field puts it, how an organisation like the British military “should

undertake and manage change\textsuperscript{2}. What emerged was the Strategic Defence Review (SDR), which set Britain on a new path to expeditionary warfare with more flexible capabilities, and which is discussed in Chapter 2. Four years later, the government brought out an additional ‘chapter’ to the SDR, which embraced network-centric warfare and the technology of transformation. It is the period in between the two, though, that is most important. In fact, just one day changed the dynamic of transformation in the UK – September 11\textsuperscript{th} 2001 – and Chapter 3 addresses how the American and British responses to that event resulted in this shift. Before that, there is a brief section setting up the strategic context prior to the first transformative moves, and then a review of the relevant literature fields.

Introductory Context

Before going on to look at the literature in the fields relating to British transformation, it is necessary briefly to address Britain’s strategic position, as from this so much of its defence policy is drawn. Britain sits, both literally and metaphorically, between Europe and the United States. That position has meant that the United Kingdom has been torn between the two for centuries. The Cold War offered a brief period during which these two strategic spheres merged for Britain – the defence considerations of the United States were to keep Western Europe from the control of the Soviet forces on its borders, and similarly the Europeans desired to protect themselves from the communist threat. While these joint goals faced some rough periods (such as the departure of the French from the NATO military planning structure in 1966, or protests about the deployment of American nuclear forces), the overall result was one

\textsuperscript{2} Andrew M. Dorman, "Transformation and the United Kingdom". \textit{JFQ: Joint Force Quarterly}, no. 37 (2005): pg. 27.
whereby Britain’s desires to reassure the Americans of their commitment to contributing to defence matched the perceived need to be a player in continental defence as well. It rapidly became clear that Britain could not consider itself an independent player in any major conflict with the Soviets, and whole-hearted involvement in NATO provided the support of an alliance structure, in particular the vast muscle of the United States.

When the Cold War ended, European perspectives and priorities had changed. Dozens of new states had emerged from the ruins of the Soviet Bloc, and their instability had caused one world war already in the century. Russia was by no means fully demilitarised, nor politically congenial towards the West. East and West Germany were re-uniting, forming the powerful and potentially threatening German state once more. Both the British and the French were particularly worried by the prospect of the reunified Germany, but dealt with the situation in very different ways. The French chose to bind her with a more federal European Union. The British, led by the Euroskeptic Conservatives, sheered away from such a route, which would have demanded at the very least openly embracing the Western European Union. Instead, the British chose to enlist the help of NATO, and particularly the United States, to bring Germany into a structured environment. These approaches achieved their goal – the renewed Germany did not pose a great threat to the UK or Europe. Britain had made its allegiance known however, and was now distanced from Europe’s core institutions, focusing instead on the United States for its strategic and military bearings\(^3\). Transformation would benefit from this bond. Strategically, this is where

---


Michael Clarke, "Security Challenges" in *About Turn, Forward March with Europe: New Directions*
we find ourselves at the start of this thesis. Britain is casting about for a new set of tasks for her military forces, and in this search she is primarily looking towards the United States.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

In a very general sense, the research question here is “How did transformation occur in the United Kingdom?” Breaking this broader question apart, two core points emerge. Firstly, there is the need to understand how and why the transformation process started, and this is dealt with in Chapter Two. Following on from that is the need to address why transformation changed so markedly from the course on which it was heading. The hypothesis of this thesis, briefly mentioned above, is that as the British and American response to September 11th was military, the campaign requirements structured how that military operated, thereby affecting its transformation.

Methodology

Alongside the study of government documents, academic literature and so forth, at the core of the research method in this work is a set of interviews, undertaken at first by Colin Campbell, and then myself. These were with thirteen senior civilian and military officials in the Ministry of Defence (MoD), and academics involved in the policy-making process. The interviews were undertaken on the condition of strict anonymity, and thus unattributed quotes exist at points during this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE – Literature Review

Britain’s Military Post-Cold War

Smith and Uttley point out that the overwhelming focus on the Soviet threat had had an impact beyond the selection criteria for Britain’s selection of her allies – in addition, “the 45-year Cold War had made planning assumptions, to a remarkably degree, extraordinarily stable”⁴. Not only had this particular threat now disappeared, but the whole idea that Britain would have to primarily orient itself towards fighting a massive war to prevent the dominance of Europe was defunct⁵, and the country found itself in the same position as many other Western European states – with armed forces “trained extensively for a war that did not take place”⁶. This resulted in both opportunity and threat. The British government could finally make choices over the status of British Forces, as the country’s very existence would not be in peril. One aspect of this would be exploiting the ‘peace dividend’, whereby a cut in the costly Forces budget could yield resources for other, needy policy programmes. Nevertheless, the world had not turned peaceful in the blink of an eye, and the Forces could not be dangerously weakened.

Despite the future offering numerous options for British defence policy, and requiring some form of reaction, assessments of the political response to these events broadly suggest governmental languor in this regard. Greenwood points out that political will

---

of the Conservative government of the time did not stretch far towards radically changing defence policy in the face of geopolitical shifts, suggesting instead an attitude that while it “might be necessary to adjust force levels or alter the force structure as time goes by...for the business of ‘defending our future’ the size and shape of the Armed Forces, their equipment and deployment are essentially as they should be”\(^7\). While some ministers recognised the new security environment, the few policy changes undertaken in the face of the changed strategic picture Britain now faced were by and large cost-cutting measures, without extensive reformulations of policy\(^8\). The experience of the last full defence review, held in 1981 by Secretary of State for Defence John Nott, was not a pleasant one. Upon the presentation of the review, which suggested in particular cuts to the surface fleet, the Conservative Party was split internally over a number of issues, and the reservations of the defence establishment caused great embarrassment to the party ostensibly so closely allied with that august body\(^9\).

In five years up to 1995 therefore, the Armed Forces had to deal with a series of minimalist quasi-reviews, termed ‘exercise’ or ‘study’ to avoid the tensions of the dreaded full ‘review’. These started with ‘Options for Change’ in 1990-1\(^10\), then moved on to three-stage ‘Statement on the Defence Estimates 1993’ \(^11\), and then on

---

7 David Greenwood, "Roles; Missions and Resources" in *About Turn, Forward March with Europe: New Directions for Defence and Security Policy* (London; Concord, MA: IPPR/Rivers Oram Press; Paul and Company, 1996), pg. 32.
9 Ibid.
again to ‘Front Line First: The Defence Costs Study’ in 1994\textsuperscript{12}. These studies did not seriously attempt to address what tasks the Forces were to undertake in the future – instead, the focus was on “trimming the tail without blunting the teeth”\textsuperscript{13}. The Conservative Government was facing severe budgetary pressures – the economy was in a recession, and there were strict self-imposed spending limits\textsuperscript{14}. The defence budget was cut consistently throughout the early post-Cold War period, and got to the stage that by 1996, the Defence Committee of the House of Commons would not recommend the annual defence estimates to the House\textsuperscript{15}, an incredibly embarrassing result for the government. Dorman\textsuperscript{16} similarly places much of the blame for the Conservative government’s inactivity over defence policy on political will, emphasising the fractious dynamics within the Conservative party regarding European matters. As the European theatre had come to structure British defence policy over the Cold War, the fact that the Conservatives were so catastrophically riven over the future of Europe produced a policy vacuum.

The financial austerity of the Conservative governments post-Cold War were not unique in recent British history. Even during the Cold War, geo-political factors were not the only drivers taken into consideration by policy-makers. As Freedman pointed out in 1983, “the history of British defence policy is of an attempt to reconcile the


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. Pg. 45.


\textsuperscript{15} McInnes, "Labour's Strategic Defence Review," 823-845.

mismatch between resources and commitments\textsuperscript{17}, a reconciliation that often offered very little generosity in the way of military expenditure, and certainly restricted the abilities of the British military to make dramatic transformational advances. During the later stages of the Cold War, this dynamic was particularly acute. Discussions should not go to excessive lengths in their comparison, say, of the numbers of ships in the Royal Navy in 1945 versus the numbers today, as significant qualitative leaps have certainly been made. Nonetheless, the fact remains that financial pressures led the British Armed Forces to a fall in capabilities relative to those of other nations\textsuperscript{18}.

With the fall of the Soviet threat, there existed even less rationale to fund defence, and the rapid cuts in spending followed.

Across the criticisms of Conservative defence policy in the mid-1990s, one theme stands out – reaping the benefits of the ‘peace dividend’ without reassessing roles was insufficient. The continued deployment of forces on the basis of fixed threats was entirely inappropriate. Britain needed an assessment of the Forces, which would allow them to develop responses to the vastly expanded requirements on their skills.

The Revolution in Military Affairs and the US Military

In contrast to the limited moves of the government, literature of the time offers numerous suggestions for how to adapt to the new requirements on the Armed Forces. Certainly, the great coincidence of the time for advanced industrialised nations’ militaries was that of the advent of advanced technological resources just as dramatic


\textsuperscript{18} John Baylis, "Greenwoodery' and British Defence Policy," International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 62, no. 3 (Summer 1986): 443-457.; Greenwood, "Roles, Missions and Resources," 31-48.
new military roles emerged. The ‘Revolution in Military Affairs’ (RMA) that had started in the final years of the Cold War now developed alongside the phenomenal growth in ‘civilian’ technologies, particularly in the field of Information Technology (IT) with innovations such as networking and increased processing power\textsuperscript{19}. The RMA therefore came to refer to “the strategic consequences of the marriage of systems that collect, process and communicate information with those that apply military force”\textsuperscript{20}, a synthesis of new thinking on the conduct of warfare, and new options for implementation.

One must emphasise the different relevance this concept held (and still holds) for the British military, compared to the Americans. While some observers\textsuperscript{21} were questioning just how radical the RMA was in its impact on US forces, there was little doubt that the country could undertake such a transformation should it so desire. As Freedman points out though, Britain’s capacity to switch to a high-tech, information-centric and network-centric military is nothing close to that of its ally – “only the United States has the economic resources and the military infrastructure to begin to follow this path”\textsuperscript{22}. A second critique of the focus on technology, and IT in particular, is that the example drawn on by early advocates of the RMA, the Gulf War of 1990-1, was a conventional war, fought with conventional weapons, on a big flat, open desert.

The situation therefore played into the strengths of the RMA concept, but offered no


\textsuperscript{21} Cohen, "A Revolution in Warfare," 37-54.

