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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The politics of future war: Civil-military relations and military doctrine in Britain

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Abstract

Tensions between civil and military authorities over issues such as budgets and strategic posture are unavoidable in pluralistic societies. Scholars of Civil-Military Relations (CMR) have identified a range of practices through which civil-military contestation occurs, and examined their implications for issues such as military effectiveness. This literature, however, has yet to incorporate critical approaches to knowledge into its analysis. Seeking to fill this gap, this article explores how the British military's presentation of its professional knowledge has been increasingly shaped by the political context of British defence policy. More specifically, it argues that the British armed forces' presentation of opaque imaginations of future war in military doctrine has sought to entrench the role of Defence in an environment of increasingly integrated governmental responses to security challenges. To do this, the article focuses specifically on two concepts that have become increasingly significant in the British defence establishment's articulation of its professional authority and strategic purpose – Multi-Domain Integration (MDI) and the Integrated Operating Concept (IOpC). The article therefore contributes to the literature a fresh perspective of the role of military doctrine and epistemic practices in civil-military contestation, as well as a critical account of the politics of knowledge in British defence.

Keywords: Civil-Military Relations; Doctrine; Innovation; Defence Policy; Future War

Introduction

The relationship between the armed forces and society in Britain has become the subject of growing interest in the past decade.¹ In part this reflects the increasingly fractious nature of British civil-military relations,² which have grown more confrontational since the turn of the century.³ Scholars have viewed political activity by the British military in terms of the interaction between political and military elites, or military attempts to influence politics via public engagement – whether through attempts to shape public narratives of conflict, or to capitalise upon the

¹Andrew Dorman and Matthew Uttley, 'International Affairs and the British defence and security policy debate: The bibliometric context', *International Affairs*, online issue (2017), p. 8, available at: {<https://academic.oup.com/DocumentLibrary/IAFFAI/UK%20defense%20virtual%20issue%20introduction.pdf>}.

²We adopt Peter Feaver's inclusive definition of civil-military relations as 'the entire range of relationships between the military and civilian society at every level'. Peter Feaver, 'Civil-military relations', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2 (1999), p. 211.

³Andrew Dorman, 'The United Kingdom: Increasingly fractious civil-military relations', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics* (31 August 2021), available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1862>}.

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popularity of serving personnel.⁴ This is broadly consistent with wider scholarship on civil-military relations in liberal democracies, which holds that civil-military tension and contestation is both normal (and perhaps even desirable) and can manifest through a variety of public and behind-the-scenes practices.⁵ Yet neither body of scholarship has focused explicitly upon the mobilisation of professional knowledge as a source of power within the politics of civil-military relations. This article, focusing on the case of Britain, seeks to develop an account of how military doctrine and doctrinal concepts,⁶ particularly where imaginations of future warfare are enshrined within them, can be instrumentalised in civil-military contestation.

We develop this argument by focusing upon the ways in which the British military establishment has sought to develop and promulgate visions of future conflict as a means of justifying military policy, and in an attempt to maintain Defence's role within a diversified national security discourse. These ideas are encapsulated primarily within doctrine publications, concept notes, and the public pronouncements made to explain them – especially the recent Integrated Operating Concept (IOpC) and Multi-Domain Integration (MDI) documents. Our focus upon the politics of military knowledge departs from realist approaches to doctrinal change, which emphasise the primacy of changing international threats to the formation of doctrine.⁷ This is a purposeful step taken on the basis that, while the IOpC seeks to foster 'a fundamental transformation in the military instrument and the way it is used',⁸ it is by no means clear that the ideas espoused in these documents are the primary drivers of change within British Defence, or indeed whether such 'concepts' are the drivers of procurement and organisational change within the armed forces at all.⁹ Drawing upon scholarship on civil-military relations, we argue that these publications need to be seen as part of a discourse of security intended to determine 'the allocation of power within society'.¹⁰ Unlike studies of military innovation predicated upon organisational culture, we see the production and employment of military knowledge in this context as highly political and a source of authority within the contested politics of British defence policy.¹¹ As such, we approach IOpC and MDI explicitly in terms of civil military contestation, focusing on the discourse of British Defence policy, and the curious language of security that characterises it.

⁴See, for instance, Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 210–34; Hew Strachan and Ruth Harris, 'The Utility of Military Force and Public Understanding in Today's Britain', RAND (2020), available at: {<https://doi.org/10.7249/RR213-1>}; Paul Dixon, 'Frock coats against brass hats? Politicians, the military and the war in Afghanistan, 2001–2014', *Parliamentary Affairs*, 73 (2020), pp. 651–91.

⁵For a summary of this literature, see Douglas Bland, 'Patterns in liberal democratic civil-military relations', *Armed Forces & Society*, 27:4 (2001), pp. 525–40.

⁶The definition of 'doctrine' continues to be the subject of much scholarly debate. Høiback considers military doctrine to have three purposes (a tool of change, a tool of education, and a tool of command); we frame doctrinal material as the manifestation of distinctive forms of epistemic practice in military organisations (in the UK, centred on a sizeable conceptual apparatus), which are intertwined with political pressures and processes. See Harald Høiback, 'What is doctrine?', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 34:6 (2011), pp. 879–900. In UK Defence parlance a 'concept' is a less formal publication 'they may feed into doctrine at a later stage'. See Defence Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), *Writers Handbook* (September 2020), p. 20, available at: {<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dcdc-writers-handbook>}.

⁷The classic work being Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984).

⁸DCDC, 'Integrated Operating Concept' (August 2021), p. 5.

⁹On the conceptual shortcomings of focusing upon doctrine as a vehicle of change, see Stephen Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 7–8; Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff, 'The sources of military change', in Theo Farrell and Terry Ferriff (eds), *The Sources of Military Change* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), p. 6. More specifically, see Hew Strachan, 'Global Britain in a competitive age: Strategy and the integrated review', *Journal of the British Academy*, 9 (2021), pp. 162–4.

¹⁰Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine Between the Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 20.

¹¹For this observation, see Sten Rynning, 'Shaping military doctrine in France: Decision makers between international power and domestic interests', *Security Studies*, 11:2 (2001), pp. 114–15.

The article offers two key contributions. First, by exploring the politics of doctrine and conceptual development, it offers a first perspective on the politicisation and instrumentalisation of professional knowledge in civil-military relations. While it has long been acknowledged that military expertise is a touchstone of professional identity within the armed forces, scholarship on civil-military contestation has yet to fully incorporate the implications of an evolving body of work that argues that knowledge about war is inherently political in character.¹² In this tradition, we approach claims and practices that seek to entrench particular epistemologies of war as explicitly political and seek to explore the interplay between imaginations of future war and the political and financial imperatives of defence policy. We suggest that the expression of these knowledge claims has deleterious consequences for trust in the authenticity of military advice, and in the quality of public and political understandings of the use of force. Second, we offer a critical account of the politics of knowledge within British Defence, and argue for a more open discussion about claims of expertise and authority in that context. While the channelling of military expertise is important in effective defence and security policymaking, its intertwining with bureaucratic politics (and its expression in such opaque forms) has significant consequences for both civilian oversight and the integration of Defence into integrated policy processes.

The argument proceeds in four main parts. First, we review the literature on military expertise and civil-military contestation, and stress the importance of claims about future war in transformation agendas in Western defence. Second, we introduce the case study context of civil-military relations in Britain, setting this within the broader conceptual frame of CMR literature. We then move on to examine how visions of future war have featured in British military doctrine since 2010, setting publications within the context of the wider politics of British defence policy. The final two sections then focus in on the content and implications of the recent ‘conceptual’ doctrine publications, particularly the IOpC and MDI. Given our framing of doctrine and doctrinal concepts as one of, if not the, most important manifestations of military expertise, our focus methodologically is on doctrine itself and promulgations of its concepts through speeches, op-eds and other practices, as well as policy documents from across British defence.

Politics, military knowledge, and civil-military relations

From the outset, the field of civil-military relations (CMR) has focused on questions of harmony and discord in the relationships between civilian and military authority. As the threat of a military coup has decreased in Western societies in recent years, there has been a shift away from what Deborah Avant criticised as the ‘contradictory standards’ of earlier CMR approaches,¹³ and towards examining the more mundane processes and practices through which civil and military authority conflict and cooperate in everyday bureaucratic politics. While such conflict has sometimes been viewed in zero-sum terms, with the underpinning ideal that civilian control over all aspects of military organisation should be maximised, some scholars now view bureaucratic contestation between civilian and military actors as ‘inevitable and perhaps even desirable’ in pluralistic societies.¹⁴ Amanda Murdie, for example, argues that a degree of civil-military friction heightens military effectiveness,¹⁵ and Eliot Cohen has stressed that robust disagreements between civilian leaders and military leaders are entirely compatible with the functioning of

¹²Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton, ‘Powers of war: Fighting, knowledge, and critique’, *International Political Sociology*, 5 (2001), pp. 126–43; Matthew Ford, ‘The epistemology of lethality: Bullets, knowledge trajectories, kinetic effects’, *European Journal of International Security*, 5 (2020), pp. 77–93.

¹³Deborah Avant, ‘Conflicting indicators of “crisis” in American civil-military relations’, *Armed Forces & Society*, 24:3 (1998), p. 384.

¹⁴Michael C. Desch, *Civilian Control of the Military: The Changing Security Environment* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 4.

