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Why does the UK have the Military that it has?

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Why does the UK have the Military that it has?

An exploration of the
factors relating to
the translation of
strategic direction
into military capability

PhD

Andrew R Curtis

This thesis is an investigation of the factors relating to the translation of United Kingdom strategic direction into military capability. Concentrating on decisions taken below the political level, by the military officers and civil servants in the most senior positions within the Ministry of Defence and at the very top of the armed forces, it answers the question 'why does the United Kingdom have the military that it has?' In doing so, this thesis has identified the factors that have shaped capability choices and determined why those choices have had the effect that they have. Its analysis has drawn on historical trends and contemporary elite interviews to assess whether the nation's current methodology to link strategic direction and the development and maintenance of military capability will fare any better than its predecessors.

The thesis' research methods were a combination of qualitative content analysis of relevant government policy documents together with associated policy analysis from the commentariat, and semi-structured elite interviews. A total of thirty-two interviews were analysed using constructivist grounded theory methodology. In the first instance, open coding was undertaken, with data points collected into a manifest, latent or global code. This was followed by selective coding to scale up the open codes into categories important to the research problem. At this point, insights from the content analysis were introduced. The final coding stage was theoretical coding, during which relationships between the categories were considered and confirmed, with the aim of identifying what is central in all of the data generated during the research and generating a substantive theory.

The conclusions identified in this thesis are the result of the first detailed empirical investigation of how defence decision makers interpret defence policy and expend resource to achieve the government's policy aims. This has developed a new understanding of the linkages between the articulation of strategic direction and the generation of military capability. Furthermore, through the application of constructivist grounded theory, this thesis has identified a core concept of the research and developed the following substantive theory.

Strategic direction is translated into military capability to deliver fit-for-purpose armed forces through an open-ended collection of interacting activities involving the government and defence decision makers. These interacting activities are: defence policy formulated by government; resource allocated by government; identification of military capability required to meet to meet policy aims by defence; and allocation of resource to acquire and maintain required military capability by defence. Interaction of the activities is regularly disrupted by events and influences over which defence decision makers have either no, or only a limited degree of, control. These events and influences, or factors, can be grouped in five distinct categories: strategic context; politics and politicians; affordability of defence; single services' conduct; and managing the defence enterprise. In order to counter the worst disruptions caused by these factors, defence decision makers must seek to maintain a balance across all of the interacting activities involved in the translation of strategic direction into military capability activity because, whilst in balance, these interacting activities afford the best chance of operating on or above the level that delivers fit-for-purpose armed forces.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Evidence from a range of countries suggests that the successful translation of government strategic direction into military capability in the form of equipment, trained personnel and in-service support, which actually meet the requirements of that direction, is not easily achieved (see, for example, Edmonds (1986), Hartley et al. (1990), Rasmussen (2015), Sapolsky et al. (2017), and Louth and Taylor (2019)). This trend is evident in the United Kingdom (UK) and its many and varied reasons are the main focus of this thesis. Perhaps the most regularly cited reason for the strategy-to-capability gap is an inability by successive governments to procure equipment to agreed performance time and cost parameters. For example, the estimated cost of developing the TSR-2, between 1960 and 1964 rose by 180 per cent (Peden, 2007) and, more recently, Bernard Gray (2009, p. 7) identified that “across a large range of [defence acquisition] programmes, the average programme overruns by 80% or c.5 years from the time specified at initial approval through to in service dates. The average increase in cost of these programmes is 40% or c.£300m.” As the National Audit Office (NAO) regularly confirms, this issue remains prevalent today (see Comptroller & Auditor General (2017), Comptroller & Auditor General (2018a), and Comptroller & Auditor General (2018b)). Another reason often quoted is untimely changes to government policy; for example, the cancellation of the Nimrod MR4 programme in the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) of 2010 (SDSR 10), followed at the very next review by the reintroduction of a maritime patrol capability through the purchase of P-8A Poseidon aircraft (Quintana, 2015). Other commentators identify the costs of modifying existing equipment to meet new operational scenarios as a factor (see Hartley (2016) and Bangert et al. (2017)). Finally, contemporary events are identified as having an impact; for example, the Falklands Conflict in 1982 forced the government to reverse a number of decisions made in the defence review of the preceding year (Dorman, 2001d). These mismatches between strategic direction and military capability are hardly surprising. For politicians and their senior military advisors, accurately identifying, and then succinctly articulating, potential future threats and risks to the nation, from which strategic direction is derived, is inherently

challenging. For defence planners, gaining a thorough understanding of that direction, and then selecting and acquiring new military capability able successfully to counter predicted threats and mitigate those risks, is no simpler.

This thesis is an investigation of the factors relating to the translation of UK strategic direction into military capability. In doing so, at the highest level, it seeks to answer the question ‘why does the UK have the military that it has?’ The essence of this investigation is captured in the metaphor contained in Sydney Harris’ famous cartoon¹ shown at Figure 1-1.

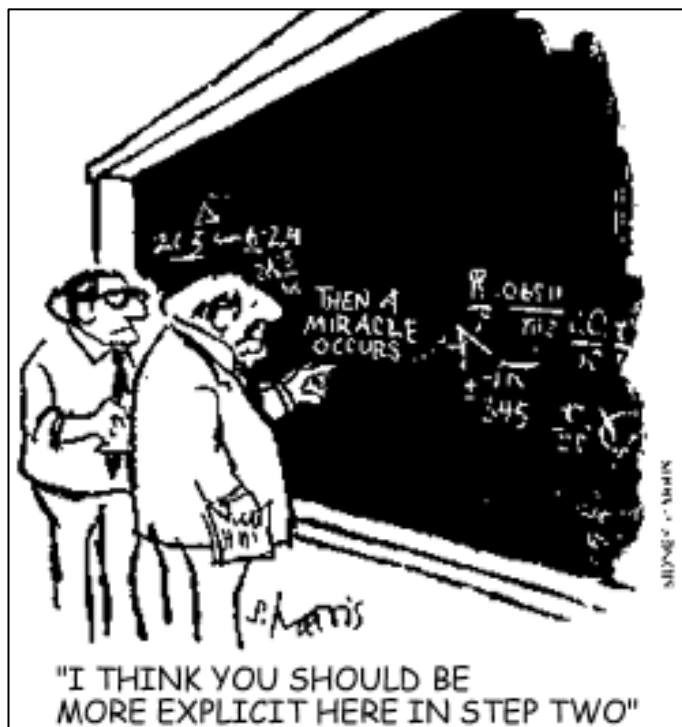


Figure 1-1: ‘Then a Miracle Occurs’ (Harris, 2010).

The equations at the top left of the chalkboard represent strategic direction and those in the bottom right are the resultant military capability. Something happens, in step two, to join them, but it is not a miracle. As subsequent chapters demonstrate, previous research has provided only limited insights into the translation of strategic direction into military capability. This thesis addresses these gaps by making Harris’ miracle ‘more explicit’. It examines UK decision making over what military capability to invest in and why, from the end of World War II to the present. Specifically, it

¹ Reproduced by permission of ScienceCartoonPlus.com

concentrates on decisions taken below the political level, by the military officers and civil servants in the most senior positions within the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and at the very top of the UK armed forces. This small group, detailed at Figure 1-2, are identified in this thesis as ‘defence decision makers’.