\textsuperscript{22} Freedman, "Britain and the Revolution in Military Affairs," pg. 112.
challenges to it weaknesses, namely that "the more it becomes necessary to operate in confined spaces in and around populated areas and against the backdrop of often highly intricate political contexts, the less useful [RMA] capabilities will become"\textsuperscript{23}. There were, accordingly, concerns both about the efficacy of the doctrine, and the economics of the transformation, such that the status of RMA in the United Kingdom was uncertain, and certainly not an established aspect of military doctrine. Similar critiques will re-emerge later in this study.

The term ‘RMA’ is not as widely used as it was during the immediate aftermath of the Gulf War. Instead, the conception has morphed into one of ‘transformation’ as describing a broader vision of a modern military. The IT influence still remains, and it still forms a focal point for these discussions. Nevertheless, the transformative agenda suggested by theorists of military policy now follows the lines of the critique offered by Cohen\textsuperscript{24} of earlier RMA conceptions – it is much less willing to view information systems as a panacea offering the ability to prosecute war from hundreds of miles away. Instead, this modern transformation is structural/organisational (encouraging closer co-operation amongst the military branches) and conceptual (actively envisioning the future military roles), as well as using technological advances to further military abilities. As will be discussed later, the shift of focus away from the financial resource-intensive technological advances, towards the less material transformations, has improved the prospects for countries other than the United States, with its overwhelming resource advantage, to in turn undergo military transformation to some degree.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. pg. 119.

\textsuperscript{24} Cohen, "A Revolution in Warfare," 37-54.
Applying this to the example of the US, one sees that with the end of the Cold War, the United States Armed Forces were also looking for their new role. Much happened in the interim period – the same changed strategic landscape that the British were having to deal with posed at least as big a challenge for the Americans. They had committed many billions of dollars towards equipping their forces, and those of their allies, to deal with the perceived threats of communist forces, and would now have to cope with that task disappearing, and many new, unconventional, demands placed on them, through their position as the world’s only super- or hyper-power. Just as in Britain, a wide-spread suggestion was that the United States should move away from what Kugler calls “specific canonical contingencies”\textsuperscript{25}, namely the doctrinal focus on fixed threats, and instead move towards planning based on ‘generic missions’, or, as they have come to be called, capabilities-based plans.

Pressure emerged for the military to exploit the new opportunities this technology offered\textsuperscript{26}. The National Defense Panel, convened to comment on the Quadrennial Defence Review process and findings in 1997, said in their report that “[w]e are on the cusp of a military revolution stimulated by rapid advances in information and information-related technologies”\textsuperscript{27}. Along with that pressure to use technological advances came the warning that the organisational structures would probably have to change alongside them, as “much of the US national security institutional structure


was created for the technology of the mid-20th century", and that “only sustained vision and leadership can achieve the revolutionary organizational changes required to bring [these] institutions into line with 21st century military technology”

Technological Change and Strategic Planning

Exploiting this kind of technology would significantly change how the military fought. Some management literature stresses the need for organisations to be wary, as well as proactive, in dealing with changes in their technological field. Christensen puts forward two mechanisms of innovative change. He implies that improvements in technology may not take place in the conventional fashion, what he terms “sustaining innovation”, a secular evolutionary path with a “measurable trajectory of improvement”. Instead, the change in question may take a form similar to that seen in hard-disk drive architecture throughout the 1970s and 1980s, termed “disruptive innovations”. Technological advances, in this case the shrinking of the drive’s diameter, may appear at first to do less than established technologies and at a greater cost, and therefore “offer a different package of attributes [at first] valued only in emerging markets remote from, and unimportant to, the mainstream”. If the pace of improvement of the technology is greater than what the market is asking of established forces, then the newer technology will eventually catch up, and surpass, what is already being used, even after having been dismissed as an option initially.

Above all else, what is required of organisations facing potential disruption at the

---

30 Ibid., pg. 9.
31 Ibid., pg. 16.
hands of innovative technologies is a willingness to learn and adapt to signals and experiences. Users of technology need to be alert to the fact that the processes they have used before may not be the best way of handling things in the future. Military technology innovations under this reasoning may not simply make a tank better at being a main battle tank, shooting further, more accurately, having stronger armour or so forth. Instead, battlefield dominance may be achieved through immobilising the opponent, outflanking them, disabling them, making the tank disappear from the enemy’s sight and so forth, but this could only be discovered through trying out the new, and dealing constructively with the unforeseen. As will be discussed in greater detail later on, this adaptive mindset is one that the British Armed Forces are actively trying to instil in the upcoming generation of mid-range officers, to ensure the understanding is present to exploit any technological transformations of a disruptive nature to the fullest.

Connected to the ability to deal the impact of technological innovation is the need to plan effectively for the future in a broader sense. Strategic planning, the “disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organisation (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it”, is the term for this process. Not to be confused with stable long-term planning, the strategic approach is questioning, looking to find the destination as well as the route to get there, entailing “the analysis of internal and external environments...to maximise the utilization of

32 Ibid., pp. 240-1.
resources in relation to objectives." It is by definition an adaptive process, and that it "gives organisations a framework for developing abilities for anticipating and coping with change" is what Bracker suggests makes it so important. Bryson suggests that all planners in public agencies should be familiar with strategic planning, particularly in periods when the environments in which those organisations find themselves are changing so rapidly, and furthermore that care should be taken to ensure those who are undertaking the strategic planning span the divide between the agency's political and 'technical' or practical roles.

Technology approaching 'by stealth' poses a severe problem for those attempting a visioning of the future, as part of a strategic planning process. If the innovation in question is a disruptive one, then it takes above-average foresight to spot its future applications and the need for investment. This power of undermining the establishment is one of great relevance to the considerations of militaries for two reasons. Firstly, with the many billions of dollars or pounds spent on equipping forces, and the inevitable lag between ordering and first-use, technological disruption is a very real risk. Far more important, however, is the threat disruptive technologies pose to the well-being of the troops, threats for which unplanned troops are unprepared and vulnerable. The tale of transformation is a tale of how military organisations deal with this dilemma.

---

36 Bracker, "The Historical Development of the Strategic Management Concept," pg. 221.
38 Ibid., pg. 44.
Finally, as transformation in Britain is being managed by the bureaucracy of the MoD in particular, along with other Whitehall elements more broadly, it is necessary to deal with some of the literature from this field of study. The ‘Westminster model’\textsuperscript{39}, whereby civil servants are considered impartial advisers and managers of policy made by elected politicians, is the traditional conception of the British bureaucracy. Thatcher challenged this system during her years in power, bringing in changes such as the New Public Management scheme that attempted to shake up the institutions, bringing policy more securely under the politicians’ central control.

How successful this programme was is unclear. Kavanagh and Richards suggest that the “pathology of departmental government”\textsuperscript{40} remains, despite the reforms, and Campbell and Wilson suggest that skepticism of policy initiatives remains ingrained in the civil service\textsuperscript{41}. What is salient for the issue here is that Blair mirrored much of the mindset of Thatcher regarding political-bureaucratic relations. He too believed that reform was required in order to make the civil service more responsive\textsuperscript{42}.

It was into this environment of partial reform that the New Labour government brought its concept of joined-up government (JUG), the major initiative proposed to


\textsuperscript{40} D. Kavanagh and D. Richards, "Departmentalism and Joined-Up Government," \textit{Parliamentary Affairs} 54, no. 1 (January 1 2001): pg. 3.


reform governance in the UK. According to Pollitt, it had four main goals: coordinating policies to prevent goals from clashing; more efficient use of resources; improving the flow of ideas amongst stakeholders in a policy field; producing a more seamless set of services for those using them. Transformation straddles JUG – the white paper on which the JUG reforms were based was released in March 1999, almost a year after the document that kick-started transformation in the UK, the Strategic Defence Review. As will be discussed later, aspects of British transformation foreshadow some of the moves made regarding JUG, and fit into this broader debate. In fact, the suggestions made here are new, in that the studies in this area tend to avoid the Ministry of Defence, concentrating instead on ‘domestic’ departments. Thus, understanding the Blair reforms can put aspects of transformation, interdepartmental jointery and bureaucratic management, into better context, and the study can in turn expand our understanding of JUG.

This chapter offered a round-up of the fields of literature relevant to the issues discussed in the rest of this work. We now turn to a look at the General Election of 1997. It was out of this that emerged, somehow, a transformative agenda for the British Military.

---

43 Prime Minister and Minister for the Cabinet Office, Modernising Government Cm 4310, Great Britain, Cabinet Office, 1999
CHAPTER TWO – The Strategic Defence Review

Having examined the debates as they existed in both Britain and the United States on the requirements for change in military policy in both those countries, and the manner in which it was suggested the transformation take place, it is now appropriate to turn to describing, discussing, and better understanding the British experience of transformation through strategic planning. The process took place largely under the momentum of the Strategic Defence Review (SDR), released in 1998. The following sections look at the run-up to this review, the process behind it, and then move on to look at the implication it had for the transformation of the British military.

Prelude to the 1997 General Election

As discussed earlier, British defence policy had been broadly criticised in the early 1990s as offering no sense of direction to the troops, and merely a steady set of cuts in manpower, equipment and financial resources. The Labour Party had traditionally faced defence issues at a spectacular disadvantage. Internal divisions marked all discussions over defence policy, divisions which sprang from two sources. The first was the influence of the nuclear deterrent. Some within the party fundamentally opposed Britain’s having any nuclear weapons whatsoever, and advocated unilateral disarmament as soon as possible. This stance was opposed within the party by those who either advocated disarmament but only as part of a joint process with the other nuclear powers, and those who wished to maintain Britain’s nuclear military

capabilities. The second cause of division was somewhat more fundamental. Rather than focusing just on the nuclear issue, it took place between those who felt that considerable defence spending was required to counter the Soviet threat, and those who took a more pacifist line, preferring to spend the limited government resources on traditional Labour considerations, such as public services and welfare.