¹⁵Amanda Murdie, ‘The bad, the good, and the ugly: The curvilinear effects of civil-military conflict on international crisis outcome’, *Armed Forces & Society*, 39:2 (2012), pp. 233–54.

democratic political control, even in times of war.¹⁶ Examining a broader range of manifestations of civil-military tension, recent CMR literature has done much to illuminate the ways in which military institutions exercise influence over policy processes. This work has emphasised militaries' ability to leverage bureaucratic influence through their missions and budgets,¹⁷ their capacity to shirk responsibility for fulfilling unwelcome tasks or roles,¹⁸ their ability to mobilise media support as a tool of bureaucratic politics,¹⁹ and their exploitation of their image and esteem among civilians,²⁰ whether through legislators or initiatives like the Military Covenant, which seeks to place defined limits on the conditions under which the military will be asked to fight.

Yet while the CMR literature has advanced significantly in recent decades, its characterisation of the civil-military 'problematique' and core realities and practices that define the subject remain anchored in large part in the thought of Samuel Huntington and Morris Janowitz.²¹ Huntington's work established the paradigm that a partial or full monopoly on knowledge about warfare is one of the foundation stones of professional identity and authority in modern military organisations, and that epistemic practices are central to the constitution of civil-military relations. On the former point, Huntington's *The Soldier and the State* situated expertise as central to the processes of professionalisation and depoliticisation which underpinned his analysis of civil-military relations, viewing it as one of three key features that marked the modern military out as a professional body. In his analysis, 'a distinct sphere of military competence does exist which is common to all, or almost all, officers and which distinguishes them from all, or almost all civilians'. That central skill is perhaps best summed up in Harold Lasswell's phrase "the management of violence".²² While more sceptical in his approach to military expertise, Janowitz, too, accepted that 'the military professional is unique because he is an expert in war-making and in the organized use of violence.'²³ This viewpoint has proven influential, with scholars such as Sam Sarkiesian agreeing that 'the military's professional authority rests on a special knowledge whose wellsprings are skills at war',²⁴ and others maintaining Huntington's assumption that political participation by the military comes at the expense of military effectiveness.²⁵ The notion of a distinct realm of military expertise has also underpinned recent research on professionalism and expertise acting as sources of cohesion and identity within Western militaries.²⁶

These arguments about professionalism have tacitly accepted that a distinction must be drawn between military 'expertise' and the 'value systems and beliefs' of the armed forces. However, they have stopped short of defining the military's claim to a monopoly of expert knowledge about war as a primary form of political engagement by the armed forces.²⁷ Critical approaches, by contrast,

¹⁶Eliot Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York, NY: Anchor, 2002).

¹⁷Rosa Brooks, *How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything: Tales from the Pentagon* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2016).

¹⁸Risa Brooks, 'Integrating the civil-military relations subfield', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22 (2019), p. 391.

¹⁹Risa Brooks and Peter M. Erickson, 'The sources of military dissent: Why and how the US military contests civilian decisions about the use of force', *European Journal of International Security* (2021), available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2021.34>}.

²⁰Brooks, 'Integrating the civil-military relations subfield', p. 391.

²¹See Suzanne Nielsen, 'American civil-military relations today: The continuing relevance of Samuel P. Huntington's *The Soldier and the State*', *International Affairs*, 88:2 (2012), pp. 369–76.

²²Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Practice of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1957), p. 11.

²³Maurice Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1971), p. 15.

²⁴Sam Sarkesian, *Beyond the Battlefield: The New Military Professionalism* (Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press, 1981), p. 8.

²⁵Peter White, 'Crises and crisis generations: The long-term impact of international crisis on military political participation', *Security Studies*, 26:4 (2017), pp. 575–605.

²⁶Anthony King, *The Combat Soldier: Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 338–75.

²⁷Risa Brooks, 'Militaries and political activity in democracies', in Suzanne C. Nielson and Don M. Snider (eds), *American Civil-Military Relations: The Soldier and the State in a New Era* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press), pp. 213–38.

have argued that knowledge about warfare (whether located within or without armed forces) is not a form of objective expertise, but is rather a node or ‘actant’ in ever-shifting structures of social relations. As Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton have argued with their concept of ‘War/Truth’, ‘intimate relations [exist] between authoritative knowledge about war, symbolic proximity to martial tradition, and the legitimation of power’.²⁸ Claims to authoritative knowledge about war are thus inherently political, with implications and a purpose in a given social and political context. Matthew Ford has built upon this insight, arguing that in the absence of empirical certainty regarding how military technology produces death, accepted wisdom on the idea of ‘lethality’ has been constituted by the ‘relative power of those actors ... who shape [e] the way that the battlefield is ... enacted and ... understood’,²⁹ including soldiers, lawyers, and surgeons. Particular understandings of concepts such as ‘lethality’ thus become a ‘social fact’,³⁰ reproduced through doctrine, civil-military discourse, and small arms technology. Doctrine plays a particularly significant role in this process by framing war in neat administrative language that purposefully seeks to limit subjectivity in order to support shared understanding. As Astrid Nordin and Dan Öberg have argued with relation to military targeting doctrines, this process plays an important role in shaping how militaries operate and thus in conveying or obscuring meaning.³¹

Viewing such framings as inherently political can be extremely useful in understanding CMR, because it has long been recognised that the episteme of armed forces is both volatile (particularly on subjects beyond the direct application of violence) and related to questions of civil authority and control. As one commentator has observed, ‘it is comparatively difficult to define accurately the military profession’s sphere of competence and specific task or tasks.’³² Significantly, recent scholarship has also highlighted the politics of ‘role conception’ for military organisations. Arguing against the implicit assumption of much CMR literature that military authorities inevitably seek to expand their power if given the opportunity, Christoph Harig and Chiara Ruffa argue that political leaders sometimes ‘pull’ militaries into operational roles that they are reluctant to fulfil owing to their own conception of their purpose and function.³³ While they do not frame their study in epistemological terms, they assert that, over time, militaries can thus develop specialist expertise and undertake other forms of transformation to adapt to and entrench themselves in new roles determined by political exigency. Viewed from the perspective of knowledge, the sphere of military expertise is thus manifestly mutable, and can be reshaped by external political pressures.

As knowledge about war therefore has a significant constitutive effect in framing the civil-military divide, it follows that the ways in which such knowledge is framed and mobilised can afford an important perspective on everyday processes of civil-military contestation. New doctrinal publications, concept notes, and statements by prominent officers can thus all be seen as part of a process of political discourse through which knowledge about war is instrumentalised in disputes over finances, functions, and strategy. Research in this area is particularly timely owing to the way in which understandings of ‘traditional’ military roles – and the forms of legitimacy associated with them – have been destabilised in the aftermath of the Cold War, and especially during the global war on terror. The experience of conflict since 2001 has prompted a widespread shift towards organisational ‘transformation’ in Western armed forces, a process

²⁸Barkawi and Brighton, ‘Powers of war’, p. 140.

²⁹Ford, ‘The epistemology of lethality’, p. 92.

³⁰Ibid., p. 81. See also Matthew Ford and Alex Gould, ‘Military identities, conventional capability and the politics of NATO standardisation at the beginning of the Second Cold War, 1970–1980’, *International History Review*, 41:4 (2019), pp. 775–92.

³¹Astrid Nordin and Dan Öberg, ‘Targeting the ontology of war: From Clausewitz to Baudrillard’, *Millenium*, 42:2 (2015), esp. p. 402.

³²C. J. Downes, ‘To be or not to be a profession: The military case’, *Defense Analysis*, 1:3 (1985), p. 155.

³³Christoph Harig and Chiara Ruffa, ‘Knocking on the barracks’ door: How role conceptions shape the military’s reactions to political demands’, *European Journal of International Security* (2021), available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2021.30>}.

that has posed fundamental questions over the military's sphere of expertise and its suitability for counterinsurgency and stabilisation operations.³⁴ Following the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the logic underpinning this imperative in large part now centres upon perceptions of new forms of 'hybrid' threat that are perceived as undermining the conventional military dominance that NATO and its partners have enjoyed since the end of the Cold War. Such threats are often non-military in nature, involving a range of state and non-state activity, espionage, cyber attacks, and other factors. Armed forces are thus seeking to adapt their force designs and conceptual frameworks to meet these challenges, and to articulate their relevance in an apparently new security environment to politicians, the public, and alliance partners.³⁵ This process has distinct national and regional features, however it shares notable similarities insofar as it poses challenges to the prevailing conceptual and organisation basis upon which NATO and other Western armed forces have operated since the end of the Cold War.³⁶ The role of 'hard' military power is particularly contested, as is the role of armed forces within a more diversified national security ecosystem. Another notable similarity is the ways in which armed forces have presented and explained this state of affairs, and sought to reformulate their relevance to it. Ideas of 'change' and an overt focus towards the future have defined this process and the rhetoric associated with it, with anticipated 'strategic trends' appearing alongside predictions about the character of future conflict as a means of legitimating various transformation agendas. Visions of future threats and a potential return to 'open warfare' in Europe have, for example, played an important role in shaping French security policy since 2016.³⁷ The Australian Army's 'Accelerated Warfare' concept note argues explicitly that 'we are now experiencing changes to the character of warfare at a rate faster than many of our processes, concepts, capabilities and structures were defined for.'³⁸ In the US context, Elena Wicker has identified a similar trend in American national security strategy documents, highlighting 'a clear historical pattern of claiming that the security environment and its challenges and opportunities are unprecedented.'³⁹

This article positions these practices as part of a trend within which knowledge about war, and specifically its manifestation in doctrine and doctrinal concepts, has become a tool of civil-military contestation. In the next section, we will provide a brief overview of civil-military contestation in Britain, before establishing the trajectory and intertwining of conceptual development and bureaucratic politics in its defence and foreign policy establishment.