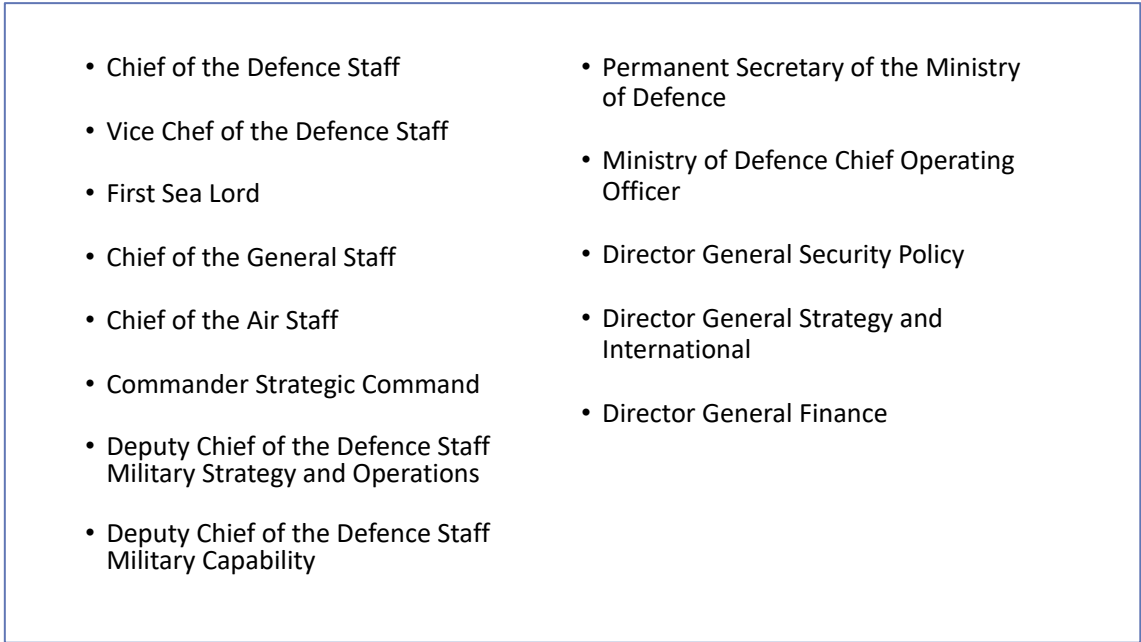


Figure 1-2: Defence Decision Makers.

Concentrating on decisions made within defence, this thesis seeks to identify the factors that have shaped capability choices and determine why those choices have had the effect they have. The analysis draws on historical trends as a basis for evaluating the current SDSR process to assess whether the UK’s latest methodology to link strategic direction and the development and maintenance of military capability will fare any better than its predecessors.

1.1 The Problem Space

This section introduces the thesis’ ‘problem space’. The title stems from a quote by former United States (US) Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. At a ‘town hall’ meeting with US soldiers in 2004, he responded to a question about lack of equipment by saying: “you go to war with the army you have, not the army you might want or wish to have at a later time” (YouTubeGB, 2004). At first glance, this might appear to be a case of stating the obvious; however, it does prompt the question ‘are the armed forces that exist today the armed forces the country needs – or wants?’ Armed forces

that the country needs can be objectively researched; armed forces that the country wants is more subjective. However, both are intrinsic to the broader question ‘why does the UK have the military that it has?’

Inherent in Rumsfeld’s remarks is the norm that states have a fundamental requirement to maintain and equip national armed forces. In the case of the UK, prior to the 2019 General Election, it was committed to spending at least two per cent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defence until at least 2021 (Hansard House of Commons, 2019), which equated to approximately \$50 billion in 2018 – the seventh largest defence budget in the world (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019). In a symposium held at the Defence Academy of the UK in March 2016, a British Army three-star general suggested that the role of his nation’s armed forces was ‘to do harm to the Queen’s enemies and blow up their stuff!’ Although this definition may have been offered somewhat tongue-in-cheek, it is a good start point for understanding the long-standing political consensus in the UK concerning the maintenance of appropriately equipped armed forces to meet defence and security policy goals. Put in another – and slightly more politically correct – way, the 2015 National Security Strategy (NSS) included the vision, “a secure and prosperous United Kingdom, with global reach and influence.” Moreover, its first method to underpin that vision was to “strengthen our Armed Forces so that they remain world-leading ... [to] project power globally ... to deter and defeat our adversaries” (Her Majesty’s Government, 2015, p. 9).

The view that it is a government’s inherent responsibility to protect the citizens of the state – first articulated in 1651 by Thomas Hobbes – has been, and remains, an entrenched norm in UK politics and society (Macpherson, 1968). A review of the main political parties’ manifestos prior to the 2015 general election revealed they all recognised a requirement for the nation’s armed forces although, unsurprisingly, their positions on its size, scope and employment did not accord. For example, even the Green Party’s non-threatening policy of ‘defensive-defence’ made it clear that “threats and attacks will be resisted” (The Green Party, 2015). Public endorsement of the armed forces remains equally as important as political support. In a survey undertaken just before the most recent SDSR (SDSR 15) was completed, seventy-two per cent of those

polled described their feelings towards the UK armed forces as positive or strongly positive. Furthermore, eighty per cent believed the purpose of the UK armed forces was to protect and defend UK territory and its citizens, and ninety per cent confirmed that defending the UK from threats and attack from outside was important or very important (pwc, 2015). To that end, this thesis assumes that all major political parties and the electorate acknowledge the requirement for the UK to maintain armed forces and equip them with military capability, at least at some level.

The term 'military capability' is a relatively recent addition to the UK defence lexicon. In 1997, the newly-elected Labour government introduced the Smart Procurement Initiative (SPI) intended to deliver equipment "faster, cheaper and better" (Taylor, 2003, p. 7). This initiative was a significant theme in the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) of 1998 (SDR 98) and was subsequently re-launched as 'Smart Acquisition' in October 2000. The currency of Smart Acquisition was military capability, defined as "an operational outcome or effect that users of equipment need to achieve" (Defence Procurement Agency, 2002, p. 51). Since then, the process for the acquisition of military capability has developed significantly and is now cohered through a formal list of 'Defence Lines of Development' (DLOD), which were endorsed by the Defence Management Board in 2005² (Joint Concepts and Doctrine Centre, 2005). The current version of the MOD operating model and associated control framework publication 'How Defence Works' defines military capability as "the combination of equipment, trained personnel and support that gives the armed forces the capacity to achieve the tasks they are given" (Director Corporate Strategy Ministry of Defence, 2015, p. 8). It is this definition of military capability that is employed throughout the thesis. An in-depth explanation of the MOD's current process for the management of military capability is included in chapter four.

Having confirmed an understanding of military capability and recognised the nation's desire to have armed forces capable of employing it, the final element of the thesis' title requiring clarification is 'strategic direction'. The purpose of this research is not to question the veracity of civilian control of the military; it accepts the view

² The harmonised set of DLODs is: training; equipment; personnel; information; concepts & doctrine; organisation; infrastructure and logistics (often referred to by the acronym TEPID OIL).

espoused by theorists such as Samuel P. Huntington (1957) that civilian political leadership, rather than the military, has ultimate responsibility for a country's grand strategic decision making. When investigating strategic direction, therefore, this research has focused on how it has influenced decisions taken at the senior levels of the MOD and the armed forces.

As a simple, high-level summary, strategic direction is interpreted and resources are allocated, by the MOD and the armed forces, to enable the government to achieve the aims and objectives of its policy. However, the reality is much more complex. For example, the UK has fielded military capability for as long as it has existed. In 1661, Sir William Penn and Samuel Pepys established the Naval Discipline Act, which included the articles of war and founded the Royal Navy (RN) by statute (National Museum of the Royal Navy, 2014). This occurred forty-six years before the 1707 Act of Union that brought about the political union of England and Scotland, forming Great Britain. The point here is that the interpretation of strategic direction and subsequent resource allocation decisions always take place against a baseline of military capability already being fielded at that point in time, as a result of previous decisions. Furthermore, at all times, there is military capability making its way through the acquisition cycle³ to reach the in-service, i.e. fielded, phase; again, as a result of previous decisions. All of this capability has to be taken into account whenever strategic direction is interpreted, and resources are allocated. This is a considerable constraint on decision making, as fielded military capability may not be the most appropriate to support the aims and objectives of new policy, but there is insufficient resource available to fund its replacement. Furthermore, the time between the decision to procure a capability, and its entry into service is usually measured in years, and sometime decades⁴. This too is constraining, as a long procurement lead time may span a change of policy that makes the capability being procured unrequired at the point it enters service. Cancellation before that generally results in the loss of

³ The acquisition (or CADMID) cycle exists to assist the reduction of risk during the concept and assessment stages of a project so that, when it is presented for approval, there is a high level of confidence that targets for time, whole-life cost, annual cost of ownership and performance will be achieved. It has six stages: concept, assessment, demonstration, manufacture, in-service, and disposal.