Whatever the specific cause of the contention, this division was clear to the public, surfacing annually at the Labour Party conference. The Conservatives made great play of it, particularly in General Elections\(^4^7\), reinforcing in the electorate’s mind that Labour was ‘weak’ on defence. Whilst not the only aspect of Labour policy that could be pilloried at election time throughout the 1980s, divisions over defence stood out ever more as Labour policy in other areas steadily came to be harmonised by leaders such as Neil Kinnock and John Smith. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the British nuclear deterrent became more redundant, as the country did not face an enemy with many thousand of nuclear weapons of their own any more. Nevertheless, without the nuclear issue to spur debate within the party, the defence policy stable for Labour looked relatively empty. Criticism had been made of the Conservatives for not engaging British forces more widely in supporting peacekeeping roles, or preventing ethnic cleansing in such spots as Rwanda, or Bosnia, but Labour offered nothing in the way of a comprehensive, well-prepared prescription for the deployment of British forces, as the commentators discussed in the previous chapter advised. Rather than presenting a detailed plan, the objective of the new generation of Labour leadership

“had simply been to neutralize the [defence] issue as a Conservative advantage”\textsuperscript{48}.

In this endeavour they were amply assisted by the defence cuts undertaken by the Conservatives, along with the apparent lack of any clear strategic plan for the post-Cold War world. There was in fact now a division in the Conservative government as to what tasks Britain’s forces should be required to undertake. Foreign Secretary Michael Ancram suggested that forces could be committed more widely, to support an expanded set of strategic tasks. Defence Secretary Rifkind however took the stance that military forces should be used sparingly, and for the tasks for which they had originally been trained\textsuperscript{49}. The Tories’ awareness of this disparity played into the hands of a Labour Party vulnerable to challenges of their record on defence matters.

Bearing in mind the historical weakness of Labour and the struggles of the Conservative government, a study of the parties’ manifestos for the election shows how little political relevance the parties placed on defence matters for the coming campaign. In the Conservative Manifesto, defence issues take up just one short section out of dozens, and offer only a pledge not to undertake a defence review, as this would “raise fear and uncertainty about the future”\textsuperscript{50}. Their approach was, quite literally, a small-c conservative one, not wanting to put the Armed Forces through a period of radical evaluation regarding missions, structure or equipment, maintaining the steady, limited changes that had been put forward in the mini-reviews in the early 1990s – effectively they would stick with a secular path of policy development.


\textsuperscript{49} McLnnes, “Labour’s Strategic Defence Review,” 823-845.

In turn, the position of the Labour Party going into the 1997 General Election was simple: “we will conduct a strategic defence and security review to reassess our essential security interests and defence needs”\(^{51}\). In effect therefore, Labour policy was to have no policy yet. They did follow this statement with some detail on what they expected to end up included in the review, in particular that the review would “consider how the roles, missions and capabilities of our armed forces should be adjusted to meet the new strategic realities”\(^{52}\) – effectively setting up a strategic planning process by the Ministry of Defence and the Services. An important addition to this section was that the Review would be “foreign policy led”. This phraseology suggests by implication that it would not be “Treasury led”\(^{53}\), or in other words a simple cover for more ‘efficiency’ and cuts reminiscent of the previous Tory years. The short segment of the manifesto covering defence thus yielded a two-pronged policy proposal, that “avoid[ed] controversial stances while hinting at something radical to come”\(^{54}\).

The most important aspect of the Labour proposal in terms of the strategic planning considered in this study is the fact that this proposal had the potential to open up defence policy for new ideas. With only limited restrictions – foreign policy leading for example – and a mandate to cover all the main aspects of military activity – roles, missions and capabilities – the proposed review was potentially incredibly broad-ranging and significant. Nevertheless, it was only potential to fit this, because the


\(^{52}\) Ibid.

\(^{53}\) McInnes, "Labour's Strategic Defence Review," 823-845.

extent of the review was so weakly circumscribed in the manifesto – it was advocating a process, but without giving an understanding of how far that process would go, and also whether the results of that process would be fully enshrined in policy.

In the run-up to the General Election of 1997, the Conservatives were hopelessly at sea in so many areas of governance. In fact, it can be seen as a clear demonstration of the distractions of the governing deficiencies of their own party, including in the defence sphere⁵⁵, that the Conservatives did not highlight the unwillingness of the Labour Party to define their stance on defence policy before the election, even though their own record was not particularly strong itself⁵⁶. Certainly, defence was not the big issue during this election that it had been in the two general elections in the 1980s (1982 post-Falklands and 1987, which Freedman termed the "two nuclear elections"⁵⁷) – it was eight years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and voters did not care very much about matters of force deployment. McInnes points out that this was in fact quite an ironic state of affairs, as the British Armed Forces were at the time of the election engaged in a greater variety of missions than at any point since the 1960s, yet still defence matters hardly registered⁵⁸. Due to this defence apathy there was little pressure from the electorate for Labour to clarify and expand upon their proposal for a strategic defence plan. Instead, the post-Cold War ‘peace’ the electorate saw made it the best time for the party to get under the radar a mere framework proposal, effectively having no defence policy. This was certainly in their own interest, as the

⁵⁵ McInnes, "Labour’s Strategic Defence Review," 823-845.
party was still seen by its own managers as being politically weak. Despite the leaders’ more moderate positions on defence matters, “defence could only lose Labour votes, regardless of any weaknesses in the Conservative record”\(^{59}\).

**Process behind the SDR**

Thus it was that when Labour won the 1997 election so overwhelmingly, they faced with living up to their pledge for a full strategic review of an area of policy from which they had been shying away in every election for the past twenty years. George Robertson, the Secretary of State for Defence, publicly launched the SDR on the 28th May 1997, stating that it would “provide Britain's Armed Forces with a new sense of clarity, coherence and consensus”\(^{60}\), and that Britain would learn from the US example of the Quadrennial Defence Review\(^{61}\) that had just been released that month. The process was to be as inclusive as possible (Robertson said he did not want it to be Labour’s defence review, but Britain’s), attempting to draw the knowledge and opinions of many sections of society connected with defence issues. Representatives of the defence industry, journalism, trade unions and academia were brought onto an ‘expert panel’ to give advice to the review\(^{62}\). On top of this, consultation was made with other government departments, with Parliament, with the general public, and even with allied countries, particularly the US.

The core of the review, however, remained those most closely affected by the

---

\(^{59}\) Ibid.: pg. 828.


changes: the Ministry of Defence’s civilian and military personnel, and the Armed Forces in general. They were not going to be excluded from the policy-making process, as had been the case in some of the cost-driven reviews of the past few years. Instead, the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff and the Second Permanent Secretary (the deputies to the military and civilian heads of the MoD respectively) headed a process that drew on a vast number of working groups and committees comprised primarily of active members of the Forces and civilian personnel from the MoD. These groups studied all the major areas relating to defence policy – planning assumptions, size, shape and structure of forces, logistic support, organisations and basing being a sample – and their findings were brought together with the contributions of the outside actors listed above.

Thus the SDR process was both narrow and broad. It was focused with respect to allowing members of the forces a direct input to the policy-making process, but also ensured that the Review would meet its target of containing defence policy within the considerations of foreign policy, all the while drawing on the advice of those without a direct institutional stake in the outcome.

Transformational Moves in the SDR

Having described the political motivation behind the move to undertake the SDR, the process of doing so, and how it fitted the strategic planning framework, we now turn to look at what transformational moves were advocated in the document, and why they were put there. The SDR recognised that some transformation of the Forces had taken place following the end of the Cold War under the previous governments.

---

Nevertheless, the planning had revealed that this process was "incomplete...and that a more radical approach was needed in many areas. On the launch of the review process, Robertson said that he intended for policy of an apparently radical nature:

It may mean change, perhaps discomforting those who yearn for the cosy status quo, but I am determined that we should have the flexible, mobile, hi-tech armed forces we will need to face the 21st century.

The following section will describe exactly what transformational policy was suggested in the SDR, and the subsequent one will assess the drivers behind these developments.

The role of technological advances was highlighted in the potential for transformational power, with Robertson suggesting it could offer "radically new ways for our Armed Forces to operate", with the major role proposed for the technological transformation of British Forces that of "improvements in intelligence gathering, command and control and precision weapons". At the same time, it was acknowledged that technology posed as a threat to national security, particularly through attacks on computer systems. The severity of this latter claim was widely disputed, with Freedman suggesting to the Defence Select Committee that in fact the more developed countries had a marked advantage in terms of information technology

---

65 George Robertson, "Why We Still Need Strong Armed Forces; the British People Reject Isolationism and are Committed to our Global Role, Says George Robertson," The Independent (London), 30 July 1997, p. 15. Lexis-Nexis,
When considering these two responses to technology, it is instructive to appreciate the wariness to advanced technologies that this juxtaposition of threats and opportunities manifests. This theme of hesitation is one that resonates throughout much of the following discussion of British transformative moves, particularly when compared to the attitude of those in the transformation process in the United States, where a full section in the earlier QDR had been enthusiastically devoted to 'harnessing' the technological advances offered by the RMA technologies. Evidence of just how skeptical the British were about the potential of these technologies was given by Mclnnes in his testimony to the Defence Select Committee, with a description of the contrast between the reception for RMA concepts in the US, where enthusiasm prevailed, and the UK, where the response was excessive (according to Mclnnes) skepticism, and lack of interest. The area where technology was flagged by the British as of use for the future was in the areas of information gathering and use. These were primarily focused the intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance capabilities (ISTAR) and the command, control and communications capabilities (C3). These were not so much the expensive single-use weapons proposed by the RMA, but instead reusable ‘force multipliers’, that would make the existing forces work more effectively and not necessarily cost so much more to operate. Such capabilities obviously fit the ever-present tension between budgets and British

---


defence policy cited earlier in Freedman, and their role in this specific case will be assessed in greater detail below.

What clearly appealed far more to the British planners than transformational technology was the merit of a joint approach to military matter. The overwhelming theme of the SDR is 'jointery', a theme present at a number of levels. Some relate to the process by which the review had been undertaken, and are discussed in the section assessing the policy-making process below. The 'jointery' proposed specifically for the forces was widespread. In his introduction to the SDR, Defence Secretary Robertson pointed out that the policy set out in the document would modernise and reshape the British Armed forces. The core manner in which these dual goals would come about was to be the increased use of 'joint' approaches\textsuperscript{72}, as demonstrated by the Joint Rapid Reaction Forces (JRRF) and Joint Force 2000 combining the Royal Air Force (RAF) and Royal Navy Harrier jets.