Civil-military relations in modern Britain

Despite the growth of comparative studies and the inclusion of other regional perspectives, the CMR literature has remained United States-centric, and British civil-military relations have received relatively little attention by comparison.⁴⁰ This may be partly due to the trajectory of British civil-military relations not being easily reconcilable with core aspects of CMR theory,

³⁴Best described in Anthony King, *The Transformation of Europe's Armed Forces: From the Rhine to Afghanistan* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 20–45.

³⁵Mikael Wigell, 'Hybrid interference as a wedge strategy: A theory of external interference in liberal democracy', *International Affairs*, 95:2 (2019), pp. 255–75.

³⁶Oliver Schmitt, 'Wartime paradigms and the future of Western military power', *International Affairs*, 96:2 (2020), pp. 401–18.

³⁷Alice Pannier and Oliver Schmitt, 'To fight another day: Between the fight against terrorism and future warfare', *International Affairs*, 95:4 (2019), pp. 911–14.

³⁸Rick Burr, 'Army in Motion: Accelerated Warfare Statement', available at: {https://www.army.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/2020%20-%20Accelerated%20Warfare_0.pdf} accessed 11 January 2022.

³⁹Elena Wicker, 'Strategy in the Artificial Age: Observations from Teaching an AI to write a US National Security Strategy' (14 April 2021), available at: {<https://warontherocks.com/2021/04/strategy-in-the-artificial-age-observations-from-teaching-an-ai-to-write-a-u-s-national-security-strategy/>} accessed 11 January 2022.

⁴⁰A point made by Adam Roberts, 'The British Armed Forces and politics', *Armed Forces & Society*, 3:4 (1977), pp. 531–56 and reaffirmed in 2021 by Dorman, 'The United Kingdom: Increasingly fractious civil-military relations'.

particularly Huntington's idea of objective control.⁴¹ This contrast was embodied in a collection of essays entitled *Soldiers and Governments*, which Michael Howard published in the same year that Huntington's *Soldier and the State* was released. The volume's treatment of Britain before 1914 concluded that 'the question of national defence became as never before a burning political issue. Soldiers followed the example of sailors and plunged into the fray. Both Services indulged in practices of a dubious nature – in particular the new techniques of press propaganda and political lobbying in order to gain their ends.'⁴² Hew Strachan has developed this perspective further, arguing convincingly that processes of military professionalisation in Britain did not result in the withdrawal of officers from political life, but rather created newfound imperatives for forms of political engagement intended to improve military effectiveness.⁴³

Yet while British civil-military relations may sit awkwardly with classic definitions of professionalism and objective control, the British example does offer a valuable case study in two important respects. First, the British case is a illustrative example of civil-military contestation in a society with high levels of support for the use of force overseas and for the armed forces themselves, but within which defence spending has consistently been deprioritised in favour of other government spending.⁴⁴ This mismatch between policy-elites' determination to consider Britain as a significant actor in the world stage, and their simultaneous commitment to austerity policies that have reduced relative spending on the armed forces, have attenuated civil-military relations, and produced strong imperatives for the armed forces to align themselves with shifting political priorities in order to safeguard their funding. Relatively little work has yet been done on the implications of these dynamics for CMR (with existing studies focusing more upon defence policy). The research that has been done in this area has highlighted the manner in which British military transformation has been impacted and reshaped by the ideological priorities of the Conservative party, creating an imperative for service leaders to 'justify' the measures on military grounds – themes that we will address in more depth below.⁴⁵ Britain therefore offers a case with direct relevance to other postcolonial European states, and to a wider set of countries whose spending on defence is misaligned with their self-image as international actors.

A second notable feature of the British case is the manner in which quasi-scientific discourses have been mobilised in framing and communicating foreign and security policy. These processes have been addressed to some degree in existing literature on UK defence policy with reference to concepts of 'risk', which have become ubiquitous within British Defence discourse since the turn of the century, in an attempt to anticipate future dangers and to prioritise them in a rigorous manner.⁴⁶ Critics have highlighted that political imperatives or organisational priorities might influence the ways in which risk is assessed, hinting at the inherently political nature of knowledge in this area,⁴⁷ or at least the potential incentive for such an approach to 'have a politicizing effect on the expert advice offered to civilian politicians by military actors'.⁴⁸ Yet virtually no scholarship has explicitly addressed the manner in which the British military has sought to

⁴¹Hew Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1997), p. 11.

⁴²Robert Blake, 'Great Britain: The Crimean to the First World War', in Michael Howard (ed.), *Soldiers and Governments: Nine Studies in Civil-Military Relations* (London, UK: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1957), p. 35.

⁴³Hew Strachan, 'Making strategy: Civil-military relations after Iraq', *Survival*, 48:3 (2006), p. 73–80.

⁴⁴On British attitudes to foreign policy, see Srdjan Vucetic, 'Elite-mass agreement in British foreign policy', *International Affairs*, 98:1 (2022), pp. 245–62.

⁴⁵Patrick Bury and Sergio Catignani, 'Future Reserves 2020, the British Army and the politics of military innovation during the Cameron era', *International Affairs*, 95:3 (2019), p. 69.

⁴⁶Timothy Edmunds, 'British civil-military relations and the problem of risk', *International Affairs*, 88:2 (2012), pp. 265–82; Anne Hammerstad and Ingrid Boas, 'National security risks? Uncertainty, austerity and other logics of risk in the UK government's National Security Strategy', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 50:4 (2015), pp. 475–91.

⁴⁷Edmunds, 'British civil-military relations and the problem of risk', p. 274.

⁴⁸Patrick Porter, 'Taking uncertainty seriously: Classical realism and national security', *European Journal of International Security*, 1:2 (2016), pp. 239–60; David Blagden, 'The flawed promise of National Security Risk Assessment: Nine lessons from the British approach', *Intelligence and National Security*, 33:5 (2018), pp. 725–6, 727–8.

mobilise its claims to authoritative knowledge about war as a political power within this debate. This article therefore offers an original case study of the instrumentalisation of military expertise in the UK, and by doing so opens a window into the more generalisable trends of contestation in CMR outlined in the previous section. We now turn to our assessment of the changing role of knowledge in British civil-military discourse.

Conceptual control and the politics of future war

Visions of future war are central to the contemporary politics of British defence, not least because they offer an essentially blank canvas upon which ideas justified by military expertise can be projected for political effect. Clearly, the instrumentalisation of predictions of future conflict in civil-military discourse is not a phenomenon unique to Britain, or to the twenty-first century.⁴⁹

The nineteenth century witnessed a burgeoning literature on future war, often linked to the instrumental concerns of the armed forces.⁵⁰ In Britain the ‘invasion scare’ genre was used to recruit public and political support for various efforts to strengthen the armed forces. Military assessments of potential threat, based upon professional credibility and knowledge, formed a prominent part of this discourse. Writing in early 1886 while serving as Adjutant-General, General Viscount Wolseley lamented how ‘The members of every administration have always seemed to me to be anxious to persuade themselves that it is only silly soldiers and sailors who believe in the possibility of these islands being invaded: it is convenient to believe in the actual impossibility of any such operation, and therefore it is the role of modern politicians to ignore and to scoff at the views of experts on the subject.’⁵¹

Historically, however, the military authorities in Whitehall did not exercise anything like what David French has termed ‘conceptual control’ over the armed forces. The competing demands of imperial campaigning, overseas deployments, the regimental system, and an institutional aversion to uniform doctrine all limited the ability of British staff organisations to define a centralised vision of war and to impose it upon the services.⁵² This situation only began to change in the 1980s, as shifts in geopolitical context, the structure of British Defence, and in the culture of Defence as an organisation presaged significant changes in the role of doctrine in the UK. Ultimately, these changes have enabled by a fundamental shift in how the armed forces have sought to instrumentalise professional military knowledge.

The conceptual revolution that occurred within British Defence in the late Cold War period is well known. Epitomised by the Bagnall Reforms and the adoption of the operational level as a guiding framework for conceptualising the role of military power, changes underway at this moment signalled a newfound desire to promulgate a common theoretical approach to war, first within the Army, and then across Defence more broadly.⁵³ This desire reflected the imperatives of the Cold War, especially the need for interoperability with American and other NATO ground forces in Eastern Europe. It was also accompanied by the establishment of multiple ‘forward looking “think-tank[s]” whose remit was to formulate doctrine on the basis of a

⁴⁹Lawrence Freedman, *The Future of War: A History* (London, UK: Public Affairs, 2017).

⁵⁰Ian Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War: Future Wars 1763–3749* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 93–130.

⁵¹Hove Library, Wolseley Papers, W/MEM/1, No. 9, memorandum by Wolseley, 4 February 1886, pp. 1–2.