⁴ The decision to procure two new aircraft carriers was announced in SDR 98. The first of these – HMS QUEEN ELIZABETH – was not commissioned until 2017.

often considerable sunk costs. In addition to the complications caused by the ever-evolving capability baseline, there are myriad associated factors that could affect the successful translation of strategic direction into military capability; the reasons for non-achievement identified in the opening paragraph of this chapter are by no means a complete list.

On the basis of the foregoing summary, and as the literature review in chapter two shows, the secondary literature around strategic direction exposes the multitude of associated actions that impact on defence decision making. However, much of the related analysis concentrates solely on the immediate outcomes of a particular defence review (see, for example, Greenwood (1975), McInnes (1998) and Taylor (2010d)). There have, of course, been books and articles published that consider defence policy in the round (see Bartlett (1972), Darby (1973), Baylis (1989), Carver (1992) and, more recently, Louth and Taylor (2019)). However, the defence landscape has changed considerably since the end of the Cold War, and the older works are of their time. Accordingly, they are only of limited use when comparing and contrasting all strategic direction, from the beginning of the Cold War to today. Contemporary analysis does exist that considers linkages between all of the defence reviews undertaken since the end of World War II (see Black (2006), Cornish and Dorman (2015), Blackburn (2015), and Thomson and Blagden (2018)); however, it is not as plentiful as was the case a generation ago. This point is recognised by Paul Cornish and Andrew Dorman (2009a, p. 253) who attribute the paucity of up-to-date scrutiny around defence policy to a “post-Cold War shift in British academia away from traditional strategic studies towards the rather broader, and arguably more diffuse, subject of security studies.”

From the 1957 defence review, up to and including SDSR 15, there is no shortage of rigorous analysis on specific defence reviews. Moreover, the same can be said for broader defence policy studies, at least up to and just beyond the point of SDR 98. However, most of the associated analysis is focused on policy formulation at the government level. Very little of the secondary literature has considered the impact of associated actions one level down; specifically, the role played by defence decision makers in the interpretation of policy and allocation of resource. A rare exception to

this was Timothy Garden's exploration of the consequences of SDR 98 for the power and influence of the chiefs of staff (Garden, 1999).

In concentrating on answering the question 'why does the UK have the military that it has?' through investigation of decision making below the political level, this thesis fills a significant gap in the academic literature. Its originality lies in two areas, both empirical and conceptual. Initially, it provides the first detailed empirical investigation of how defence's most senior decision makers interpret defence policy and expend associated resource, in order to field military capability to achieve policy aims. This is realised through a detailed review of relevant government and MOD policy documents, for example defence review command papers (Cm), and the associated existing literature on the historical aspects of the translation of strategic direction into military capability. Together they document how the UK policy implementation cycle has been realised since 1945, and the effects of related actions on capability outcomes. In particular, the absence of scrutiny in the secondary literature regarding the impact of associated actions below the political level presents an opportunity to add an original perspective on the collective comprehension of defence policy in the round. Thereafter, having uncovered the impact of associated actions on decision making within the MOD and the armed forces, the thesis blends these findings with analysis from elite interviews, to develop a new understanding of the linkages between the articulation of strategic direction and the generation of military capability.

This new understanding is the conceptual aspect of the thesis, and is achieved through its second original feature, namely the application of its chosen research strategy. The thesis' research methods are a combination of qualitative content analysis of relevant government policy documents together with associated policy analysis from the commentariat (hereafter shortened to 'content analysis'), and semi-structured elite interviews. The methodology employed to underpin this research is constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014), a development of grounded theory first posited by Barney Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1967). The research methodology is discussed in more detail in chapter three.

The thesis will argue that strategic direction is translated into military capability to deliver fit-for-purpose armed forces through an open-ended collection of interacting activities involving the government and defence decision makers. The interacting activities are: defence policy formulated by government; resource allocated by government; identification of military capability required to meet policy aims by defence; and allocation of resource to acquire and maintain required military capability by defence. The interaction of these activities is regularly disrupted by events and influences over which defence decision makers have either no, or only a limited degree of, control. Examples are 'strategic shock' events, such as the Suez Crisis in 1956, as well as less tangible activity, such as the influence of ambitious politicians or the lobbying of external pressure groups. Overall, they can be grouped in five distinct categories: strategic context; politics and politicians; affordability of defence; single services' conduct; and managing the defence enterprise. In order to counter the worst disruptions caused by these events and influences, defence decision makers must seek to maintain a balance across all of the interacting activities involved in the translation of strategic direction into military capability activity because, whilst in balance, these interacting activities afford the best chance of operating on or above the level that delivers fit-for-purpose armed forces.

To summarise, this thesis is original because it uncovers how previously identified actions impact on the translation of strategic direction into military capability, below the political level. Its originality extends to its systematic analysis of the current defence review process, using constructivist grounded theory methodology (GTM) to analyse evidence from elite interviews. In essence, it discards Harris' 'occurring miracle' and replaces it with the explicitness his cartoon character seeks.

1.2 Research Planning

Miles et al. (2014) recommend the early development of research questions. This approach is expanded upon by Keith Punch (2014), who confirms that considerable progress can be made towards identifying research questions when professional knowledge about the subject is incorporated into the research. To that end, the development of the research proposal that preceded this thesis drew upon the

author's own experience of working within both the acquisition and capability management pillars of the MOD.

Planning for this research project was undertaken using Punch's hierarchy of concepts to define the boundaries of the thesis and provide a framework within which relevant data could be subsequently collected (2014). This hierarchy drove an increasing level of specificity as planning became more detailed, whilst, at the same time, ensuring that all aspects of the plan remained aligned. Thus, the thesis' data collection questions flowed from its specific research questions, which flowed from the general research question, and so on.

At the top of the hierarchy was the research area, which identifies the thesis' macro focus. The research area of this thesis is UK defence policy. One level down is the research topic. The topic falls within the research area, but it is not the only topic within it. The reason for identifying the research topic is to make the general area of research more specific. The thesis' research topic is capability planning. The next level of specificity is provided by general and specific research questions, which provide a further narrowing of the research's focus. A general research question is broader and more abstract than a specific research question; moreover, it is usually not directly answerable. By contrast, specific research questions are more detailed and tangible. They are directly answerable as they pinpoint the data required to resolve them.

The thesis' original research proposal contained a draft general research question and a number of potential specific research questions. These were developed during the literature review and in the early stages of the content analysis. Prior to the commencement of the elite interviews, they were confirmed as:

General Research Question:

How is strategic direction translated into military capability by defence decision makers, to ensure the UK's armed forces are fit for purpose?

Specific Research Questions:

1. What is the purpose of a defence review, how are they undertaken, and why have governments undertaken them when they have?

2. What are the factors that have had an impact on defence reviews, both during and after the Cold War, have they changed over time and, if so, why, and why did they have the impact that they had?
3. Why might factors from previous defence reviews affect future SDSRs?
4. How does the government decide upon, and then articulate, strategic direction?
5. How do defence decision makers translate strategic direction into military capability?
6. Does the evidence suggest that UK military capabilities are aligned to strategic direction? If not:
 - a. What is the nature and what are the causes of this misalignment?
 - b. What would be required to align them?