The reason for this focus was that the strategic visioning process had suggested that future operations would necessarily be undertaken by all three services working together\textsuperscript{73}. As early as 1996, before the Labour Government had come into power, initial moves were made to create a Permanent Joint Headquarters, which served to direct all British forces when on active duty in theatre. The SDR drew on this experience, but took the principle much further. Now the full chain of military operations would shift towards being prepared for joint undertakings — troops, command and control systems, intelligence gathering, and logistics supply.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., Intro.-4 & 5.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., Sect. 79.
Training was to be shifted to joint exercises, under the control of the Chief of Joint Operations. The development of future doctrine was also shifted to a joint setting, namely the Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre (JDCC, now the Developments, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, DCDC), as it was deemed “essential” that the long term strategic visioning were to be “a truly Joint Service” one. This would meant that jointery would become ever more integral to the Forces’ thinking, as they would be approaching matters through techniques and tactics developed through a joint framework. It was a development about which the Chief of the Defence Staff at the time, General Sir Charles Guthrie, enthused:

The Joint Doctrine development centre, I think could be very important. Up until recently the single services have really had a bottom up approach to the doctrine, they have all had their [own] doctrine centre and people studying the doctrine concepts. They have been very much in stove pipes and that I do not think is the right way of doing it. What I think you have to do is to have something on top to say what defence wants as a whole, work out that doctrine and then the stove pipes work to that and so are not so independent, we can pull things together. It is going to do that. I think it will look also at the development, the way we are going, far ahead. This Defence Review is [planning through to] 2015, it could be even looking further ahead, to work out the kind of forces we need, the kind of weapons we need, unless we can get that right jointly we are not going to get it right over

74 Ibid., Sect. 173.
The head of the Forces considered the JDCC to be the initiator of a philosophy of jointery in the services, and also the location for institutionalised strategic planning for the future Forces, thereby making it the centre of much of the transformational moves Britain's military would make in the future.

The institutional position of Chief of Joint Operations was given a further boost by its designation as a 'Top Level Budget' (TLB) holder in its own right. This meant that it would have a wide degree of financial independence, with budgetary authority and responsibility for its various commands passed to the post holder. As with any bureaucracy, the ability to determine one's own spending, to direct resources as far as possible within the limits set externally, is of great significance to one's institutional status. As a means of comparison, the other TLBs in the MoD were the four operational commands (Army, Air Force, Navy, Northern Ireland), the three Service personnel commands, the Whitehall Ministry institution itself, Logistics Command and Defence Procurement. Joint Operations now held the same independent budgetary status as these others.

As a case-study of one facet of the move towards greater jointery, the JRRFs are the most important of the joint institutions proposed by the SDR. A "pool of powerful and versatile units from all three services which would be available for operations at short notice"\textsuperscript{76}, they were the embodiment of the strategic and doctrinal concept British defence policy now had at its core. Not intended for any one specific threat response


\textsuperscript{76} Great Britain, Ministry of Defence, "The Strategic Defence Review," Sect. 92.
or task, the versatility the SDR spoke of was the key to their many potential uses. This connects it to the very central understanding of capabilities-based planning, namely that it recognises that any of a wide variety of operational demands may be placed on forces, and that forces need to be able to deal with any and all of them. The JRRFs as self-contained units were intended to do precisely this, rather than being held in a fixed force-orientation based on a single threat or commitment. The more complex post-Cold War world made for a much more difficult planning task, as many more roles were foreseen for British forces, and this ensured the more troops could do, and the quicker they could do them, the better.

Assessment of the policy-making process

Upon its commissioning, there were a number of pessimistic voices who claimed that the forthcoming SDR would not go to the lengths of visioning that Robertson had suggested. A Labour left-winger and an “MoD veteran” were both quoted in one newspaper commentary of the time as suggesting a swift conservative result was already prepared for the SDR. If this were indeed the case when the review process started, such a pre-prepared outcome was swiftly jettisoned, as the review process stretched ever longer. Originally intended to take some six months and be finished by the end of the year, it was finally printed in July of 1998, some fourteen months after its launch. It may well have been that the widespread consultation did not play any significant influence in the final reckoning, and cynicism is often the default position to take regarding such consultatory processes. Nevertheless, the SDR, both process

---

and document, was widely praised, with one interviewee terming it "probably the best defence review we've had in Britain", and the Defence Select Committee praised it as "a positive advance in formulating a defence policy...for the new millennium" 79.

In this regard, the commitment to hold the review had "almost the opposite effect" 80 from that intended during the election, namely keeping the defence issue under wraps. As one interviewee put it, starting the review was like opening up Pandora's Box, and Labour had to deal with everything that came out of it. What Labour could have done to tame the review was to either limit its purview, or limit the number of participants and interests consulted. Instead, the review was allowed, within certain framing principles, to develop in a self-directed fashion. In this respect, there was a degree of intellectual honesty to the whole proceeding, and there is little doubt, looking at the comments given to the Select Committee panel by a number of senior military officials, that the SDR process was recognised as such by these members of the institution Labour had been at loggerheads with for so long. Blair certainly wanted to impress the military 81, or at least impress upon them his sincerity on defence matters, making this very much a core area for the 'New' aspect of New Labour's personality to shine through. There were therefore considerable political gains to be had out of a review that dealt with defence issues in a manner that showed the Labour Party had turned the corner on defence and could now offer the country sensible policy in this area – policy that had a distinctive Labour imprint on it, but policy that made sure to hold the wishes and needs of the military in the very highest regard as well. It may

have been a planning process that was backed into as much unintentionally as intentionally. Still, what was undertaken certainly fits the definition stated by Bryson\textsuperscript{82} of strategic planning, and of the process advocated by Barzelay and Campbell\textsuperscript{83} for military organisations to consider their future roles and structures some distance into the future, with the goal for the SDR being to vision Britain’s strategic situation up to 2015.

Despite the planning, some aspects of future policy were left undetermined. One area in which this can be clearly seen is that of the role advanced technology was planned to play in the future Forces. As discussed above, the transformational agenda in the SDR eschewed the majority of the temptations of high-tech equipment, and the primary reason for this wariness is the extreme budgetary constraint behind which the whole procedure was undertaken. Looking at point 33 of the SDR exposes this difficulty, a difficulty about which the Review makes no bones:

How much should we invest in improving ‘enabling technologies’ at the expense of weapon numbers? How can our equipment plans keep up with the pace of change? How do we and our Allies retain interoperability with US forces given the radical changes they envisage? And will technological changes also require radical changes in the way our forces are organised and fight?\textsuperscript{84}

There is clearly a fundamental worry expressed here about the pace of change, and the


\textsuperscript{83} Barzelay and Campbell, "Preparing for the Future : Strategic Planning in the U.S. Air Force," 274.

\textsuperscript{84} Great Britain, Ministry of Defence, "The Strategic Defence Review," Sect. 33.
impact this will have on an organisation in the shape of the British Armed Forces that
has always been deeply conservative. Underlying it, however, is the more
materialistic fear of the costs of embarking on the path of transformation.

As the quotation above demonstrates, the impact of American transformation is
already putting pressure on the UK to decide where it goes, what it buys and so forth.
How to face this dilemma is a recurring theme in British debates, and is one that will
come into even starker focus in the next chapter, when we deal with the partnership
Britain develops with the US after September the 11th 2001, which requires British
forces to act in ever-closer co-ordination with their American counterparts. This
passage shows that there was an early understanding that transformational moves
requiring RMA-style next-generation technology would place a financial burden on
defence planning at which the Exchequer would balk. It had taken a large amount of
political capital for Robertson to gain an undertaking from Chancellor of the
Exchequer Gordon Brown that defence spending would be held constant for a three-
year period\textsuperscript{85}, including going over Brown’s head to wring concessions directly from
Blair. If advocates of broader transformation were to advance their case, consideration
of the costs of the mechanisms required would have to be carefully taken, or political
willingness to spend the money would have to change. As will be seen in the
following chapter, this latter case of affairs is exactly what came about.

Consideration of the resource trap did not only affect the discussion over
technological transformation. The shift towards jointery was also assisted by the fact
that combining individual services’ centres for the development of doctrine, or turning

\textsuperscript{85} Freedman, "The Politics of British Defence, 1979-98," Also from interviews.
the Navy and RAF Harrier squadrons into the Joint Force 2000, cut down on multiple, redundant institutions saving money as well as fulfilling the prevailing military doctrine. As one interviewee stated it, “the budgetary pressures...[have] led people to say with the one tank out there to be killed, we don’t need to be able to kill it from...an aircraft, a helicopter, a tank, an artillery piece, a guided missile; they don’t all need to be there”. Jointery as envisioned in the SDR merged capabilities together and enabled savings to be made, but did not go as far as to abolish the separate service identities and skill sets, which the review had intentionally made inviolate.

There is nevertheless a worry about the actual economic effects of increasing the joint focus of the forces. Hartley points out that bargaining for new platforms by services under a joint system have many of the characteristics of oligopoly and monopoly behaviour, as no alternative is offered to the ‘customer’, or government. This is certainly of concern when the intention of jointery is to do precisely the opposite, and create economic benefits for procurement. It is probably too early to tell whether the actual effects of jointery have been to increase economic costs or not. Regardless of their impact, cost considerations certainly did structure many of the decisions made on future policy in the SDR. This was something that had been feared in advance, and the designation of the SDR as ‘foreign policy’ rather than Treasury driven both reflects this worry, but also belies the inevitable influence of limited budgets on military strategic planning.

As described in some detail above, the SDR policy-making process was a joint one, building on close work between branches of the bureaucracy, interested parties, and the three services. They were trying to prevent bureaucratic competition and turf-war intransigence from affecting policy goals. As such, the Foreign Office and the newly-formed Department for International Development (DfID) both played central roles in the development of new policy for the Ministry of Defence that the SDR represented. This then represents one more level of jointery, beyond the definition more commonly used for the connection between the various service branches within the military. It has potentially revolutionary impact for the organisation, equipping and performance of British forces. The involvement of these other institutions at the planning stage means that the forces are affected in the nascent state, and grow up with doctrine, equipment and structure that are all at least in part focused on operations of this new kind. The clearest example of the impact of these other departments on military policy is the introduction of the defence mission in the SDR called “Defence Diplomacy”88, which explicitly placed the Armed Forces in the position of dealing with ‘conflict prevention’. This task had previously been the remit of the diplomatic corps, with the Forces moving in only if the non-military groups’ attempts failed. Now, the initiation of planning for the use of military forces meant that interdepartmental jointery would play its role in shaping how those forces would look in the future.