⁵²David French, ‘Big wars and small wars between the wars, 1919–39’, in Hew Strachan (eds), *Big Wars and Small Wars: The British Army and the Lessons of War in the Twentieth Century* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2006), p. 49; Aimée Fox, *Learning to Fight: Military Innovation and Change in the British Army, 1914–1918* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 19–50.

⁵³Jeremy John Mackenzie and Brian Holden Reid (eds), *The British Army and the Operational Level of War* (Camberley, UK: Tri-Service Press, 1989); Hew Strachan, ‘Operational art and Britain, 1909–2009’, in John Andreas Olsen and Martin van Creveld (eds), *The Evolution of Operational Art: From Napoleon to the Present* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 120–3.

twenty-five-year future horizon.⁵⁴ This cultural shift in the importance of doctrine and future war within UK military thought was significant, and paved the way for new patterns of conceptual thought and organisational practice in the post-Cold War period.⁵⁵

In the altered geopolitical context of the 1990s, doctrine assumed a newfound importance as a vehicle to prepare for a wider range of potential missions and deployments. It also assumed a more public and political role, enabling Defence to articulate the relevance and utility of military power to a wider public and political audience. These factors both militated a shift towards integration and doctrinal unity across Defence.⁵⁶ An important milestone arrived in 1997, with the publication of *British Defence Doctrine*, Britain's first 'military-strategic' doctrine publication, a document intended to widen efforts at jointery within a defined conceptual architecture.⁵⁷ As Major General Anthony Milton commented on the release of the updated version of this document in 2001, this 'high level doctrine ... conveys a distinctive British approach, making *BDD* a vitally important source of guidance for those producing Doctrine for all the UK's military capabilities down to the tactical level.'⁵⁸ As doctrine became central to the process of integration across the services and within NATO, the volume of new publications grew considerably.⁵⁹ As Stuart Griffin has argued, 'formal doctrine has become an increasingly prominent aspect of the components of fighting power, and doctrine-writing has expanded from cottage industry to industrial production.'⁶⁰

The development and promulgation of specific visions of future conflict developed in step with this process of doctrinal centralisation. An Inspectorate General of Doctrine and Training was created in 1993, which had overall authority for higher-level training and doctrine in the Army; this was reorganised into the Directorate General of Doctrine and Training (DGD&D) in 1994. As much as lesson-learning was a primary focus of these institutions, much importance was also attached to assessing the future operational environment and the adaptations necessary to succeed within it. The third objective of DGD&D, Major-General Michael Willcocks stated, was to 'analyse recent conflict and look to the future in terms of [exploring] the application of military force and the technology to support it'.⁶¹ This future focus became steadily more important in DGD&D during the 1990s,⁶² and found an institutional home in the new Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre (JDCC), which was established in 1998 following the Strategic Defence Review earlier that year, which had found that the MoD needed to develop the capacity to understand future strategic contexts. In 2006, the JDCC was renamed the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC) and significantly expanded, taking on staff from across the services with the goal of providing a 'clearer long-term vision of the way in which we expect our forces and their methods of operation to develop'.⁶³ Under the command of the Vice-Chief of the

⁵⁴Simon Moody, *Imagining Nuclear War in the British Army, 1945–1989* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 198–9.

⁵⁵Markus Maeder, *In Pursuit of Conceptual Excellence: The Evolution of British Military-Strategic Doctrine in the post-Cold War era, 1989–2002* (Berlin: Verlag Peter Lang, 2004).

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 181–2; Colin McInnes, 'The British Army's new way in warfare: A doctrinal misstep?', *Defence & Security Analysis*, 23:2 (2007), pp. 136–7.

⁵⁷Maeder, *In Pursuit of Conceptual Excellence*, p. 229.

⁵⁸A. A. Milton, 'British Defence doctrine and the British approach to military operations', *Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) Journal* (2001), p. 41.

⁵⁹Tom Dyson, 'The military as a learning organisation: Establishing the fundamentals of best practice in lessons-learned', *Defence Studies*, 19:2 (2019), pp. 107–29.

⁶⁰Stuart Griffin, 'Iraq, Afghanistan and the future of British military doctrine: From counterinsurgency to stabilization', *International Affairs*, 87:2 (2011), p. 330.

⁶¹Alexander Alderson, 'The Army brain', *RUSI Journal*, 155:3 (2010), p. 12.

⁶²*Ibid.*, pp. 10–15.

⁶³The National Archives, 'DCDC: The Background to the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre', available at: {<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20080205182025/http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/FactSheets/DcdcBackground.htm>} available at: 11 October 2021.

Defence Staff, and with a remit focused in large part on providing ‘long term strategic context for policy makers’ and outlining ‘how our armed forces and defence may operate in the future’,⁶⁴ DCDC has sought to understand the future with the goal of enabling long-term defence planning. As Hew Strachan has observed, its remit of focusing upon a thirty-year time horizon ensures that DCDC focuses ‘more towards the possible evolution of future defence policy than ... the conduct of current operations’.⁶⁵ DCDC and its immediate predecessor has now published six editions of Global Strategic Trends documents (which represent breathtakingly ambitious attempts to understand the strategic environment of the future), with the most recent document aiming to assess the global strategic context out to 2050. It has also published assessments of regional trends and individual security issues, as well as a large number of Joint Concept Notes, which focus on specific aspects of military-technical innovation and aim to ‘shape the design and development of the future force’ out to 2035.⁶⁶

This focus upon future war within UK doctrine and the research infrastructure dedicated to establishing future trends has been reflected in the use of military knowledge within the politics of Defence. Most significantly, it has supported a trend of senior military officers promulgating, advertising, and endorsing new conceptual approaches and visions of future conflict. The CDS annual speech, a practice inaugurated in 1999, is probably the best example of this practice, but other public-facing activities conducted by senior officers have seen similar emphases.⁶⁷ This theatre is then deployed to harness military assessments of future threat to meet the political imperatives that lie behind strategic level doctrine. In a speech at the RUSI Land Warfare Conference in 2009, for instance, David Richards stated that ‘technology and globalisation has materially altered the way inter-state and non-state wars will be fought’, calling for a ‘fundamental re-think of the way we prepare and equip our armed forces for the twenty-first century’, on the basis of the new realities of ‘non-kinetic effects ... information dominance ... and cyber attack and defence’.⁶⁸

At one level this mobilisation of expertise represents the evolution of a long-running process of civil-military interface. However, there are reasons to suppose that senior British officers have tended to deploy their professional expertise in more overtly political ways over recent decades. In part, this process has been structurally driven. Since the 1980s the Nott-Lewin, Heseltine, and Levene reforms have concentrated financial and political power within the MoD, making the position of Chief of the Defence Staff increasingly influential.⁶⁹ In terms of decision making, the Defence Select Committee condemned this move as having ‘left a void at the heart of the decision-making machine’ by reducing the influence of the individual service chiefs.⁷⁰ Politically, however, elevating the significance of the role of CDS and concentrating power more centrally within the MoD has served to curtail public displays of professional disagreement over defence and security policy. Unlike periods in the past, when serving officers contributed more freely to open discussions of defence and security in the public realm, or in parliament, dissent is now carefully controlled within the MoD.⁷¹ Sitting atop this process, CDS is therefore presented as embodying the unanimous voice of the armed forces. In reality, this obscures

⁶⁴Ministry of Defence, ‘Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre’, available at: {<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/development-concepts-and-doctrine-centre>} accessed 11 October 2021.

⁶⁵Hew Strachan, ‘One war, joint warfare’, *RUSI Journal*, 154:4 (2009), p. 23.

⁶⁶Ministry of Defence, ‘Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre – Futures’, available at: {<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/development-concepts-and-doctrine-centre>} accessed 11 October 2021; {<https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/development-concepts-and-doctrine-centre#futures>}.

⁶⁷Charles Guthrie, ‘Bringing the Armed Forces into a new millennium’, *RUSI Journal*, 145:1 (2000), pp. 1–6.

⁶⁸David Richards, ‘CGS General Sir David Richards In His Own Words’, speech to the RUSI Land Warfare conference (2009), available at: {<https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/cgs-general-sir-david-richards-his-own-words/>} accessed 11 October 2021.

⁶⁹Timothy Edmunds, ‘Complexity, strategy and the national interest’, *International Affairs*, 90:3 (2014), p. 536.

⁷⁰House of Commons Defence Committee, HC 682, ‘Decision-making in Defence Policy’, 18 March 2015, p. 39.