At the lowest level of the hierarchy are data collection questions, which are used to gather the information required to satisfy the specific research questions. In this thesis, the data collection questions formed the basis of the interview guide for the elite interviews. Data collection questions were regularly updated, both between individual interviews and interview tranches, as a result of insights gained during thematic analysis.

1.3 Thesis Construct

This final section of the introduction chapter outlines the construct of the thesis, which is divided into ten chapters that broadly fall into three parts. The first part is context based, and includes the literature review, methodology and background information. The second and third parts are the data chapters. Part two contains insights from the content analysis (chapters five to seven) and part three details the analysis from the elite interviews (chapters eight and nine). The three parts are supported by an introduction chapter and a conclusions chapter.

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter has introduced the thesis through the metaphor of Sidney Harris' cartoon. It has then explained the thesis' problem space, unpacking relevant terminology and identifying its empirical and conceptual originality. Its second section outlined the initial research planning that underpinned the thesis and

introduces its research structure. Finally, this section describes the construct of the thesis document using short, chapter-by-chapter explanations.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Chapter two studies the body of academic work relevant to the thesis. It is divided into five sections. Initially, it investigates the secondary literature around strategy; however, given the vast range of writing on strategy, it targets very narrowly those national and military elements that directly affect the thesis' general research question. The second section concentrates on defence reviews, from the end of World War II to the present, specifically focusing on why decisions were made, rather than what decisions were made. The chapter then moves onto pan-defence review themes, with the aim of identifying the secondary literature concerning the mechanics of defence reviews to date, and how they might affect reviews of the future. The final exploratory section covers the relatively new subject of 'military capability', and focuses on academic scrutiny of extant process and procedures for the management of defence. The chapter concludes with a summary overview of the principal literature that considers strategic direction and military capability and identifies the connections between the two.

Chapter Three: Methodology

In order to allow an evaluation of the reliability and validity of the thesis' research, chapter three discusses its underpinning methodology. This discussion is broken down into four separate, but interrelated subjects. It begins with an explanation of the methodological approach, before describing the methods of data collection and the methods of analysis. It concludes with an evaluation and justification of the overall methodological choices.

Chapter Four: Strategic Direction and Military Capability

Chapter four is the last of the context chapters and provides the necessary background information upon which the thesis is constructed. Its sections discuss the relevant aspects of 'strategic direction' and 'military capability'. Strategic direction flows from a number of related areas; in the first instance, there are the actual words, spoken and written by senior members of government and a small number of non-

elected officials sanctioned to communicate on matters of defence and security. There is also relevant government policy, which in the case of defence and security, is now dominated by the quinquennial review process that generates the NSS. However, prior to SDSR 10, there was no regularity to defence reviews, or even an agreed definition to support them; to that end, the strategic direction section of this chapter concludes with an examination of the defence review process to provide the appropriate context to support the data chapters. The second section charts the developments in military capability planning, from the introduction of the SPI to the present day. In particular, it examines the methods of procurement and support employed under SPI, before considering the impact of the post-SDSR 10 Defence Reform Programme (DRP).

Chapter Five: Themes from Past Defence Reviews

The fifth chapter is the first of the thesis' three chapters that are constructed around the content analysis. Shaped by the literature review, it focuses on the defence reviews from the end of World War II to immediately prior to SDSR 10. In particular, it considers both internal and external factors, such as policy, process, finance and contemporary events, that impacted the defence reviews, with the aim of determining whether themes from the past may be relevant for the future.

Chapter Six: Strategic Defence and Security reviews – A New Approach

The second content analysis chapter focuses on the most recent change to the UK's approach to defence and security policy making, which began with the introduction of the first NSS in 2008 and saw the establishment of the quinquennial review process in 2010. The analysis in this chapter also avoids actual outcomes and instead concentrates on decision making within SDSR 10, to help unravel the thesis' general research question.

Chapter Seven: Development of Strategic Defence and Security Reviews

Chapter seven is the final content analysis chapter. It investigates how the quinquennial review process has developed, predominantly through a study of SDSR 15. It also brings the thesis up to the present by considering the impact that the

National Security Capability Review (NSCR) of 2017 and the 2018 Modernising Defence Programme (MDP) have had on the thesis' general research question. In doing so, it reveals the factors that impacted SDSR 15, as well as the influences that the UK's 2016 decision to leave the European Union (EU) are beginning to have on defence and security policy making.

Chapter Eight: Factors that Shape the Translation of Strategic Direction into Military Capability

Chapter eight is the largest in the thesis and is the first of two that analyses data from the elite interviews using GTM. In accordance with the thesis' methodology, outlined in chapter three, it interprets the data points confirmed during open coding to identify trends and similarities that could be grouped into subcategories, and thence into categories. The analysis that confirms the relevance of each category is exposed in a series of separate sections. Specifically, the sections in this chapter identify the factors that shape the translation of strategic direction into military capability.

Chapter Nine: Factors that Determine the Translation of Strategic Direction into Military Capability

This chapter follows the approach of chapter eight; however, its analysis is restricted to the single factor that determines the translation of strategic direction into military capability. To provide a manageable structure to the chapter, each of the subcategories that make up the single factor's category are examined in a separate section.

Chapter Ten: Conclusions

Although a number of the earlier chapters finish with a summary section, all of the thesis' conclusions are consigned to its final chapter. The chapter is divided into four sections: conclusions from the content analysis; conclusions from the selective coding process; developing theory from the theoretical coding process; and final thoughts. The selective coding section draws together all of the conclusions from the content and elite interview analysis to confirm the categories nominated for inclusion in the theoretical coding process. The theoretical coding section identifies and justifies the relationships between the categories that underpin the findings of the thesis. The final thoughts section completes the chapter and the thesis with a consideration of the

implications of the thesis' findings, as well as recommendations for future research and practical applications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter surveys the body of academic work relevant to this thesis, to provide an overview of the ideas, theories and noteworthy literature currently published that relates to strategic direction, military capability, and the linkages between them. It begins with a discussion on strategy, and, more specifically, strategic direction; however, it is limited in focus to those aspects of strategy that are directly relevant to this research. The following two sections concentrate on defence reviews: section two covers the Cold War (1945-1990), the Early Expeditionary period (1991-2009), and the SDSR era⁵ (2010 onwards); section three considers several historiographic orthodoxies and theories that span all defence reviews. Together, these sections examine the secondary literature to provide an overview of the significant ideas and theories published on all defence reviews between 1957 and 2015. Sir Michael Quinlan (1992) recognised that focusing on the specific content of the UK's defence programme following a defence review is of far less value than studying the reasons why the related decisions were made in the first place. In line with this thinking, these sections concentrate less on the 'what' and more on the 'why' of defence review decision making. In doing so, they critically review the extant research related to defence reviews and synthesise the findings in the context of the thesis that follows. The final topic considered in this literature review is military capability, an area seldom subject to academic scrutiny in isolation.