This second tier of jointery – involving other departments in planning the future military – was the significant contribution New Labour made to the development of

the joint philosophy in the MoD and the Forces. As Edmonds\textsuperscript{89} points out, most of the moves towards increasing the inter-service connections in both operations and doctrine were part of a long, evolutionary process in that direction, brought on by a series of changes in management style and financial resources. In contrast, the move to place defence policy at the mercy of foreign and development policy was a new attempt to "conceptualize something...that crossed departmental barriers in Whitehall"\textsuperscript{90}, putting a distinctive spin on the concept of jointery and fostering change at a more radical pace than the inter-service developments. With the review initiated from a foreign-policy driven perspective, it reflected a core mindset of the New Labour government, that would soon evolve into the 'joined-up government' programme.

The decision to move towards a foreign policy-led defence policy brought forward the need to develop a capabilities-based planning concept in the Forces. If foreign policy were to lead, then defence resources would have to be flexible to follow, as it would not be able to pick its own commitments and prepare for them in advance. The actions of another branch of the government would structure the actions of the MoD, and therefore the MoD would have to be ready for more potential tasks, at shorter notice than previously. By knowing their various capabilities, the Forces could then apply those to whatever situations emerged for them to deal with. Adaptability would have been required in any case, following the disappearance of the one overwhelming threat for which fixed plans could be made, but expanding the set of tasks by giving


other departments a say in troop usage was certainly a significant spur to the development of the versatility emphasised in capabilities-based planning.

Conclusion

After a long period of uncertainty and only partial attempts at elucidating defence policy for the changed strategic and technological environment, the Strategic Defence Review of 1997-8 offered a means of change. Originally intended as a way for the Labour Party to deflect long-seated criticisms of its defence policy, the question for the promised defence review was whether it would fulfil the promises made of it. What had been a diversion away from one of the most unreported and minor electoral issues could have gone one of two ways - it could become a manifesto promise largely ignored and unfulfilled, or the review could set out to achieve the grand goals proposed in Labour's electoral materials.

In terms of the process behind its production, the report certainly took the second of these two options - in fact, it expanded beyond even what its strongest political advocate, George Robertson, had intended, thereby truly deserving the Pandora's Box label. The substance of the review advocated the transformation of the British military, partially drawing on work the previous Conservative governments had put in place, but also establishing a new, more radical programme. Moves towards jointery straddled this same divide, with some amalgamations (Joint Force 2000 for example) being very much in the same line as earlier developments. On the other hand, the entwining of defence policy with the goals of the Foreign Office, and more instructively still even the new DfID, resulted in a defence policy now joined in an alternative fashion, to planning goals and skill requirements outside the usual military
sphere. "Modernising Government"\textsuperscript{91}, the white paper on which the joined-up government thinking was based, was still a year from release, but we can see its reflection in the inter-departmental moves of SDR. Elements of all of Pollitt's four pillars of JUG are visible here. Firstly there was the intention of preventing a clash between development and military goals through the pursuit of "an integrated external policy"\textsuperscript{92} through which interests are pursued using all the instruments at the government's disposal, including the diplomatic, developmental and military branches. Secondly, as ever, cost and efficiency considerations were omnipresent. Furthermore, instituting 'defence diplomacy' was a move towards "improving the flow of good ideas...amongst stakeholders"\textsuperscript{93} by drawing on military expertise, and finally there was the drive to make defence diplomacy more seamless through 'properly linking'\textsuperscript{94} the MoD and the Forces to other government resources and departments. The SDR was very much a forebear to the joined-up government concept.

Considerations of cost continued to be a primary policy driver in the SDR. Much of the jointery programme took as a further motivation the fact that multiple occurrences of the same capabilities would be phased out as a result. Nevertheless, at the same time as financial pressure drove transformation forward, it held it back in others. Already the future capabilities of the Americans, drawing on the RMA, were predicted to take a radical shift to include expensive high-technology in areas of both weaponry and C3 command and control functions. The British budgetary situation

\textsuperscript{91} Prime Minister and Minister for the Cabinet Office, "Modernising Government Cm 4310,"
\textsuperscript{93} Pollitt, "Joined-Up Government: A Survey," pg. 35.
ensured that this programme could not be embraced with anything like the enthusiasm of their allies across the Atlantic. The repercussions from this did not only manifest themselves in the future abilities of the British Forces to act individually. The SDR connected the British to the Americans in any major conflict, probably to the extent of placing UK troops under US command. If this did happen, maximum compatibility would be required, a compatibility threatened by Britain’s inability to pay for the appropriate equipment.

Transformation of a technological, an organisational, and a doctrinal nature all came out of the SDR. The process itself is instructive of how defence policy was opening up under Labour to numerous outside influences. The drivers of transformation, however, were primarily those of finances and management practices that Edmonds describes, and also the political will of a Labour leadership determined to change the party’s image on defence matters. The following chapter deals with the dramatic shift in the transformational dynamic that occurred in the aftermath of the events of September 11th 2001, an attack on Britain’s primary ally that precipitated a rapid increase in the deployment of ‘transformed’ military forces by both the US and the UK.
CHAPTER THREE – Transforming Transformation

US moves towards transformation

At this stage, it is appropriate to study in greater detail the progress in military transformation that took place in the United States during this period. As is mentioned already, the QDR set out clear intentions as to the advances the US military should make for the modern era. In doing so, the QDR drew on the Joint Vision 2010 document\textsuperscript{95} released by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in July of 1996, which set out the broad framework of what would come to be the transformational agenda. The understanding of Joint Vision 2010 was that dominance in the future strategic environment would be achieved through the combination of joint forces with cutting-edge technology. In a degree of similarity to the British case, the reduction of redundancies for economy’s sake was a prime motivation for this shift to ‘jointness’:

Simply to retain our effectiveness with less redundancy [in the face of budget cuts], we will need to wring every ounce of capability from every available source. That outcome can only be accomplished through a more seamless integration of Service capabilities. To achieve this integration while conducting military operations we must be fully joint: institutionally, organizationally, intellectually, and technically.\textsuperscript{96}

Despite this preparation for an era of shrinking finances, the comparison with Britain

\textsuperscript{95} United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, \textit{Joint Vision 2010}, (Washington, D.C.: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1996), 34.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., pp. 12-13.
is not complete. The Joint Chiefs could still draw on an astonishing amount of funding for the technology for the new era of warfare. Long-range precision strike weaponry, stealth abilities, unmanned vehicles, and systems for widespread information provision to forces were all advocated as future goals for these joint forces. In addition, there was not the same wariness that characterised the later British foray into the same concepts – according to the Joint Chiefs, technology was a positive addition to American military capabilities.

This document then became a primary building block of the QDR the following year. The QDR shied away from expressing a separate doctrine of jointness, or even expanding on its meaning, referring attention instead to Joint Force 2010 for details. What the QDR did express in some greater detail were the potential technological transformations the US should develop. Section VII offers an impressive array of options by which the RMA could be harnessed to the service of the future generation of military technology – stealth and precision strike abilities in the new generation of strike aircraft (the F22 and Joint Strike Fighter), the development of long range precision strike weaponry and unmanned vehicles, and the embrace of C4ISR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) networking technology. The National Defense Panel’s assessment of the QDR, required as part of the review process under law, looked even further ahead and further emphasised the transformative aspects of the future defence policy. It also urged perseverance in the creation of joint programmes, citing the combination of expeditionary force usage and thrift that appealed to the British around the same time.

The transformative agenda espoused in 1997’s QDR received a boost with the election of George W. Bush in 2000. Donald Rumsfeld, the incoming Secretary of Defense, immediately set out to push rapid transformation as the primary goal for the military, even over the objections of his staff as to the pace of this change. In contrast to the United Kingdom, the political appointees made leaders of departments are often policy experts in that field, and Rumsfeld was no exception. In the Ford administration he had been the youngest Defence Secretary in history, and under Bush he became the oldest. Over that period he had developed an experience in defence matters far outstretching that of his British counterparts, who tended towards shorter terms determined by the vagaries of parliamentary electoral considerations and cabinet reshuffling. He would encourage the establishment of a very different military, and make it a primary goal of defence policy, rather than an addendum pursued according to the military’s own, organic timetable.

Despite Rumsfeld’s pro-transformation mindset, implementation of radical changes was not immediate. Another defence review was required by statute in order to set out the strategic plan of the new administration. In preparation for it, Rumsfeld established a number of study groups to investigate the needs for defence policy. The one dedicated to transformation reported in July 2001, and the results were widely reported as eschewing any radically transformational agenda, retaining the bulk of the ‘legacy’ systems, such as three separate fighter aircraft development programmes, and retaining the huge, lumbering Crusader howitzer, weighing in at some 80 tons, rather than moving to the lighter, flexible and easily deployable forces hoped for by the transformationally minded. Rumsfeld’s agenda had come up against forces in the US military who still had as their primary concern the emergence of a ‘near-peer
competitor', a power that could challenge the US in global influence, with the potential to take the Americans on in full-scale operations. The main contender for this crown was the People's Republic of China, although some suspicious glances were still cast at Russia. This political-bureaucratic dynamic, which structured what transformation was for, what a transformed military would look like, and what it would cost changed dramatically with the events of September the 11th, 2001. The terrorist strikes completely changed the considerations of policy-makers in both Britain and the United States. The following section brings the British developments up to date at this point, and then we turn to the impact of what would be termed 'the War on Terror' on military transformation.

Further Development of Planning Moves in the UK

The Strategic Defence Review was a significant step towards transforming the British military. By openly embracing the jointery developments between service branches, the policy advanced a more efficient system of defence. Yet it was not the end of the moves towards transformation. Rather, the demands the SDR made with regards to overall strategic planning in the MoD gave added impetus to a range of new bureaucratic planning management structures, which continued the transformative momentum.

Further moves towards transforming the planning processes of the MoD came in with Sir Kevin Tebbit when he took over the position of Permanent Secretary in 1998. He had played a lead role in the formulation of the first chapter of the SDR, placing

---


defence policy in the foreign policy context, recognising that there existed complex new requirements on the Armed Forces, and requiring that they be able to deal with these changed strategic circumstances. His appointment connected the lead management structures in the MoD with the goal to modernise defence policy. What emerged was a set of high-level committees, boards and groups that ensured jointery began and ended at the top, in the bureaucracy as well as the field. 

The Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter

As their main response to the terrorist attacks, the British government released ‘The Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter’ (SDR-NC) in July of 2002. Clearly not all of the defence policy set out in 1998 needed to be reassessed in light of the new situation and requirements on the Forces. International terrorism was now a more obvious threat to the ‘homeland’ than previously suspected – the original SDR contended that the only serious threat to the UK mainland in the post-Cold War geopolitical situation was domestic terrorism, itself much weakened the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Nevertheless, the strategic situation had not, in the eyes of the British at least, changed across the board – a new threat had emerged, or an old threat had been upgraded in severity, but it did not require a re-tasking of the entire British Armed Forces. Much of the SDR could therefore stand, without even being considered in the context of terrorism. What the SDR-NC would do was form a part of the government’s moves to ‘eliminate terrorism as a force in international

---

100 See Appendix Two for a chart demonstrating these bureaucratic structures
103 This point was strongly made by a number of interviewees
affairs. By the time the SDR-NC was published, the British military had already engaged the Taliban forces and al-Qaeda elements in Afghanistan, as part of the American-led actions there in October and November 2001. Through the SDR-NC, established policy was being adapted in order to catch up with the time pressures of international events.

In many respects, the SDR-NC was an adaptation of the same policy themes identified in the SDR. For example, in order to counteract terrorism, it embraced much of the same joined-up government approach manifested in the SDR, connected as it was with humanitarian, financial, policing and diplomatic measures to address all aspects of the problem. In part, this focus on the broad base of terrorism, and the complimentary multiplicity of responses, came from the wide consultatory process behind the document’s preparation. From the essay accompanying the SDR-NC detailing this process, it is clear that some external consultants encouraged more skeptical thought on such matters as the scale of the terrorist threat on a strategic level, the role of allies and international law in the conflict, and the extent to which poverty and poor governance in societies inspired the threat. Raising problems without a solely military solution, as this consultative process did, further reinforced the drive towards joined-up governance, at least when responding to the terrorist threat. It is also clear from the interviews that a determination existed within the MoD, even before this consultation, to avoid what was seen as America’s myopic concentration on a solely military response, such as through terming the campaign the ‘War on Terror’. As a powerful institutional framework to reinforce this mindset, the

government established cross-departmental budgets ‘to enable a more joined-up approach’\(^{106}\), ensuring that the military dealt with their conflict role in the wider issue context. We will return to the importance of funding in greater detail later.

The SDR-NC further reinforced the earlier agenda of the SDR in the area of expeditionary mission planning. The deployment of British troops to Afghanistan, firstly as part of Operation Veritas (the UK contribution to the US Operation Enduring Freedom), and then Operation Fingal (the UK contribution to the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul) showed the salience of the expeditionary mission principle set forth in the SDR. The SDR-NC added to this with a more focused anti-terrorist mission, which threw out the geographical limitations proposed in the SDR. Al-Qaeda’s home base, located in Afghanistan, was on the outside limits of where the SDR had considered British operations as taking place, but it was conceivable that branches of this notoriously tentacular organisation would emerge in still more distant locales. It was therefore required that the expeditionary abilities of the forces stretch further afield, and be able to operate at short notice more frequently: ‘a coherent and effective campaign against international terrorism…may require engagement further afield more often than perhaps we had previously assumed’\(^{107}\).

While some aspects of the SDR-NC reflected the approach and prescriptions of the SDR, in other respects it went considerably further in pushing a transformational path for the military. The clearest example of this is the enthusiastic adoption it makes of


\(^{107}\) Ibid., pg. 13.
'network-centric capabilities', which took the ISTAR ideas of the SDR-era, massively expanded them and fully committed to them budgetarily and doctrinally. The results are defined as "the elements required to deliver controlled and precise military effect rapidly and reliably" and consist of three main elements — sensors, a network, and strike abilities. The main 'capability' here is to be able to deal with large amounts of information very quickly, dispatching them to the appropriate destination for processing. It was not a cheap prospect. The SDR-NC called for an accelerated and increased investment in the technologies for these three elements — airborne stand-off surveillance and battlefield unmanned air vehicles (UAVs) for the sensors, tactical data-links for the networks, and Tomahawk and Storm Shadow cruise missiles for the precision strikes, to build the kind of future force shown in Figure 1 below.

Fig. 1

This was certainly a significant move, as it represented a stance that "gave greater
emphasis to the ideas of the revolution in military affairs than did SDR"\textsuperscript{110}. The principles of network-centric warfare meant that the heart of the RMA was now written large on British military policy. Originally so skeptical about the safety of the computerised networks and about the cost of the high-technology equipment, the MoD was now embracing it as a means to defeat terrorism. The network-centric concept was seen as the best way of taking the (expensive) advances in technology and fitting them into the British military system and (still limited) budget. The circle was squared through the understanding that this capability provided a ‘force multiplier’, that does not require all forces in the area to be so transformed as to be plugged in to the network, but instead relies on a few core transformed assets to interface with the troops\textsuperscript{111}.

While the troops were not required to be transformed in terms of the equipment they carry (this was not a fully computerised soldier), they would need transformed interaction abilities with the networking technologies. This would require what one interviewee called “a generation of...mid-range officers who are transformationally minded”, so that the interaction between the technology and personnel would be smoothly overseen by the more senior of the officers in active command of troops. This meant that the transformative philosophy developed in bodies such as JDCC would be needed to fully exploit transformative potential. As is demonstrated later, experience struggled to match-up to these smooth expectations of equipment and manpower.

\textsuperscript{110} Dorman, "Transformation and the United Kingdom," pg. 4.

Funding the SDR-NC

The SDR-NC offered a much expanded picture of technological transformation, and therefore gave much more significant momentum to that aspect of transformation than had the SDR. Nevertheless, what was required for the theory, or policy, to become practice was a significant injection of funding such that the equipment and training required for these RMA concepts to take root could be brought in. In order to do this, the Treasury announced in its Spending Review of 2002 that the MoD budget would increase by some 1.2% each year for the following 3 years, a total rise of £3.5 billion, with “over £1 billion of new capital and £0.5 billion of new resources for new network-centric capabilities and other equipment which will enable the conclusions of the SDR New Chapter to be delivered”\(^{112}\). Some were suspicious as to how far this funding would go towards addressing the requirements of network-centric warfare, noting that in comparison to spending across other government departments the MoD was getting a poor deal and that “marginal” measures would likely be the result\(^{113}\).

This skeptical view is by no means assured. Much of the equipment required for this kind of warfare is relatively cheap – UAVs were by this point ‘off-the-shelf’ technology, as the US military had used them in a number of guises for some years, enabling the British to avoid long, costly development phases\(^{114}\). While there were some more expensive programmes tying in with these others, the burst of funding did provide for an advancement in the core network-centric technologies. The reaction to 9/11 opened up the Treasury’s purse-strings, removing another obstacle so often the limit on transformative advancement in the UK.


\(^{113}\) Dorman, “Transformation and the United Kingdom,” pg. 4.

\(^{114}\) Select Committee On Defence, United Kingdom Parliament, "Sixth Report: A New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review"
At the same time as this British move on transformation in reaction to terrorism was underway, the United States had pushed forward itself in a much more committed fashion. The QDR of 2001, while overwhelmingly the product of pre-September 11th thinking, had been rapidly converted to a document whose message was intended to speak to the “new order” of things in the light of the now declared ‘War on Terror’.

On October 29th 2001, Rumsfeld established the Office of Force Transformation (OFT) in the Pentagon, devoting considerable resources to the “urgent requirement for defense transformation”. This too was not merely a response to terrorism, but signified the personal commitment of Rumsfeld to transformation as discussed above. Both of these moves reflect how the transformation agenda got caught up in the radical mission-shift that took place in light of terrorism.

From an institutional perspective, the establishment of a body like the OFT is a strong mechanism towards furthering the goals it espouses. It was not a goal that the US military took to with any great enthusiasm, with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Richard Myers admitting that military culture created a considerable obstacle to the designs of transformation advocates such as Rumsfeld and President Bush. In the face of such reluctance, something like the OFT, whose director’s role was to “evaluate the transformation efforts of the Military Departments and promote synergy by

115 United States Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review Report, United States Department of Defense, 2001). The QDR was released just 20 days after 9/11, so obviously it was overwhelmingly the product of work before that event. The preface of the Review nevertheless solely discusses the ‘War on Terror’.
recommending steps to integrate ongoing transformation activities\textsuperscript{118}, ensured that transformative practices were taken up by the services. With the transformation mission of this body tied to the ‘War on Terror’ through such policy documents as the QDR, and the personal commitment of significant actors like Rumsfeld, action by the US military against terror-connected targets became actions of a transformational nature. The following section looks at how British Forces’ connection to those of the US had a compounded impact.

British and US military co-operation

As discussed above, the SDR-NC came out after some British units (primarily special forces, light rapid response forces, and naval strike forces with cruise missiles) had already operated in Afghanistan, alongside their American counterparts, in actions against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. This connection to the United States military was developing into a transformation driver of considerable strength for the British. In operating in close, integrated co-ordination with the Americans, British forces required the ability to slot into the American actions. Ostensibly operations were allied in nature, and British command retained full control over their troops’ missions, but there was little doubt as to where operational doctrine was formulated. If the Americans were to make this a ‘transformed’ conflict then the British would at the very least need to be conversant in these concepts, and the more active a role they intended to take in the coalition, the more they would have to structure their activities around the framework that such a conflict demanded. Thus it was that even if the British were reluctant to embrace transformation, integrating with the Americans would impose those principles by default. Afghanistan was the first real test case for

transformation. Eighteen months later, British and American troops were once more in action together, this time in Iraq. This action was to have at least as much impact on the process of transformation as Afghanistan, and probably more so.