⁷¹Hew Strachan, ‘The civil-military “gap” in Britain’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 26:2 (2003), pp. 56–8.

significant disagreements and the full range of professional perspectives between and within the services. Moreover, selection for and continued service in the role of CDS demands a considerable degree of adherence to government policy, and a willingness to fulfil political roles which reach beyond their realm of professional judgement. CDS can be placed in the position of having to comment upon domestic or international political issues, the relevance of their military expertise to which is often unclear. In the late 1990s this meant quieting rumours of European army.⁷² More recently, it has required rhetorical adherence to the idea of 'global Britain'.⁷³ This process reached its apogee in the summer of 2021 when General Sir Nick Carter fronted an interview on Sky News defending the British withdrawal from Afghanistan in terms that attracted widespread comment due to their highly political and dubious nature, describing the resurgent Taliban as 'more reasonable' and 'less repressive'.⁷⁴ Ill-advised as these comments may have been, they encapsulated the way in which senior military officers have had their right to speak 'confined to those who endorse the government's policy'.⁷⁵

More contingent factors have exacerbated these shifts since the late 2000s. The UK's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan and the challenges and frustrations posed by those campaigns compelled figures like the then CGS, Richard Dannatt, to use their professional credibility and the popularity of the armed services as a political device to leverage concessions from governments who were unwilling to state clear aims for British interventions in the Middle East. This provoked a negative reaction from some politicians, leaving a legacy of mistrust which, combined with the ultimate failure of both campaigns, saw Defence's stock within Whitehall drop in the wake of 2014.⁷⁶ At the same time, the formation of the National Security Council in 2010 placed increased bureaucratic pressure upon the Ministry of Defence to compete with other agencies within a cross-government approach to security, especially in the context of the financial crisis. How Defence communicates its relevance to UK security in the round therefore became acutely politically significant, and has created a tendency of 'mission creep' into areas outside of the military's traditional remit. This is particularly evident in the tendency of CDS speeches to emphasise threats of cyber, information, and political warfare. Developments in these areas clearly have military implications and it is entirely appropriate for Defence to be taking those seriously. However these implications are largely at the tactical and operational levels. As Nick Carter admitted in 2015, the Army's new information warfare unit, 77 Brigade, 'is fundamentally optimized for the tactical level'.⁷⁷ It is therefore by no means obvious whether CDS is best placed to speak about the national or international significance of political warfare or subversion, nor whether Defence is the appropriate government department or agency to counter them.

Future war and politics

The trend of centralising UK Defence's doctrinal and conceptual development has, therefore, become increasingly enmeshed in what Patrick Bury and Sergio Catignani have called the 'politics of military innovation' in the UK.⁷⁸ While recent research has stressed the potential importance

⁷²Guthrie, 'Bringing the Armed Forces into a new millennium', p. 3.

⁷³Nicholas Carter, remarks at the launch of the Integrated Operating Concept (30 September 2020), available at: {<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chief-of-the-defence-staff-general-sir-nick-carter-launches-the-integrated-operating-concept>} accessed 7 October 2021.

⁷⁴'Afghanistan: Defence Secretary Ben Wallace backs UK armed forces chief General Sir Nick Carter', *Sky News* (19 August 2021), available at: {<https://news.sky.com/story/afghanistan-defence-secretary-ben-wallace-backs-uk-armed-forces-chief-general-sir-nick-carter-over-taliban-has-changed-remarks-12385054>}.

⁷⁵Strachan, 'The civil-military "gap" in Britain', p. 57.

⁷⁶Anthony Forster, 'The military covenant and British civil-military relations', *Armed Forces & Society*, 38:2 (2012), p. 279.

⁷⁷Nicholas Carter, 'The Future of the British Army: How the Army Must Change to Serve Britain in a Volatile World', remarks at Chatham House (17 February 2005), p. 4, available at: {<https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/document/20150217QBritishArmy.pdf>} accessed 11 October 2021.

⁷⁸Bury and Catignani, 'Future Reserves 2020'.

of fostering a more transparent and engaged discussion about defence and security issues in the UK, the communicative practices of British military doctrine and senior military figures are moving in the opposite direction.⁷⁹ Doctrine and speeches remain encoded in an opaque and inaccessible language. As Paul Cornish has argued, ‘the Ministry of Defence and Armed Forces do, on occasion, seem keen to use English in a pretentious and often bewildering way: using modish expressions that are laden with meaning that is not generally meaningful; a coded language to which few have the key.’⁸⁰ Others have put it more bluntly, ‘everything cannot be adaptive, innovative, transformative, and modernised ... these platitudes of change have become a drop down selection in our senior leaderships’ speeches, with almost all internal and external communications sprinkled with this language of meaningless nonsense.’⁸¹ Indeed such is the opacity of some doctrinal publications that some may be led to assume that obfuscation of public discussion about aspects of defence and security policy and practice is, in fact, their aim. ‘Politics’, in this context, is therefore about primacy within official debates over security, and opacity can be seen as a means through which Defence can demarcate and defend its role by utilising ‘military expertise’ in future conflict as a source of political legitimacy within Whitehall.

The process of promulgating new concepts and frameworks through which to approach national security has accelerated since the late 2000s. This can be seen in the progression through concepts such as the Comprehensive Approach, Integrated Action, and Full Spectrum Operations towards IOPC and now MDI. These doctrines share many common features, primarily a desire to improve coordination between Defence and other government departments. This requirement was laid bare by British experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, and has been an item of faith for decades, although its continued presence as an aspiration may raise questions over the feasibility of the ambition to integrate. The idea of cross-government integration also prompted a move towards conceptualising security problems in terms of ‘audiences’ to be ‘influenced’ rather than enemies to be defeated. As UK Land Power summed up in 2017, the Full Spectrum Approach ‘is designed to ensure that all possible ways and means (including those outside of direct government control) that could be used to change or influence the behaviour of an opponent or competitor are considered before generating options and creating a strategy’.⁸²

Leaving the bureaucratic realities of cross-government strategy making aside for the time being, what was perhaps more revealing about these interventions was the manner in which unified anticipations of future war came to play a more central role within them over time. Speaking in 2009 David Richards referred to the notion of ‘generic future conflict’, a view that he shared with his French and American counterparts.⁸³ His successors have spoken in similar terms. As Nick Carter explained in a 2015 Chatham House speech shortly after arriving as CGS, Integrated Action ‘recognizes that the character of conflict has changed in this information age in which we find ourselves. Manoeuvre is now multidimensional.’⁸⁴ The pervasiveness of information operations was one element of Carter’s assessment of wider global security dynamics: ‘I think it plays into this idea of constant competition, which is my take on how the world is at the moment.’⁸⁵

This was reflected in subsequent doctrinal publications such as UK Land Power in 2017. This document was revealing for the way in which it sought to articulate the nature of the problem it set out to solve. On the one hand, UK Land Power was rooted in the Clausewitzian notion of the nature and character of war, and was explicit that ‘the nature of war does not change’ and

⁷⁹See Strachan and Harris, ‘Utility of military force’.

⁸⁰Paul Cornish, ‘The Disintegrating Language of UK Defence’, The Alphen Group (27 November 2020), p. 2.

⁸¹James Burton, ‘A Culture of Apathy and Dishonesty within the British Army’, Wavell Room (9 December 2020), available at: {<https://wavellroom.com/2020/12/09/cultural-apaty-and-dishonesty-within-the-british-army-say-do-gap/>}.

⁸²DCDC, ‘UK Land Power: Joint Doctrine Publication 0-20’ (June 2017), pp. 18, 55.

⁸³Strachan, ‘One war, joint warfare’, p. 22.

⁸⁴Carter, ‘The future of the British Army’, p. 3.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 4

that ‘war has certain intrinsic attributes that transcend individual clashes and disputes’.⁸⁶ These ideas do, after all, underline the inherent importance of land forces – a key message of the doctrine as a whole. It also recognised that each conflict possesses a unique character: ‘predicting the precise character of future conflict is impossible, the character of a *particular conflict* will be shaped by factors such as its geography, participants and the types of tactics and technology that adversaries employ’.⁸⁷ Yet at the same time, UK Land Power then went on to make a series of bold generalisations about *all* contemporary conflict. In its estimation, the ‘pervasive nature of information’ had resulted in a discomfiting set of new operational realities wherein ‘the global audience is unbounded, blurring previous operational and non-operational distinctions; even relatively minor armed conflicts have potentially global consequences’.⁸⁸ This tendency to promulgate a vision of future war has become a central feature of IOpC and MDI, with both doctrines employing prognostications about the character of conflict to justify the measures of reform or reorganisation they propose.

The politicisation of Defence’s assessments of ‘future war’ has a number of problematic consequences, not least in terms of how issues of security are understood and debated in parliament and society more broadly. Foremost among these is the credibility of strategic level doctrine publications within Defence itself, as new concepts often appear tailored to justify reforms that are, in reality, determined by the political priorities of the incumbent government.⁸⁹ The formation of a ‘war-fighting division’ in SDSR 2015 is a good example of this process. In evidence to the Defence Select Committee, the new CGS, Sir Nick Carter, reflected back on the earlier attempts to predicate the Army’s *Army 2020* plans on a vision of the future operating environment in positive terms. He saw the planning that had gone into that exercise, which ‘foresaw a character of conflict that would be significantly different from the one we had about 10 years ago’, as having been largely correct – a ‘reassuring’ confirmation of this method of planning for the future. The predictions which informed *Army 2020* had, Carter said, been based upon ‘the connection between home and away ... [being] much more networked than perhaps it was in the past’ – a reference to the ongoing threat of terrorism. In 2015, however, Carter enthusiastically endorsed the view of the SDSR of that year, which assessed that ‘the state-on-state threat was greater than perhaps would have been the case in 2012’. This assessment, influenced in large part by the Russian annexation of Crimea, apparently presaged a significant shift in the emerging character of war. It therefore required reforms to the British Army: ‘one of the great outcomes from the SDSR, from my perspective as head of the Army, was the ambition to deliver a war-fighting division.’ His rationale was simple:

the division is a bit like an aircraft carrier – it is where the full orchestra comes together ... I think is absolutely right for us to have at the moment, because it makes you a reference customer not only for your enemies, but of your allies. It means that you can sit at the table alongside the Americans and the French, who can field this capability, and you can use that as the basis for restructuring.⁹⁰

These remarks highlighted the multifaceted relationship between predictions of future threat and the politics of British defence, and underlined the deeply political nature of military policy at the level of the service chiefs.