2.1 Strategic Direction

Hew Strachan (2005) wrote that strategy is not just a matter for historians – it concerns us all. This view has certainly been embraced by the current generation of British defence and security academics. From the end of the Cold War, and certainly since the UK's involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, interest in strategy has increased considerably. For example, Colin S Gray, who John Baylis has described as one of the

⁵ To consider analogous analysis in one place within this Chapter, the review of all secondary literature appertaining to the UK's adoption of a national security strategy is included in this sub-section (recognising that the first strategy and its update were published in 2008 and 2009 respectively, which is within the previously defined Early Expeditionary period).

greatest strategic thinkers of the day (Gray, 2015), has authored, or co-authored, no fewer than ten books on the subject in the last ten years⁶. Although the abundance of defence and security literature related to strategy considers a huge range of associated issues, two general topics attract by far the most attention: what is strategy and how well, or otherwise, is it being carried out? (see Barnett (1991), Barnett (1993), Strachan (2005), Strachan (2006), Clarke (2007), Gray (2008), Strachan (2008b), Blagden (2009), Cornish and Dorman (2009a), Caudle and De Spiegeleire (2010), Cornish (2010), Cornish and Dorman (2010), Gray (2010a), Jenkin and Grant (2010), Newton et al. (2010) Porter (2010), Morris (2011), Savill (2011), Strachan (2011), Cornish and Dorman (2012), Layton (2012b), Freedman (2013), Strachan (2013), Edmunds (2014), Evans (2014), Gaskarth (2014), McCourt (2014), Menon (2015), Blagden (2015), Gaskarth (2015), and Layton (2015)). Clearly, both of these topics can be sub-divided further, which could lead to lines of study not directly relevant to this research. To avoid becoming mired in the contestation surrounding strategy in the round, this section concentrates only on those specific aspects that directly impact this thesis, namely the generation of strategic direction at the national level, and its receipt and interpretation at the military level.

The Oxford English Dictionary's first definition for strategy is: "a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term goal or aim." Its second definition is: "the art of planning and directing overall military operations or movements in a war or battle" (English Oxford *Living* Dictionaries, 2018). Regardless of how accurate the latter definition may be, the fact that it is listed behind the former is telling – in today's world the military definition no longer has primacy. Debating the appropriateness of using the word strategy outwith a military context is irrelevant; it is now widely used in many everyday environments, particularly business and sport. As Richard Knighton (2009) points out, strategy and strategic level have become shorthand for 'big' and 'long-term'. In other words: "the word strategy has acquired a universality which has robbed it of its meaning and left it only with banalities" (Strachan, 2005 p. 34). In the

⁶ *Theory of Strategy, Strategy and Politics, Fighting Talk: Forty Maxims on War, Peace and Strategy, The Future of Strategy, Strategy and Defence Planning: Meeting the Challenge of Uncertainty, Perspectives on Strategy, Strategy in the Contemporary World, The Practise of Strategy: from Alexander the Great to the Present, War Peace and International Relations: an introduction to Strategic History, The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practise.*

circumstances of this research, excessive, non-military use of the word is problematic because it introduces confusion when it is used in a military context (see Strachan (2005), Newton et al. (2010) and Porter (2010)). This matters, as the importance of a shared understanding of the lexicon that supports civil-military relations cannot be over-stated:

“When we fail to define our terms, and neglect to use the key terms with a consistent meaning, it is not possible to hold an intelligent debate or make rational decisions. Moreover, if the misuse and general abuse of strategic conceptual language reflects not simply intellectual idleness, but rather a substantive misunderstanding, then we really are in trouble.”

(Gray, 2008 pp. 13-14)

If the UK's political and military leaders have a different interpretation of the framework within which strategic direction is imparted, then how can those both on transmit and receive know the message has been accurately heard and understood?

Strategy at the National Level

Edward Luttwak (2009) wrote that all states have a grand strategy, whether they know it or not; a view supported by Hal Brands who defines grand strategy as “the theory or logic that binds a country’s highest interests to its daily interactions with the world” (Brands, 2012, p. 3). There is an almost universal acceptance among commentators that grand strategy occurs at a national level, and most also recognise that it involves the harnessing of “all a nation’s resources to accomplish objectives defined by national policy” (Wedemeyer, cited by Milevski, 2016, p. 68). The view that grand strategy exists in both times of peace and war is widely held (see Collins, Earle and Meyers cited by Milevski (2016)), as is the concept that it is an iterative process involving an understanding how a nation’s actions in the present can deliver its desired end state (see Brands (2012) and Layton (2012b)). In the words of John Lewis Gaddis cited by Peter Layton (2012b, p. 59) grand strategy is “about how one uses whatever one has to get to wherever it is one wants to go.” Perhaps a final commonly held view is that practising grand strategy is a complex and difficult task, which may account for the regularly offered academic view that it is often undertaken poorly (see

Porter (2010), Strachan (2013), and Edmunds (2014)). Brands suggests that the challenge of grand strategy flows directly from its meaning:

“Grand strategy is an inherently difficult endeavour that will tax the abilities of even the most capacious leader. ... [it] is not simply a struggle against one enemy or another; it is a fight against the complexity, disorder, and distraction that inevitably clutter the global scene. It is bound to be an exacting task, one full of potential pitfalls.”

(Brands, 2012, pp. 10-11)

Given the differing views of exactly what strategy at the national level involves, it is unsurprising that recent judgement of the UK's ability to undertake it is mixed. On the one hand, there is the view that the UK has maintained a grand strategy, on which UK foreign and security policy has been based, for the last seventy years. Malcolm Chalmers (2015a, p. 1) argues that, since the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in 1949, UK grand strategy has “consistently been based on a permanent alliance and economic partnership with fellow democracies in the US and Western Europe, and on support for the rules-based international order created after 1945.” On the other, there is the blunt view that “the UK doesn’t do strategy coherently” (Porter, 2010, p. 6) and “the problem with the UK ‘debate’ on strategy ... is that for many observers there does not seem to be one” (Newton et al., 2010, p. 44). These views are supported by Strachan (2013) who identifies that, in the three years following the 2010 SDSR, no fewer than four Parliamentary committees criticised the UK's failure to promote its capacity for strategy making. Notwithstanding the differing academic opinions on whether or not the UK practises strategy at the national level and, if it does, how well it manages it, understanding the manner in which strategic direction is handed down from the political to the military level is a key component of this research.

Strategy at the Military Level

In his first in a series of articles on strategy (see Strachan (2005), Strachan (2006), Strachan (2008b), Strachan (2011), and Strachan (2013)), Strachan suggests that the Cold War forced a change to the meaning of strategy. In his view, military, or in his words ‘conventional’, strategy is concerned with action – it prepares for war and then

implements those preparations. However, he saw the focus of nuclear strategy as dissuasion – it prevented war. This supposition aligned with the thinking of Thomas Schelling who, in 1960, defined strategy “not as concerned with the efficient application of force but with the exploitation of potential force” (Schelling, cited by Strachan, 2005, p. 43). Furthermore, Strachan recognised that, whilst conventional strategy was created through historical precedent, nuclear strategy did not have that reach back⁷. It required a new methodology, and turned to methods of mathematical modelling, for example game theory. As a result, Strachan determined that during the Cold War, “[strategy] ... became increasingly distant from the use of the engagement for the purposes of war” (Strachan, 2005, p. 44). Although this approach to strategy retained its usefulness throughout the Cold War, it quickly became obsolete thereafter. However, at the end of the Cold War, Strachan believes that military strategists did not revert to strategy’s principal design, which he saw as “to make war usable by the state so that it can, if needs be, use force to fulfil its political objectives” (Strachan, 2005, p. 49). He saw the reasons why as twofold. In the first instance, he posited that the Hobbesian view of a nation’s right to resort to war in fulfilment of its obligation to protect its citizens had been reduced, as international law had effectively mandated that the decision to go to war resided with the United Nations (UN) (see also Rasmussen (2006)). He also recognised that the UK armed forces’ adoption of the operational level of war, following its espousal by the US military during the 1980s, removed the obligation for defence planners to re-acquaint themselves with the art of military strategy at the end of the Cold War. In effect, the gap created by the obsolescence of nuclear strategy was filled by the embracement of the concept of operational art (see also Evans (2014)).

Strachan suggests that this reluctance to wage war⁸, coupled with the irrelevance of nuclear strategy in the post-Cold War era and its supplanting by operational art, left military strategy without a focus, and concluded: “strategy is about war and its conduct, and if we abandon it we surrender the tool that helps us to define war and to shape it and understand it” (Strachan, 2005, p. 48). In the context of this

⁷ With, of course the exception of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945.