The British participation in the invasion of Iraq on the 20th March 2003, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) to the Americans, took the form of Operation TELIC, a commitment of some 45,000 military personnel. The British moved into the southern section of Iraq, alongside the 15th US Marine Expeditionary Unit who were operating under British command. This was a test of the interoperability of the British and Americans, something that the British transformational doctrine required. If Afghanistan had been one example of British troops acting in an integrated fashion with their American allies in the ‘post 9/11’ environment, then Iraq was this principle writ far larger. Those 45,000 troops in the region formed the overwhelming bulk of the British military. With the intention being to work alongside the Americans, and in many instances fully integrate with them, the impact on how the British needed to think about transformation dramatically shifted. This was no longer a theoretical prospect or exercise, nor was it only concerning a small fraction of already well-integrated special forces, who had dealt with their American counterparts in numerous declared and undeclared actions. This was the vast bulk of British conventional military force integrating with the Americans in full-scale modern warfare.

**Blue Force Tracker – A Case-Study**

The example of ‘Blue Force Tracker’ is instructive for the problems it demonstrates with transformation pushed upon forces from outside their standard evolutionary development path. The British 1st Armoured Division, operating the Challenger 2
main battle tank and Warrior fighting vehicle, was equipped with 47 Blue Force Tracker units\textsuperscript{119} to be placed inside each tank. An American device, leased by the British, this sent out a signal to the military network that the vehicle in question was friendly or ‘blue’. The intention was to prevent the cases of ‘friendly fire’ or ‘blue-on-blue’ attacks that had bedevilled the coalition in the first Gulf War, and something about which the Secretary of State for Defence, Geoff Hoon, faced considerable political pressure, leading to his assurance that a technological solution would be found. In such a fashion, the military commitment in Iraq again kick-started transformation, in this case because political pressure required transformative technology to prevent the public-relations nightmare of friendly-fire casualties.

The problem with the implementation of Blue Force Tracker was that the British were not prepared for having the boxes inside the Challengers – there was not the space in the crowded cabin. This being the case, according to interviews the damage rate was extraordinary – within two days a third of the units were broken. Embracing the technological advances of the Americans, spurred on by the fears over vehicle misidentification, did not ‘fast-track’ that aspect of transformation. Instead, “the system was disregarded and the relief in place was conducted through the more familiar use of liaison officers on the ground”\textsuperscript{120} – it merely caused the technology to be wasted, and left troops reverting to their previous techniques.

Transformational implications of the insurgency

While Blue Force Tracker shows that attempts to advance transformation beyond its


\textsuperscript{120} Ibid. Sect. 5-5.
‘natural’ rate may be unsuccessful, in another regard the Iraq War demonstrates far more significant problems for transformation. Initially, the war was a series of dramatic victories, showcasing the phenomenal speed of US forces and their ability to win a modern war with a very different force structure than that of previous land campaigns. Before the war, there had been considerable conflict reported in the Administration and Pentagon in the US about the proper size of the invasion force – after all, Colin Powell, the Secretary of State, had coined the eponymous doctrine requiring ‘overwhelming’ force to be massed against opponents before the commencement of combat, a doctrine he had enforced the last time American ground troops had engaged the Iraqis during the Gulf War, and this mindset was in addition well entrenched at the top levels of the military. Despite that initial success, the situation in Iraq quickly complicated, for it soon became apparent that, as Milton put it, “he who...overcomes by force, has overcome but half his foe”\(^{121}\) – a flourishing insurgency soon sprang up against the Allied occupation and the interim Iraqi government.

The failings that emerged after the heady days of formal victory belied the message of “mission accomplished” as declared by President Bush on May 1\(^{st}\) 2003 are manifest, and are too many to discuss here. What is relevant is how the tenuous security situation soon required the allied troops to take on very different roles from the ‘transformed’ ones they had used to destroy the lumbering Iraqi forces. Dealing with the insurgency was classic occupation warfare, with the main tactics faced being suicide bombing and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on mined roads, all

perpetrated by individuals and groups who blended seamlessly into the local population. The required response on the part of the Allies was to commit troops to extended deployment 'in theatre', patrolling the streets, arresting suspected militants, engaging anyone spotted placing IEDs and so forth.

Such tasks placed different demands on troops, and different demands on those behind the front-line, such as the planners and managers in the MoD. Instead of the network-centric focus of fast-moving war, with its emphasis on strike ability, cutting-edge technology and instant adaptability, the mission became one where good body armour, foot patrols and establishing positive relations with the local people were the requirements for success. Without this focus, troops found themselves at great risk, and were ineffectual at quelling uprisings. Up the chain of command, this meant that the MoD needed to look at providing these supplies to the Forces in Iraq, and to concentrate on doctrine relating to counter-insurgency warfare, drawing on the past lessons of Northern Ireland and Malaya, rather than developing the concept of network-centric warfare.

As was the case in so many other aspects, the British tended to compare their approach to that of the Americans, to see how the extent of adoption of transformational doctrine and practices affected performance. The experience of Blue Force Tracker had shown that when in place in large numbers across units used to using it, the network technology enabled US formations to operate far more effectively, as opposed to the British attempts. When it came to the aftermath of active combat however, the benefit of comparisons tended to go the other way, at least

---

in British eyes.

The British officer Brigadier Nigel Aylwin-Foster, serving in Iraq as Deputy Commander of the Office of Security Transition in the Coalition Office for Training and Organising Iraq's Armed Forces, stirred up a considerable storm in allied military, political and journalistic circles\textsuperscript{123}, when he wrote a piece for the US journal 'Military Affairs' critiquing the American approach to the counter-insurgency conflict. His criticisms related to how the technological, warfighting aspect of transformation became the matrix by which the Americans (in particular the Army, but his points apply to other units, such as the Marines, who were operating as ground anti-insurgent forces) saw operations that clearly called for a non-transformed approach:

\begin{quote}
The US Army has developed over time a singular focus on conventional warfare, of a particularly swift and violent style, which left it ill-suited to the kind of operation it encountered as soon as conventional warfighting ceased to be the primary focus in OIF.\textsuperscript{124}
\end{quote}

A similar point was made by another British observer of the U.S. Army's tactics, remarking that "[o]verly relying on technology to produce solutions for warfare is a great concern. In the end, resolving a conflict invariably centers on issues of people and territory, tasks that demand land force deployment."\textsuperscript{125}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{122} See eg. Canadian Press, Washington Post, USA Today, Daily Mail for January 11th 2006
\textsuperscript{123} Nigel Aylwin-Foster, "Changing the Army for Counterinsurgency Operations," \textit{Military Review} 85, no. 6 (Nov/Dec 2005): pg. 9.
\end{flushright}
In Aylwin-Foster’s view, the technological aspect of the transformational doctrine the Office of Force Transformation pushed across all aspects of US military practice was being rigidly imposed at the cost of an understanding of transformation emphasising flexibility and adaptability. These latter principles had of course been fundamental to the early British discussions of transformation, as discussed in Chapter 2, from which the capabilities-based planning approach emerged. If transformation was indeed intended to the British approach to transformation had developed very much from those principles, and Aylwin-Foster’s critique of American doctrine picks this contradiction out clearly:

It makes much of changing the military culture, and enhancing the strategic and operational agility and responsiveness, but is itself uncompromisingly and ironically orientated towards warfighting in tone and content. It leaves the distinct impression that the Transformation project will concentrate too much on harnessing high technology to enhance conventional warfighting capability across Defence, and too little on the much more critical, and demanding, transformation of the human workforce, the key to development of a genuinely adaptive entity.126

There is little doubt that some of this attitude towards the American approach was a reflection of British snobbishness. That was certainly the claim of many Americans, piqued at the criticism by an ostensible ally. Yet many of the issues Aylwin-Foster raised have been brought up by American officers themselves, and the shift in approach of much training for US troops heading into theatre in Iraq suggests non-

technological lessons have been learnt, or more accurately, been re-learnt.

Financial Implications

What both the US and British militaries found additionally constricting however, was that the non-transformational demands of forces, indeed the demands quite simply of holding significant numbers of forces in theatre for years after the end of the conventional conflict, pressurised budgets. The British drew on a special contingency fund the Treasury set up for the war, and therefore initially other development moves in the Forces were not financially affected by the commitments in Iraq, even if the troops themselves had other priorities. As the deployment stretched out however, finances started to become complicated. With the establishment of these contingency funds, the Treasury gave more leeway than was normal to spending – urgent requirements were generally passed straight through. The Treasury's fear was that this would encourage non-urgent spending requests to be placed, masquerading as operational requirements. This led to a conflation of budgets in planning circles, as demonstrated by this comment from one interviewee dealing with Army issues: “I think we are going to have a problem on this basis, at the moment we have been on ‘operations’ for so long...that we’re uncertain now what our baseline is for actually running the Army properly”. Fighting a long war that requires a considerable number of troops to remain in theatre, undertaking non-transformational tasks, means that financial, as well as doctrinal, resources become scarcer. The level of defence spending in the UK has always structured what the military could do, and has formed a core influence in this discussion here – the British were struggling to fund

transformation as it was, having to cherry-pick the aspects they could afford. Requiring another expensive task of the Forces once more proved that the primary limiting factor in defence policy would be money.

Conclusion

Following the SDR in 1998, while jointery was whole-heartedly embraced in British defence policy, the technological aspect of transformation was left undecided, both from concerns over its cost and from concerns over technological approaches to military conflict *per se*. The past five years of military policy in the UK have led to a number of changes in the progression of transformation, beyond what could have been extrapolated from the SDR. The reasons for these changes are indirect, stemming from the attacks of September 11th 2001. In the aftermath, the Americans choose to prosecute the campaign against terrorism through military means, and the British make it a matter of policy to be strong allies in this campaign. This connection to the United States, and an improved financial situation for the military, enables a new look at transformative technology, and the SDR-NC embraces the ‘network-centric’ concepts and equipment. Initially, both major conflicts of the anti-terrorism alliance showcase the benefits of transformational warfare based on modern technology, speed and co-ordination, even if Blue Force Tracker demonstrates the dangers of over-reaching. Yet when both initial phases are over, and troops have to settle and hunker down, transformation slows. For every force there is an equal and opposite one, and now resources—time, money, intellectual—are required for untransformed activities, not the transformation project. Attempting to avoid this transfer of resources, and fight the latter kind of war with the former’s tactics, results in under-manning and chaotic scenes of insurgency—such was the critique that
emerged from some members of the British forces. Transformation has thus been doubly affected by 9/11 – it was advanced, and then displaced by the strategic concerns of the day.