⁸⁶DCDC, ‘UK Land Power: Joint Doctrine Publication 0-20’, p. 18.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 21.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Bury and Catignani, ‘Future Reserves 2020’.

⁹⁰Nicholas Carter, oral evidence to the Defence Select Committee, ‘SDSR 2015 and the Army, HC108’, UK Parliament (14 June 2016), available at: {<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/defence-committee/sdsr-2015-and-the-army/oral/34418.html>} accessed 11 October 2021.

Five years after these comments, key elements of the warfighting division – including the Ajax vehicles for the two intended strike brigades and the number of Challenger tanks projected to be upgraded – are in very serious doubt. The MoD admits that the 2015 SDSR ‘did not fully resource the Army to achieve this output’ and that the modernisation programme is under ‘increasing pressure’, which has resulted in ‘an inability to fully meet the 2015 SDSR ambition’.⁹¹ Rather than address the financial, political, and bureaucratic shortcomings that appear to have conspired to render undeliverable this apparently vital capability necessary for the ‘state on state’ conflicts of the 2020s, the IOPC shifted position and argued that the character of conflict had rendered the armoured division an anachronism. Nick Carter, now CDS, himself shifted position to argue that ‘some industrial age capabilities will have to meet their “sunset” to create the space for capabilities needed for “sunrise”’. This process will be ‘incremental’ but must recognise that ‘some sunset capabilities ... will increasingly become vulnerable in a war fighting context.’⁹² The Defence Secretary was more direct: ‘for too long we have had a sentimental attachment to static, armoured centric force structure ... If we are to truly play our role as “Global Britain”, we must be more capable in new domains, enabling us to be active in more theatres.’⁹³ The war fighting division, which was hailed as being the key solution to the emerging character of conflict in 2015–16, is thus now an apparent anachronism in the view of the MoD.

This shift appears to be primarily motivated by ongoing problems with Defence procurement, particularly with regards to armoured vehicles, and by an accompanying desire for Defence to embody the assumptions of the government’s ‘Global Britain’ and technology agendas.⁹⁴ The 2018 Modernizing Defence Programme indicated that the government believed Defence needed to ‘embrace modern business practices’, make ‘leaner’ its relationship with industry (which it stated needed to be more willing to ‘share risk’ with the MoD), and generally unshackle itself from ‘unwieldy processes and structures’ in order to create ‘financial headroom’.⁹⁵ While highlighting around £5 billion in efficiency savings made up to that point, it also highlighted its ambition to increase the authority of MoD’s Head Office, so that it may ‘exercise a stronger grip over the entire Department’.⁹⁶ Perhaps more importantly, however, the MDP elucidated a need for Defence to become more innovative in all aspects of its operation. More specifically, it stipulated that Defence needed to become better at ‘exploiting the opportunities offered by modern technology to ensure [retention of] strategic military advantage’.⁹⁷ Highlighting the advances of strategic rivals, it identified a need to ‘incorporat[e] new domains of space and cyberspace’,⁹⁸ developing strategies that utilise new technology and equipment, and for the MoD to become a more ‘agile’ organisation overall. Representing the Conservative government’s ‘global Britain’ agenda has been another key pressure, with political capital to be made with steps such as the deployment of the Queen Elizabeth carrier strike group to the Indo-Pacific, and the stationing of Royal Navy patrol vessels in the region on a permanent basis – both of which were highly visible representations of the ‘tilt’ described in the Integrated Review.

⁹¹MoD, ‘Obsolescent and Outgunned: The British Army’s Armoured Vehicle Capability’, Fifth Report of Session 2019–2021, Defence Select Committee, p. 23, available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/5081/documents/50325/default/> accessed 11 October 2021.

⁹²Ibid., p. 30.

⁹³Ibid., pp. 29–30.

⁹⁴Matthew Uttley et al., ‘A power for the future? Global Britain and the future character of conflict’, *International Affairs*, 95:4 (2019), pp. 801–16.

⁹⁵MoD, ‘Mobilising, Modernising and Transforming Defence: A Report on the Modernising Defence Programme’ (2018), pp. 16–17.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 16.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 4.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 15.

Multi-domain integration and ‘persistent competition’

In this context, it is difficult to avoid the impression that the diagnosis of the current ‘character of conflict’ that runs through the IOPC, and MDI has been conceived primarily in order to situate Defence to meet these political pressures. As numerous commentators have noted, the style of these publications presents problems for those seeking to understand and analyse them. It is difficult to disagree with the Defence Select Committee’s assessment that ‘the language of the IOPC may be somewhat impenetrable.’⁹⁹ However they are perhaps at their most consistent when outlining their vision of ‘the threat’ and ‘character of conflict’. As the IOPC claims, ‘our rivals engage in a continuous struggle involving all of the instruments of statecraft, ranging from what we call peace to nuclear war.’ Information lies at the heart of this struggle, and is ‘transforming the character of warfare’ such that ‘old distinctions between “peace” and “war”, between “public” and “private”, between “foreign” and “domestic” and between “state” and “non-state” are increasingly out of date.’¹⁰⁰ A second key feature is the idea of warfare as political, and adversaries as pursuing forms of ‘political warfare’ intended to ‘undermine cohesion, to erode economic, political and social resilience’.¹⁰¹ This approach is facilitated by the growing importance of new domains of competition, especially cyber, space, and the electromagnetic spectrum, all of which can be combined with (dis)information, economic coercion, and political subversion. Looking further ahead, competition is now seen as inherent and escalating: ‘the UK, our allies and alliances ... all face diversifying, intensifying, persistent and proliferating threats.’ This links into new technological arms races in areas such as machine learning, quantum computing, and AI, all of which presage ‘not just a new generation of weapons systems but an entirely new way of warfare.’¹⁰² This gloomy assessment of the state of the current and future security environment is then used as justification for a manifesto for change: ‘we must acknowledge that we are in a state of strategic competition, which can veer to confrontation, and as threats and opportunities continue to evolve, so too must we.’¹⁰³

In response, Defence now proposes a range of measures. Notable among them is the idea of regaining the capacity to ‘drive the conditions and tempo of strategic activity, rather than responding to the actions of others from a static, home-based posture of contingent response’.¹⁰⁴ This includes proactive involvement of UK forces to ‘constrain’ enemy action below the threshold of ‘war’: ‘it may involve the use of force, for example, by escalating beyond training, advising and assisting to accompanying partners to enable them to act offensively.’¹⁰⁵ It will also require ‘information advantage’, which MDI views as central to effective decision making: ‘Knowing what to do and when rests on the ability to sense and understand the whole set of influences at play. The ability to then orchestrate the right blend of actions among the multiplicity of levers at one’s disposal into an integrated effort is what realises desirable outcomes.’¹⁰⁶ This will necessitate a global approach based upon a new spatial concept of ‘the multi-domain operating area’, a concept within which forces can ‘manoeuvre in a geographically unconstrained domain’ due to the prevalence of information and cyber within the emerging character of conflict.¹⁰⁷ This will require considerable investment in high-technology information systems, integration with allies and between services on a potentially global basis, in addition to the development of significant new niche expertise in specialist areas such as cyber security.

⁹⁹MoD, ‘Obsolescent and Outgunned’, p. 31.

¹⁰⁰MoD, ‘Introducing the Integrated Operating Concept’ (30 September 2020), p. 5.

¹⁰¹DCDC, ‘Joint Concept Note 1/20: Multi-Domain Integration’ (2 December 2020), p. 3.

¹⁰²MoD, ‘Introducing the Integrated Operating Concept’, p. 7.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 9.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁰⁶DCDC, ‘Joint Concept Note 1/20: Multi-Domain Integration’, pp. 26–7.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 38.

MDI and the future of national security

The ideas contained within the IOpC and MDI carry with them considerable implications, although many of these remain implicit within the documents themselves. Their mode of expression is similarly noteworthy, albeit in different ways. The documents lack clarity of language or precision of expression. The same can be said of some of the speeches in which senior officers have endorsed the concepts. In one such intervention, the then-commander of Strategic Command, General Sir Patrick Sanders, stated (apparently without irony) that ‘we need to evolve pentahibians, with the ability to operate seamlessly across all 5 domains.’¹⁰⁸ By expressing the ideas in the IOpC and MDI in such ‘a coded language’,¹⁰⁹ their authors have ensured their inaccessibility to a broader audience within Defence or across government, to say nothing of a non-expert public. For a concept that assumes that ‘Defence activity will be part of a broader cross-governmental approach’ and that ‘partners across government are amenable to integrating in the way proposed’, this is a potentially vital shortcoming.¹¹⁰ Even within Defence itself, the concept appears to betray calls for a shift towards greater clarity of thought and simplicity of expression. If, as Brigadier Ollie Kingsbury has argued, ‘in a world where most armies often delight in complex new ideas, there is something genuinely radical and innovative in stripping our thoughts and our descriptions back to the bare bones’,¹¹¹ then MDI must be judged to have failed that test.