⁸ In this instance, Strachan is referring to Western nations’ aversion for major state-on-state conflict, as opposed to military engagement with non-state actors or intervention in failed states.

thesis, the ability to define, shape and understand war must be a fundamental skillset for anyone tasked with translating strategic direction from the national level into military capability; moreover, this ability cannot be replaced by operational art, as the operational level of war is about planning, conducting and sustaining operations (Development Concepts & Doctrine Centre, 2014a, p. 20).

2.2 Defence, Strategic Defence, and Strategic Defence and Security Reviews

Scale and Scope of the Literature

The cumulative body of academic literature on the subject of UK defence reviews of the Cold War and Early Expeditionary period is limited in scale and scope. In a recent quantitative bibliometric study, Andrew Dorman and Matthew Uttley (2015) highlight the paucity of relevant journal articles published during this time⁹. For example, over their 1950 to 2014 survey period, *International Affairs* was the largest publisher of peer reviewed articles on UK defence policy (accounting for sixteen per cent of all articles published), yet it included only two articles on the subject during the time of Duncan Sandys' review (1957), just one article over the period of Dennis Healey's reviews (1966 to 1968), and no articles at all during the time of Roy Mason's review (1975). In all, only twenty (or thirty-six per cent) of the relevant articles were published between 1950 and 2000, with the remaining thirty-six (or sixty-four per cent) all published in the last fourteen years. This shortage of contemporaneous journal articles before 2000 necessitates a reliance on more recently published historical treatments when studying defence and strategic defence reviews between 1945 and 2009.

In addition to journal articles, there are also a modest number of published monographs that address this thesis' specific research questions pertaining to defence reviews over this period. The first such works appeared in the early 1970s, their publication peaked around the end of the Cold War, and output has tapered to no

⁹ The quantitative bibliometric survey employed by Dorman and Uttley identified the total population of articles on British defence and security policy published in academic peer reviewed journals between 1950 and 2014. Their database relied on seven online data sources: Ebsco, Proquest, Military Policy Research, Taylor & Francis, SAGE Journals, Wiley Journals, and Oxford Journals were used to identify articles published in English between 1950 and 2014.

more than a trickle since the turn of the twenty-first century. The monographs that have emerged can be broadly divided into two categories: those that concentrate specifically on defence policy formulation and implementation (see Bartlett (1972), Owen (1972), Darby (1973), Baylis (1977), Chichester and Wilkinson (1982), Baylis (1983), Chalmers (1985), Lider (1985), Coker (1986), Edmonds (1986), Broadbent (1988), Dillon (1988), Baylis (1989), Dockrill (1989), McIntosh (1990), Byrd (1991), Clarke and Sabin (1993), Coker (1993), Dodd (1993), Keohane (1993), Bellany (1994), Ovendale (1994), Smith (1996), Freedman (1999), Kincaid (1999), Hopkinson (2000), Croft et al. (2001), Dorman (2002), McConville and Holmes (2003), Black (2006), Edmunds and Forster (2007), Page (2007), Peden (2007), O'Hanlon (2009), Brown (2010), Hennessy (2010), Cornish (2010), Kirkpatrick (2010), Self (2010), Grattan (2011), Codner and Clarke (2011), Ashcroft and Oakeshott (2018)); and a smaller group that covers related aspects of UK defence policy, including the employment of Britain's armed forces on operations, but use the history and context of defence reviews as a handrail to do so (see Carver (1992), Jackson and Bramall (1992), Dorman et al. (2002) Kampfner (2003), Black (2006), Willett (2008), Dorman (2009), Chin (2013) and Dannatt (2016)).

Cold War Defence Reviews

Existing analyses of the four defence reviews of the Cold War are dominated by the impact that economics had on decision making. Baylis (1986) cited the titles of a number of books and journal articles on the subject¹⁰ to reinforce what he believed was a commonly held, or conventional, view that “a continuous process of contraction and decline” was the most apt description of the trajectory of post-World War II UK defence policy. This historiographic orthodoxy that economic constraints on defence expenditure precipitated the UK's post-1945 relative decline remains the dominant paradigm. In the academic examinations that followed all of the Cold War defence reviews, cutbacks in capability were regularly attributed to the deterioration of the economy, which forced the government of the day into reducing defence expenditure (see Chichester and Wilkinson (1982), Rees (1989), and Dockrill (1989)). For some, (see Navias (1989) and Dorman (2001c)) even the first consideration of nuclear weapons in

¹⁰ For example, *The Long Retreat*, *The Long Recessional*, and *The Collapse of British Power*.

the 1957 defence review was influenced by economic factors. Specifically, Martin Navias (1989, p. 408) asserted that “[in 1957] nuclear strategic thinking was very much a secondary consideration in a larger formula that sought major financial savings.” Evidence that this thinking endured throughout the Cold War period can be found via both commentators (see Self (2010)), and practitioners (see Healey and Cross (1969), Mason (1975), Jackson (1990), Carver (1992)). Revealingly, from his position as Secretary of State for Defence, Mason (1975, p. 218) observed: “the imperatives of economics, no matter how illogical this may be, do in fact exercise a commanding influence over the level of the resources which we can devote to defence.”

There have been alternative points of view. Recalling the consequence of the UK’s tardy rearmament decision in the 1930s (Dunbabin, 1975), Sir John Slessor asserted that “this appeal to economics is a hand that can be overcalled” (1957, p. 555). Moreover, Phillip Darby (1973) suggested that, during the Labour government’s reviews of the 1960s, neither short nor long terms savings were so significant as to argue that the final shape of the UK’s footprint East of Suez was economically motivated. Instead, he attributed the decision to other non-economic factors, notably increasing Cabinet scepticism about the effectiveness of the UK’s military posture in the Middle and Far East, as well as an increasing groundswell of opinion (especially driven from within the Labour Party) towards redefining the UK’s role as one within Europe, rather than maintaining world power aspirations. However, there is one academic who is synonymous with a questioning of the enduring orthodoxy that a diminishing economy was the reason for the contraction of the UK’s military capability since the end of World War II: David Greenwood.

Greenwood’s revisionist approach to explaining how the UK budgeted for defence during the Cold War was so distinctive that it spawned its own term – ‘Greenwoodery’ (Baylis, 1986). Greenwood was highly critical of the viewpoint that capability reduction was made inevitable by force of economic circumstances; instead, he argued that the government of the day always had a choice regarding its resource allocation for defence. In Greenwood’s view, economic constraints may have been influential, but they were never decisive. On this point, he asserted:

"The state of the economy does not force governments to make defence cuts, it merely defines the limits of policy choice. What a government decides to do when faced with various economic problems reflects its own values and priorities. It is, strictly speaking, a question of political choice, not of economic necessity."

(Greenwood, cited by Baylis, 1986, p. 452)

Although Greenwood's assessment may be literally correct, others have recognised that cuts and reductions in declaratory defence policy have often been made by the government of the day with the utmost reluctance. For example, Chalmers (1985, p. 87) argued that, right up until the final moment, ministers continued to believe the 1968 decision to withdraw completely from East of Suez by 1971 could have been avoided "by sleight of hand or a sudden improvement in the economy." By contrast, Chalmers (1985, p. 95) also pointed out that, at the 1974 general election, the incoming Labour government was elected on a manifesto pledge to "progressively reduce the burden of Britain's defence spending to bring costs into line with those carried out by [the UK's] main European allies." Therefore, even though the state of the UK economy was so parlous that "no government – Labour or Tory – could have left Defence unscathed in the economic and political chaos that engulfed the country in the Spring of 1974" (Jackson, 1990, p. 134), the Labour party had already committed to realising several hundred million pound per annum of savings from the defence budget (Chichester and Wilkinson, 1982). This analysis suggests that, although Greenwood's hypothesis that "the UK can devote to defence what it chooses to devote to it" (1968, p. 328) is technically correct, the economic situation throughout the Cold War forced UK politicians frequently to translate his 'choice characteristic' as 'no choice at all'.