The classic comment of Harold MacMillan, that what drives politics is “the opposition of events” remains just as relevant today. Still, how one reacts to those events is not certain. As one of the interviewees put it, “[e]verything changes because of 9/11, because the Americans change”\textsuperscript{129}. The connection between the terror attacks and the distortions\textsuperscript{130} of transformation is by no means a necessary one – it was of course entirely possible for the United States to approach terrorism in a non-military fashion, rather than declaring a ‘War on Terror’. Even given this declaration, the British government did not have to stand ‘shoulder to shoulder’ with the Americans at all, or do so beyond the engagements in Afghanistan. The motivation for deploying British Forces in the Iraq conflict and maintaining them there for a protracted occupation is complex, has provoked considerable vitriol, and is certainly a more extensive task than is possible here. Regardless, these decisions were made, and did impact the transformative agenda, as detailed above.

With Britain thus determined to fulfill whatever niches the Americans required, rather than undertaking a multilateral approach to the post-9/11 geopolitical situation, they became by some distance the major minor partner in the ‘coalition of the willing’ that emerged. In comparison to the coalition facing Saddam Hussein during the first Gulf War, where there were several junior partners, now only Britain could provide fully

\textsuperscript{129} My emphasis

\textsuperscript{130} The term ‘distortion’ is not intended to be derogatory in context.
integrative capabilities. Thus, it was much easier for the transformative approach to spread across specific capabilities – there was only one serious partner for the technologies and command concepts such as Blue Force Tracker, only one external group to bring up to speed and connect to the network. Furthermore, this is a self-reinforcing process, because Britain, as the most transformationally minded potential ally out there, was the particular ally the Americans were most willing to work with and to call on proffered forces. This meant that the British got to work with the Americans more, the integration drove transformation, which in turn encourages further collaboration.

In order for the British to fulfill the commitments they make regarding working alongside American military action, they need to be able to integrate into the American way of acting, to “plug into the US more directly”, as one interviewee put it. Britain’s is not an independent military force when it acts alongside the Americans – and in being dependent on the Americans in major conflicts, it is very much fulfilling an understanding made early in the SDR process. As an example of taking this ‘plugging into the US’ too far, however, Blue Force Tracker gives us a demonstration of attempting ‘plug and play’. The British cannot just accept transformational equipment on the battlefield as operations are about to commence – as one British officer comments “the U.K. must understand U.S. concepts of operations and capabilities before it gets to the line of departure if it is to help in an integrated effort”\(^{131}\).

Having seen how transformation was given a significant boost by the post-9/11

actions, and possibly even advancing too fast in the case of Blue Force Tracker, the final lesson to learn is how transformation can be way-laid by the demands of current fighting. As it is an on-going process, transformation requires consistent planning for the future, and the priority shifts required to prosecute long, drawn-out and non-transformational warfare effectively detract from that process. The impact of 9/11 has thus been called “distorting” and “transforming” in this work because the decisions and military commitments made in light of the changed strategic situation pushed and pulled at the transformational dynamic that existed in the UK following the Strategic Defence Review. The following, and final, chapter will discuss how this changing picture has been managed by the bureaucracy in the United Kingdom, and the Ministry of Defence in particular, before summing-up the conclusions of the thesis as a whole.
CHAPTER FOUR – Conclusion

The move towards transforming the British Armed Forces started in earnest with the SDR. This set out for the first time a plan for the entire British military establishment to move towards a capabilities-based warfare for the post-Cold War era. The New Labour government backed into the SDR for electoral reasons, and did not intend for it to be as extensive a shake-up as it turned out to be. In spite of this, and to the credit of Robertson and Blair, they pushed ahead with the requirements that emerged from the study, and Britain had a plan for a changed military.

Thus, the pre-9/11, post-SDR British military is transformed. It is joint, it looks towards expeditionary work, being 'quick in, quick out', responsive and flexible. In particular, the institutional structures are in place to ensure that this jointery pervades the bureaucratic structure of the MoD as well as the Forces in the field. Appendix Two gives a map of the senior bureaucratic bodies involved in strategic planning, and an idea of how all planning goes through those joint institutions, but what should be emphasised here is how the structures were in place to manage the change in policy started by the SDR.

Nevertheless, the Forces are missing a core element of what we now think of as requisite in a fully transformed force – the network centric conception, with the technological backing, which formed the programme of the OFT in the US. Transformation requires jointery, because it is based upon networked principles, and networks join units. So in that respect, pre-9/11 Britain had a force that was working
in a transformed mindset. It just sheered away from the technological embodiment of the grander transformed military. That came later.

It came when Britain was drawn into widespread conflict alongside the United States. The mission to Afghanistan was expeditionary, just as the SDR had suggested future British operations would be. What was different was the presence of the American allies, who had at their disposal the transformational technology. With an open-ended commitment to supporting the US, Britain soon adopted the same network-centric concept the Americans had developed, and established that it would move to structure its military around it.

In a concerned piece regarding the status of transformation in NATO, Sir Ian Forbes, Deputy Supreme Allied Commander for Transformation in the Alliance mentions that NATO is having to get over the psychological barriers in the way of transformation. This thesis suggests that Britain faced just such a barrier, and jumped it due to commitments made in Iraq and Afghanistan. But it was not a one-way street – the Americans needed to choose Britain, and accept their help, something they pointedly did not do with NATO for Afghanistan. To repeat the point made earlier, it was particularly easy for the UK to become integrated because they were the only ones the Americans would take. Thus, the coalition could concentrate on just that one link, and then Britain looked increasingly enticing at later stages.

The ‘War on Terror’ provided a significant funding boost to defence spending in both the UK and US. The increase given by the 2002 Spending Review and then by the Iraq War contingency fund overcame Britain’s traditional hurdle of budgetary

---

constraint. One thing this thesis found from its interviews in particular is that with British troops locked into a costly occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan, the resource debate was not over, and returned to complicate the distribution of funds to transformative ends.

Further study

When looking at what has been uncovered here, the first thing is to re-emphasise that transformation is not finished. This study can only focus on the beginning of the process, and the distortion of the ‘War on Terror’. Further study can tell us if the policy drivers explained above remain key through later developments. What will change in the British military after long periods of occupation in Iraq, or pacification work in Afghanistan? Will these commitments have a long-term impact, limiting the drive to a lighter, expeditionary transformed force? Burnett, for example, has suggested that the Americans are already learning a new kind of warfare, and that the transformation around RMA principles is less central to this future. Is it the case that non-transformational warfare in Iraq turns back transformation? Will different skill-sets just develop alongside network-centric warfare? Or will the militaries try to preserve their transformation, even at the cost of backing out of significant operations in these theatres?

Some factors will probably remain the same – funding pressures are the primary suspect in this regard. By looking in greater depth at thinking in the Treasury, probably by expanding the set of interviews to senior officials there, a better conception of the budgetary dynamic will emerge. Other factors may well change,

133 Barnett, "Blueprint for Action: A Future Worth Creating," 440
such as the potential emergence of a peer or near-peer competitor. A threat like that of the Soviet Union before it may require a fixed, massed and threat-focused military, rather than the light, expeditionary transformed units. What is clear from the discussion above is how much the campaign structures the military, despite the emphasis on a particular approach.

Finally, policy implementation remains reliant on the bureaucracy. Current bureaucratic structures in the MoD, depicted in Appendix Two, reinforce the joint principles at the core of British transformation: the Investment Approvals Board and the Policy and Programmes Steering Group funnelling jointly developed concepts and acquisitions advice up to the Defence Management Board and the MoD leadership. Continued study of this structure will yield better understanding of how this aspect of transformation reflects the military as a whole, not just field operations. Similarly, further study of operations will give us more on the 'macro-jointery', the interplay between Defence and other departments. As discussed above, the interplay between MoD and DfID is central to the British mission in Afghanistan, and recognised as such by both parties. Developing a better knowledge of this relationship, its structure and institutions, will require further work than was possible here.

British defence policy changed significantly with the election of New Labour in 1998, and shifted yet again following September 11 2001. Transformation is not finished, though, and if we wish to have a full picture of this process, then it is incumbent upon us to exploit these avenues of study above.


Baylis, John. "'Greenwoodery' and British Defence Policy." International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-) 62, no. 3 (Summer 1986): 443-457.


Ministry of Defence Web-site: http://www.mod.uk


Prime Minister and Minister for the Cabinet Office. *Modernising Government Cm 4310*. 


Robertson, George, "Why We Still Need Strong Armed Forces; the British People Reject Isolationism and are Committed to our Global Role, Says George Robertson," The Independent (London), 30 July 1997, Lexis-Nexis.


## APPENDIX ONE – Glossary of acronyms & terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C3</td>
<td>Command, Control and Communications capabilities. Again, early acronym conception of key future military capabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCDC</td>
<td>Developments, Concepts and Doctrine Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IED</td>
<td>Improvised Explosive Device.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISTAR</td>
<td>Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance capabilities. The early acronym for some of the core ‘transformed’ military capabilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JDCC</td>
<td>Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre, became the (current) DCDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRRF</td>
<td>Joint Rapid Reaction Force. New group of units planned in the SDR to further British expeditionary abilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JUG</td>
<td>Joined-Up Government. New Labour programme to deal with complex, over-lapping policy areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoD</td>
<td>Ministry of Defence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFT</td>
<td>Office of Force Transformation, US Department of Defence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QDR</td>
<td>Quadrennial Defense Review. Statutorily required defense policy paper in the US, released every four years, detailing the new administration’s view of defense policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TLB</td>
<td>Top Level Budget holder. Most independent budgetary unit in the MoD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UAV</td>
<td>Unmanned Aerial Vehicle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX TWO - MoD Bureaucracy

Defence Council

Secretary of State's board
Meets infrequently, primarily to pass business already conducted by DMB

Defence Management Board (DMB)

Executive Board of the Defence Council
Responsible for costing the Defence programme and Departmental planning

Policy and Programmes Steering Group (PPSG)
Provides guidance on capability and policy options in the planning process

Defence Audit Committee (DAC)
Oversees corporate governance and provides risk management

Investments Approvals Board (IAB)
Responsible for approval of all investment projects

Information gathered from the Ministry of Defence web-site and interviews. In addition to these three planning management committees, the PPSG, DAC and IAB, are two others of less relevance to the matters dealt with here: the Chiefs of Staff Committee that provides operational advice to the Prime Minister, and the Defence Estates Committee overseeing that aspect of MoD resources.