As indicated above, within the documents themselves, the IOpC and MDI offer a highly selective – and in many ways deeply misleading – account of warfare and global security dynamics, which are then employed to justify military policy. Numerous features of the documents and accompanying statements expose their subjective nature, and thus how War/Truth has been constructed and contested within the British state. On a fundamental level, MDI and the IOpC both perpetuate the dominant ontology of ‘war-as-fighting’, while also extending it in new directions. They are very explicit in their aspiration to break down the binary of war and peace, a traditional anchor of Western understandings of conflict.¹¹² This allows them both to reaffirm traditional ontologies of ‘war-as-fighting’ while simultaneously extending their remit to what might be seen as ‘war-as-competition’, the notion that competition is continual and must be contested at all times.¹¹³ As we have noted, this framing could readily weaken some of the institutional and legal oversights present in ‘war’ time.

As Nordin and Öberg note, ‘military doctrines not only make a world appear, but also dissolve meaning and are therefore acts of disappearance.’¹¹⁴ This process is very much alive within the IOpC and MDI, particularly in their depiction of the ways in which ‘Western’ forces and governments operate, counterposed with the practices of so-called ‘adversaries’. As Mark Galeotti has argued, ideas of a new Russian approach to war predicated upon subversion and political warfare are largely a chimera. The much-vaunted General Gerasimov, whom Nick Carter referred to specifically in 2015, was in fact seeking to describe what he perceived to be features of Western warfare as they applied to the Arab Spring and Ukraine, rather than to inaugurate a new Russian concept, when he introduced the so-called ‘Gerasimov doctrine’.¹¹⁵ Indeed, of the UK’s potential state based adversaries – Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea – it is worth reminding ourselves

¹⁰⁸Patrick Sanders, ‘UK Strategic Commander DSEI 2021 Speech’, available at: {<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/uk-strategic-commander-dsei-2021-speech>} accessed 11 October 2021.

¹⁰⁹Cornish, ‘The Disintegrating Language of UK Defence’, p. 2.

¹¹⁰DCDC, ‘Multi-Domain Integration’, pp. 62, vii.

¹¹¹Ollie Kingsbury, ‘How Can the British Army Anticipate a Crisis as it Develops to Maximise Speed of Response?’, Wavell Room (27 September 2021), available at: {<https://wavellroom.com/2021/09/27/maximise-speed-of-response/>} accessed 11 October 2021.

¹¹²Tarak Barkawi, ‘Decolonising war’, *European Journal of International Security*, 1:2 (2016), pp. 199–214.

¹¹³On multiple ontologies, see Nordin and Öberg, ‘Targeting the ontology of war’, p. 398.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 402.

¹¹⁵Mark Galeotti, ‘The mythical “Gerasimov Doctrine” and the language of threat’, *Critical Studies on Security*, 7:2 (2019), pp. 157–61.

that Britain has either invaded or conducted extensive subversion activities against each of these opponents in the twentieth century, to say nothing of US or UK ‘sub-threshold’ involvement elsewhere. MDI and the IOpC thus perpetuate a form of ‘othering’, which reinforces the notion that Western military power is legitimate, and seeks to create justifications for military activity overseas or at the boundaries of effective civilian oversight. Allied to this flattening of history is the challenge of conflating all contemporary challenges within a single conceptual framework, regardless of their distinctive features. Confrontation with China in the Indo-Pacific and combating extremist groups in Africa do not obviously invite comparison, and would seem to demand significantly different conceptual and material approaches.¹¹⁶

Both doctrines make further assumptions that militate against the sort of cross-government and inter-allied integration they envisage.¹¹⁷ The very act of producing a concept with ambitions to define a whole of government approach to security *before* consulting extensively with other Departments (MDI lists the notion that ‘partners across government are amenable to integrating in the way proposed’ as an ‘assumption’),¹¹⁸ reinforces the impression that Defence has sought to ‘dominate’ security reviews.¹¹⁹ As Theo Farrell has identified, earlier MoD attempts to promote the ‘comprehensive approach’ across Whitehall encountered notable resistance from other government departments, in particular the FCO and DFID, which ‘are suspicious of military doctrine in general and not inclined to discard their own operational planning methods’.¹²⁰ Such initiatives thus did little to assist in cross-government integration, as they lacked widespread buy-in, or the necessary political support.¹²¹ The futility of attempting to promulgate plans for cross-government integration from within the MoD has been further underlined by cuts to the overseas aid budget and the DFID-FCO merger, measures that suggest a degree of disintegration between departmental priorities, rather than a newfound ethic of coordination.¹²²

The recent evacuation from Afghanistan laid bare such interdepartmental frictions, highlighting the extent of the barriers to pursuing the sort of integration that MDI and the IOpC envisage. Evidence submitted to the Defence Select Committee exposed differences between FCDO and MoD procedures during the evacuation operations, and that the ‘MoD-Home Office partnership was not sufficiently joined up’ to ensure the resettlement of threatened Afghans.¹²³ As Jack Watling observed to the Committee, ‘you had the military doing its own planning and preparing, and the Foreign Office having its own conversation, but they had not really linked up their processes ... the mood music in Whitehall is integration. There are some interesting examples of where integration was not at all what it might have been.’¹²⁴ One member of the committee was less generous, describing the situation as a ‘shambles’.¹²⁵

This point about consultation is further exacerbated by the ambition of the ‘new spatial framework’ introduced in the MDI concept.¹²⁶ This notion conceives of a global area of operations, and

¹¹⁶Strachan, ‘Global Britain in a competitive age’, pp. 174–5.

¹¹⁷Chris Tuck, ‘What is Multi-Domain Integration?’, Defence in Depth (14 May 2021), available at: {<https://defenceindepth.co/2021/05/14/what-is-multi-domain-integration/>} accessed 11 October 2021.

¹¹⁸DCDC, ‘Multi-Domain Integration’, p. vii.

¹¹⁹Evidence by James de Waal to the House of Lords Committee on the National Security Strategy, 1st Report of 2017–2019 (19 March 2019), p. 25, available at: {<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/jt201719/jtselect/jtnatsec/756/756.pdf>}.

¹²⁰Theo Farrell, ‘The dynamics of military transformation’, *International Affairs*, 84:4 (2008), p. 793.

¹²¹Andrew Johnstone and Oliver Walton, ‘Implementing conflict prevention: Explaining the failure of the UK government’s structural conflict prevention policy 2010–15’, *Conflict, Security & Development* (2021), available at: {<https://doi.org/10.1080/14678802.2021.1984684>}.

¹²²Strachan, ‘Global Britain in a competitive age’, pp. 162–3.

¹²³Written evidence submitted by the Sulha Alliance to the Defence Select Committee, available at: {<https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/40188/html/>} accessed 11 January 2020.

¹²⁴Defence Select Committee, Withdrawal from Afghanistan Enquiry, hearing of 16 November 2021, Q120, available at: {<https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/3037/pdf/>} accessed 11 January 2022.

¹²⁵Ibid., Q121.

¹²⁶DCDC, ‘Multi-Domain Integration’, p. 38.

is thus manifestly reliant upon considerable levels of integration with allies and partners, with ‘interoperability’ with the US being an explicit priority. The extent to which the document was informed by consultation with allies is unclear, however the degree of interoperability and information sharing it envisages would clearly represent a considerable challenge to achieve even on bilateral terms. As was demonstrated by the recent AUKUS deal, interests diverge even among allies, and it is by no means clear that a common global approach is a realistic or desirable aspiration. Moreover, MDI contains consistent tensions between global ambition, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, and the UK’s contribution to enduring NATO formations in Europe, and to security in the North Atlantic.¹²⁷ NATO remains ‘central to the pursuit of our strategic ends’, yet with shrinking armed forces and increased ambitions outside of the North Atlantic, quite how these divergent tendencies can be resolved is unclear.

The documents also reflect particular political assumptions about Defence and its role within wider British society. The ‘central idea’ of the IOPC ‘is to drive the conditions and tempo of strategic activity’,¹²⁸ and MDI expands upon the idea of ‘windows of opportunity’ as a ‘moment of relative advantage’ that can be created or perceived.¹²⁹ These ideas, which the IOPC acknowledges are ‘provocative’, were seemingly developed in advance of the Integrated Review and originated in the MoD.¹³⁰ They clearly have potentially profound implications for UK foreign policy, oversight of military activity, and the conditions for service members themselves.¹³¹ More broadly, they also reflect a tendency to conceive of security as an apolitical objective to which technocratic solutions represent the only logical approach. This betrays a fundamental paradox within current British military thought, and its lack of awareness of the subjective nature of knowledge about security. On the one hand Defence repeats the idea that the UK faces a challenge of ‘political warfare’, while on the other it appears unable to accept that warfare, security, and stability are inherently political concepts, and to capture the implications of that reality in its doctrinal or conceptual development. The withdrawal from Afghanistan surely offers the opportune moment for such a reckoning, or for at least some critical reflection upon what the experience of that conflict, and the engagements in Iraq and Libya, might offer. ‘Bizarrely’,¹³² no such process has yet taken place. Defence thus remains intent on promulgating purportedly apolitical, technocratic, operationally focused concepts in the face of strategic challenges that have no ready solution. This tendency was visible in British and American stabilisation doctrine a decade ago, and has become more entrenched in the intervening years.¹³³ As Chris Tripodi has argued, the logic behind this tendency presupposes that there are indeed ways in which military forces can be used in particular contexts that will result in desired political outcomes – a highly dubious assumption that has been falsified in dramatic fashion on a continual basis since 2003, and again by the rapid collapse of the Afghan state in 2021.¹³⁴ Despite the continued insistence of US or British military authorities that these campaigns may have been successful if politicians had defined their aims more clearly, or applied appropriate resources, ‘the problem was not the absence of plans but their profusion and the profound disagreements about what was possible.’¹³⁵

¹²⁷Jack Watling, ‘A Post Mortem of a Disintegrated Review’, RUSI (9 April 2021), available at: {<https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/post-mortem-disintegrated-review>} accessed 11 October 2021.