Beyond the general reference to Greenwood's individual approach to defence budgeting, the term 'Greenwoodery' was also associated with his particular contribution to the argument concerning a purported 'funding gap' in the UK defence budget in the late 1980s (Baylis, 1986). Greenwood argued that, from the 1983 General Election until the end of the decade, the UK defence programme was continuously underfunded, creating a gap between declaratory defence policy and the actual military capability necessary to achieve stated policy goals. In his view, this was primarily because the Treasury and MOD used overly optimistic assumptions about

inflation in their public expenditure planning, but also because of “that persistent tendency of costs in the defence sector to rise faster than prices in general” (Greenwood, 1991, p. 40). As a result, military resources and political commitments became out of balance. Rather than reconsider commitments, the Conservative government of the time chose to take short-term savings measures, such as reducing military activity levels and elongating delivery schedules for new equipment. For example, not only was the introduction into service of the European Fighter Aircraft (now designated the Eurofighter Typhoon) delayed, it also went on to replace rather than supplement – as had been originally planned – the Tornado F3, which itself had only entered service in the mid-1980s (see Sabin (1993a)). In addition, rigorous efficiency drives were pursued across defence in an effort to reduce costs (see Hobkirk (1987)). According to Baylis (1986), Greenwood believed that, although efficiency measures did yield some savings, the size of the ‘funding gap’ would reach approximately £4.7 billion (or almost twenty-four per cent of the entire defence budget) by 1989. This concern about the shortfall in the defence budget was not limited to Greenwood (see Coker (1992) and Dunn (1992)); moreover, as Michael Asteris (1994) pointed out, it was only resolved by the fortuitous demise of the Soviet Union and the subsequent disbanding of the Warsaw Pact.

The end of the Cold War also saw the end of the ‘Greenwoodery’ debate. Reductions in military capability in the early 1990s, following the Options for Change exercise (Secretary of State for Defence, 1991), and the Defence Cost Study review (Secretary of State for Defence, 1994b), appeared to have closed the ‘funding gap’ (see Mottram (1991), and Dunn (1992)), and scholars became far more preoccupied with what defence activity would look like in the post-Cold War era. This change in academic focus was evident not only in the content, but also the titles of journal articles of the time¹¹. However, the underlying problems that created the ‘funding gap’ have not gone away. Public expenditure planning remains vulnerable to over-optimistic assumptions, and defence inflation still exists (Augustine, cited by Hartley, 2010). These factors continue to place strains on government attempts to balance defence

¹¹ For example: *Defence in Transition: Options for Change*; *Soldiers of Fortune: Britain’s New Military Role*; *British Defence Planning in a Changing World*; and *British Defence Choices beyond ‘Options for Change’*.

resources and policy commitments articulated in defence reviews. Even though 'Greenwoodery' arguably remains as relevant today as it did at the end of the Cold War, the potential for a 'funding gap' to have a major impact on defence planning, now and into the future, remains a largely under-researched issue. Such an identifiable gap in the literature is extremely relevant to this research, as understanding whether today's defence planners recognise the existence of a 'funding gap', and, if so, the impact of their methods to alleviate it¹² is fundamental to understanding the translation of strategic direction into military capability.

Early Expeditionary Period Defence Reviews

The focus of UK defence planning shifted significantly following the end of the Cold War and, not unexpectedly, the attention of interested academics shifted with it. As defence's thinking around, and application of, expeditionary operations developed, so too did the relevant secondary literature. Attention moved from a preoccupation with economic factors towards fundamental choices about what the nation's military capability should actually now be used for, given the reducing need to deter potential aggression from the Soviet Union. In this environment of strategic uncertainty, academic opinion was divided. On the one hand, it was argued that a wide range of defence capabilities should be retained to ensure the UK had sufficient flexibility to tackle a diffuse range of potential future global risks and crises (see Quinlan (1992) and Sabin (1993a)). Conversely, Asteris (1994) adopted a more focused approach, suggesting that, once the homeland security had been established, the nature of the UK's military provision beyond that should become much more a matter of national choice in relation to re-cast post-Cold War calculations of the national interest. Against this, David Dunn (1992) argued that the UK would face fluid political, economic and strategic risks in the future, which would require a reduced reliance on military force but an increase in reliance diplomatic efforts. Sir Lawrence Freedman (1999, p. 14) was more blunt, suggesting that the removal of the Soviet threat had prompted "the awkward question of whether there was anything left that the country really needed to defend against." The uncertainty about the character of immediate post-Cold War

¹² For example, seeking increased levels of efficiency within MOD, reducing short-term expenditure on training or support, delaying or cancelling specific equipment programmes.

strategic environment was regularly reflected in the secondary literature concerning the last decade of the twentieth century (see, for example, Chalfont (1992)). This situation is summed up neatly by Dorman (2001a, p. 22) who wrote: “the end of the Cold War had transformed the state of world affairs, but nobody was quite sure how.”

While there was disagreement on the future direction of defence policy, there was an acceptance that the end of the Cold War had created demand for a ‘peace dividend’, which would strongly influence decisions over reductions in Britain’s existing military capability and future investment choices (see Greenwood (1991) and Dodd (1993)). Indeed, there was an almost unanimous recognition across the secondary literature that defence spending should be reduced. This was best expressed by David Bolton (1991, p. 1): “no democratic nation can afford to expend resources and maintain its investment in military forces and capabilities for a war which is over, even a Cold War.” However, echoing the ‘funding gap’ debates of the late-1980s, Christopher Coker (1992, p. 66) tellingly observed that “one of the reasons why there was no immediate peace dividend when the Cold War came to an end was that the government had largely spent it.” Specifically, defence spending had fallen by eleven per cent in real terms between 1986-1990, even though its declared level of capability remained unchanged (Coker, 1992). Therefore, in broad terms, the Options for Change force level reductions did little more than offset this estimated £5 billion of underfunding, leaving the government a minimal ‘peace dividend’ to invest elsewhere.

The end of the Cold War precipitated changes in UK defence planning, and change that had to be delivered with a reduced budget. This aspect is covered in some detail in the secondary literature (see Bolton (1991), Bellamy (1992), Perkins (1992), Coker (1992), Dunn (1992), and McInnes (1993)). What is also made clear is the large degree of choice at the strategic level about the then ambiguous risks and threats the UK faced that had to be articulated and then translated into military capability. However, what does not appear to have been recognised in the early 1990s is the significance of the change demanded of the UK armed forces as it transitioned from the deterrent posture of the Cold War to an ability to project military power swiftly and operate at reach, as called for during the Early Expeditionary period. This change was explicit in government command papers from Options for Change in 1990-91 to SDR

98 (see Secretary of State for Defence (1990), Secretary of State for Defence (1991), Secretary of State for Defence (1992), Secretary of State for Defence (1994a), Secretary of State for Defence (1994b), Secretary of State for Defence (1996), and Secretary of State for Defence (1998a)). If deterrence was about discouraging the Soviet Union from initiating conflict in Europe by instilling doubt over its chance of success, or fear of the consequences, the quality and, more importantly, the quantity of NATO's (and, by definition, the UK's) military capability was paramount. It was all about show. As Freedman (1999, p. 83) observed: "in the age of deterrence, there would be something terribly wrong if it came to be necessary to fight the war for which one was planning most." However, the Early Expeditionary period was different. It required consideration of force availability and sustainability, because, in a power projection scenario, military capability is employed just being deployed. Greenwood understood the difference:

"Maintaining an inflated nominal order of battle, but leaving it seriously underfunded, may be acceptable if the only thing that matters is keeping up appearances, for the benefit of adversaries or allies (or, indeed, one's own self-esteem). But it is a risky strategy if there is any chance that forces might have to be committed to combat, especially if it could be necessary to dispatch them at short notice."