¹²⁸MoD, ‘Introducing the Integrated Operating Concept’, p. 9.

¹²⁹DCDC, ‘Multi-Domain Integration’, pp. 42–8.

¹³⁰Watling, ‘A Post Mortem’, fn. 72.

¹³¹Strachan, ‘Global Britain in a competitive age’, pp. 173–4.

¹³²Ibid., p. 164.

¹³³Griffin, ‘Iraq, Afghanistan and the future of British military doctrine’, p. 331.

¹³⁴Christian Tripodi, ‘The British Army, “understanding”, and the illusion of control’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 41:5 (2018), pp. 655–6.

¹³⁵Rory Stewart, ‘Best-laid plans: Afghanistan did not fail for lack of strategies’, *Times Literary Supplement* (1 October 2021), p. 8.

The solution to this problem lies, as Hew Strachan has argued, in the nature of civil-military relations in Britain. In this respect, the aspiration of MDI to integrate military activity more coherently within a wider civil-military approach to security is apt.¹³⁶ Yet the method, of continuing to claim, or even to extend, military dominance over the definition of 'security' and the proposed policy solutions towards it, is not. In the security bureaucracy which has evolved since 2010, the secretariat of the National Security Council is the only place where pan-government coordination can be orchestrated, and attempts by individual departments to take a lead – especially Defence, with its tendency to 'dominate' such debates – is counterproductive. In this respects MDI represents an irony – in order to achieve a more coherent alignment of military and political activity, Defence may need to be prepared to be less proactive at defining the nature of the problem, and more willing to discuss and debate with civilian counterparts.

Conclusion

This article has presented a novel perspective on civil-military contestation by examining the changing ways in which the armed forces' professional expertise has been mobilised within the politics of British Defence policy. The presentation of professional knowledge and the authority it conveys is a prominent feature of the ways in which military elites engage with domestic publics and political establishments. These dynamics are particularly clear in the context of the anticipations of 'future war' that play a prominent part in the 'transformation' agendas visible across Western defence establishments, whereby 'core' competencies, strategic objectives, and professional identities are being continually reconstituted to ostensibly ensure military competitiveness in imagined future conflicts. We argue that such knowledge claims are inherently subjective, and that the mobilisation of expertise as a form of power within national security discourses and civil-military relations must therefore be viewed as a form of political activity. Claims to speak with authority about conflict thus represent an important subject for CMR, and should be framed alongside other forms of political activity by armed forces, such as mobilising press support or leveraging budgets.

Thinking around various 'multi-domain' concepts, which are of growing significance across NATO,¹³⁷ offer a valuable perspective on the domestic political and bureaucratic imperatives influencing conceptual development in armed forces. In the case of the UK, MDI and related conceptual thinking in the IOPC, portray global politics as being characterised by constant, perpetual competition between nation-states, waged in new domains (including cyberspace and on the electromagnetic spectrum), and requiring new forms of tactics and technology to 'drive the conditions and tempo of strategic activity'.¹³⁸ This thinking places development, climate change, international law, and a host of other international issues firmly within the realm of defence policy, and has become an increasingly important framing for its communication with both the public and the political establishment.

The thinking presented in MDI poses particular challenges for effective security policymaking and civil-military relations. The concept implies that permanent overseas deployment and 'competition' below the threshold of warfare are grand strategic necessities, and that despite the implications of the fact that the UK is subject to sustained 'political warfare', promulgates a bizarrely technocratic view that 'proactive' overseas deployments represent an appropriate (apolitical) response. These claims betray a failure to grapple with difficult but necessary questions over strategic agency, the use of force, and restraint in international politics – to say nothing of parliamentary oversight. The MDI concept acknowledges its 'experimental' nature, and need 'to be

¹³⁶Strachan, 'Civil-military relations after Iraq', pp. 76–7.

¹³⁷Jose Diaz de Leon, 'Understanding Multi-Domain Operations in NATO', *The Three Swords Magazine*, vol. 37 (2021), p. 91.

¹³⁸MoD, 'Introducing the Integrated Operating Concept', p. 8.

tested'.¹³⁹ However, the fact that these are the questions being posed within British defence raises some broader issues about the internal dynamics of Defence, and about the relationship between the armed forces and wider society.

Most basically, the increasing importance of concepts and doctrines to British military culture, and the centralisation of those concepts within a relatively narrow doctrine writing community,¹⁴⁰ begs the fundamental question about who gets to set the agenda for British military thought, and on what basis. If, as we have argued, a desire to shape defence policy to meet political imperatives exerts a growing influence over the production of new concepts and doctrine, then the deleterious implications for the quality and diversity of thought within Defence, government, and society as a whole, are clear. Much as venues such as the Wavell Room and social media have provided new opportunities for discussion and debate, the military establishment remains deeply suspicious of public scrutiny or challenge, as attempts to suppress books such as Mike Martin's *An Intimate War* and Simon Akam's *Changing of the Guard* attest.¹⁴¹ This unwillingness to facilitate a far more open and dynamic dialogue about strategy and future security, to say nothing of recent operational experience, remains puzzling and counterproductive.

Furthermore, depicting military expertise as a guide to the future carries clear risks within a broader political context. Defence's record at accurately diagnosing emerging threats is unlikely to inspire much political or public confidence. The lack of foresight demonstrated in planning for post-combat operations in Iraq is now legendary. As those failures were playing out, General Sir David Richards recalled how, upon arriving as CDS, events in Afghanistan were overtaken by unexpected developments in the Middle East: 'No one saw the Arab Spring coming, even though it was just weeks away.'¹⁴² Even though Nick Carter refuses to classify Afghanistan as a failure, he was prepared to admit that 'everyone got it wrong' when predicting the likely endurance of the Afghan security forces.¹⁴³ Tying military expertise to a diagnosis of inherently unpredictable future security trends therefore risks undermining the credibility of senior military officers and of the MoD, at a time when their voices ought to be amplified in discussions of strategy. Similar risks accompany Defence's efforts to position itself as the appropriate leading authority on the security implications of issues such as cyber and information warfare which, in terms of national security, do not fall within its historic areas of competence. Therefore, recent publications and public statements risk unintentionally undermining the role of conventional military power in UK security, which is almost dismissed as an irrelevance within MDI, save an acknowledgement that Western conventional deterrence has compelled 'adversaries' to adopt alternative strategies.¹⁴⁴ Here imperatives to underline Defence's claims to relevance and innovation appear to risk rendering its core functions irrelevant, highlighting the tension between the contest for primacy over who defines and provides security within the British state, and the organisation and focus of the armed services themselves – dynamics attenuated by the ongoing pressure on the Defence budget. Given the ongoing challenges to the Defence budget and procurement processes, staking ambitious claims to define how other departments ought to fit into new national strategy risks provoking accusations of over-reach, while simultaneously under-selling the contribution of Defence within that context.

¹³⁹DCDC, 'Multi-Domain Integration', p. v.

¹⁴⁰McInnes, 'The British Army's new way in warfare', p. 137.

¹⁴¹Ewen MacAskill, 'Territorial Army captain resigns over Afghanistan book', *The Guardian* (9 April 2014), available at: {<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/apr/09/territorial-soldier-resigns-book-afghanistan>} accessed 11 October 2021); Sian Cain, "'A terrifying precedent': Author describes struggle to publish British army history", *The Guardian* (23 July 2021), available at: {<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/jul/23/author-describes-struggle-to-publish-army-history-simon-akam-the-changing-of-the-guard>} accessed 11 October 2021.

¹⁴²David Richards, *Taking Command* (London, UK: Headline, 2014), p. 335

¹⁴³Francesca Gillett, 'Afghanistan: "Everyone got it wrong" on Taliban takeover – armed forces chief', *BBC* (5 September 2021), available at: {<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-58453258>} accessed 11 October 2021.

¹⁴⁴DCDC, 'Multi-Domain Integration', p. 3.

The unwillingness to democratise discussion within Defence itself is mirrored by an ongoing reticence to communicate about the purpose of armed forces within the public realm. MDI is the latest installment in a long running but deleterious trends of publications written in a ‘coded language’ that many within Defence do not understand, and which few outside the organisation care to attempt to make sense of. Vague mentions of ‘constant competition’ and ‘information dominance’ serve to create further barriers in terms of parliamentary and public understanding of the role of the armed forces in global affairs and foreign and security policy, with potentially troubling consequences for civilian oversight of the military and public identification with their purpose. Whether the recent conceptual revolution in British defence fulfils its ambitions remains to be seen, but resting attempts at transformation upon a singular vision of future war can only ensure that those predictions go awry.

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