(Greenwood, 1993, p. 181)

The refocus of UK defence policy during the Early Expeditionary period was considerable; moreover, evidence suggests that the challenge for defence planners to recalibrate UK military capability so it could accommodate this change was sizeably more so. This task was articulated effectively in the relevant supporting essay (Supporting Essay 6 – Future Military capabilities) to SDR 98 (Secretary of State for Defence, 1998b); however, the manner in which defence planners went about this task, and the level of success they had in achieving it, has received little more than a passing mention (see, for example, Sabin (1993b)) in the secondary literature.

Strategic Defence and Security Reviews

The 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review

The academic focus on the 2010 SDSR was significant, both in its build up and aftermath. There are a number of reasons for this high level of interest. Although the

1997-2010 Labour government had completed two updates to SDR 98 – The SDR. A New Chapter (Secretary of State for Defence (2002)), and Delivering Security in a Changing World (Secretary of State for Defence (2004)) – there was a growing recognition as the first decade of the twenty-first century progressed that a more substantial re-examination of UK defence policy was required (see Edmunds and Forster (2007), Clarke (2007), Clarke (2008), Edmunds (2010), and Kirkpatrick (2011)). Max Hastings (2008, p. 32) summed this up well when he wrote: “there is room for a good argument about how Britain’s armed forces should be configured for the generation ahead. ... Only a properly conducted defence review can force the sort of hard choices that are needed.” In addition to the growing view that a review was needed, operations in Iraq and Afghanistan had become enduring, ultimately fixing the UK armed forces in over a decade of continuous commitment at scale and reach. This prompted some commentators to question the utility of extant UK military doctrine, including, in some cases, the validity of expeditionary warfare altogether (see Edmunds and Forster (2007), Codner (2007), Strachan (2008a), and Lindley-French (2015)). Finally, the ‘age of austerity’ that followed 2008 global economic crisis had necessitated a government-wide review of expenditure, which resulted in the extensive re-examination of the influence of the nation’s financial state on its defence policy decision making (see Kirkpatrick (2010), Chalmers (2010a), Chalmers (2010b), Cornish (2010), Dorman (2010), Hartley (2010), and Cornish and Dorman (2011)). Although not a complete list, these issues together guaranteed that there would remain a considerable academic interest in any UK government move to reappraise and reset national defence policy.

The secondary literature associated with SDSR 10 followed a discernible pattern. Prior to the review itself, most writing concentrated on the challenges policy-makers would face and the choices they had in meeting those challenges (see Clarke (2008), Cornish and Dorman (2009a), Cornish and Dorman (2009b), Chalmers (2010a), Chalmers (2010b), Cornish (2010), Cornish and Dorman (2010), Dorman (2010), Edmunds (2010), Hartley (2010), Kirkpatrick (2010), and Taylor (2010c)). Following the review, the commentary unsurprisingly coalesced around the outcomes of the review (see Taylor (2010d), Cavanagh (2011), Chalmers (2011), Cornish and Dorman (2011),

Dorman (2011), Dover and Phythian (2011), Cornish and Dorman (2012), Dover and Phythian (2012), and Phillips (2012)).

The generally held view at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century was that the challenges facing UK defence were considerable. Cornish and Dorman (2009a) argued that British defence was in a deep crisis, and that defence policy, planning and analysis has reached a state of “organisational, bureaucratic and intellectual decay” (2009a, p. 261). Timothy Edmunds believed that a mix of operational overstretch, swingeing budget cuts, and an unaffordable equipment programme represented a defining moment for British defence:

“It is increasingly clear that the declaratory goals of defence policy, the demands made by operational commitments and the financial and organizational capacities to meet these in practice no longer match up, while defence policy-makers themselves have struggled to formulate an adequate or unified response to these pressures.”

(Edmunds, 2010, p. 377)

Ideas offered by academia to meet these challenges were wide-ranging, with proposed changes ranging from the very tactical to the very strategic, and from specific, intra-defence to broader, societal-based, solutions. As an example, at the tactical, intra-defence level, David Kirkpatrick (2010) recommended that elements of UK forces contributing principally to homeland defence should be transferred from regular to reserve status, with their equipment mothballed and their personnel given only part-time training. Both Edmunds (2010) and Chalmers (2011) recognised the societal challenge of re-establishing national consensus on the role of the military. In particular, Edmunds (2010, p. 392) posited that defence remained “quite low in the hierarchy of public concern”, as a result of its post-Cold War change in status from a focus on a war of national survival to an expeditionary posture designed to manage and contain security challenges at source. He concluded that this reduced concern around matters of defence, by the general public and, as a result, also by politicians, did little to advance the case for solving defence’s problems through increased spending.

There are ample instances in the secondary literature of academia’s concerns over the challenges (and potential solutions to those challenges) facing UK defence

prior to, and during, SDSR 10. However, the part of the review that attracted the majority of comment was its outcome. Writing before the review was published, Taylor (2010c) suggested that it offered “the opportunity to re-examine assumptions and conventional wisdom and then to generate a persuasive narrative to justify the size and shape of the defence budget.” In terms of meeting this aiming point, most commentators believed the review fell short. Keith Hartley (2010) considered it a missed opportunity for radical change, Kirkpatrick (2011) believed it did not reconcile MOD aspirations and resources, and Dorman (2011, p. 83) suggests that the review “ducked many issues” and government continued “to have eyes that are too big for its stomach.” By contrast, Taylor (2010d) believed the SDSR had moved positively towards forming an affordable defence programme; furthermore, Cornish and Dorman (2012) suggested that the conceptual framework of both the NSS and the SDSR were probably as good as could have been expected although, in a separate article, they also suggested that the review rapidly lost credibility and within a few months was close to, or indeed had, failed (Cornish and Dorman, 2011).

These views from academia were reinforced by a survey of RUSI’s defence and security community, albeit the survey took place barely one week after the SDSR 10 report was published (Chalmers et al., 2010). Over two thirds of those surveyed agreed (or strongly agreed) that the review was a lost opportunity for a more radical reassessment of the UK's role in the world, and over half disagreed (or strongly disagreed) that the review had eliminated the inherited over-commitment in the defence programme. However, more positively, sixty-five per cent believed that the government’s spending review had struck a reasonable balance between cuts in the defence budget and cuts on other public services, and an overwhelming ninety-four per cent considered the government was right to make defence part of a wider review of national security. In summary, the clear majority of commentary on SDSR 10 was negative with criticism aligned under two distinct themes, identified Louisa Brooke-Holland (2015, p. 2) in a House of Commons primer for SDSR 15:

- It was a Treasury-led review, dictated by budgetary considerations, rather than a truly strategic assessment of the resources needed by the armed forces.

- The reduction to personnel numbers and cuts to equipment, prompted concern about the ability of the armed forces to fulfil all the tasks expected of them.

The 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review

Within the bounds of this thesis, the 2015 SDSR is unique, as it is the only defence review to have been undertaken since the research had begun. As a result, time has permitted only a limited amount of academic scrutiny of the review, and the quantity of relevant secondary literature remains small. This has necessitated a change in structure in this part of the literature review, with the analysis divided into pre- and post-review secondary literature.

Many examiners of SDSR 10 recognised that the review left a number of significant issues unresolved, notably closing the 2015-20 funding gap; agreeing the structure of a transformed MOD head office; and confirming the size, composition and role of the reserves (see Hartley (2010), Taylor (2010d), Chalmers (2010b), Dorman (2011), Dunn et al. (2011), and Kirkpatrick (2011)). As SDSR 15 approached, there was an acknowledgement that some of these issues had still to be tackled. Against a backdrop of continuing national austerity, it is perhaps unsurprising that budgetary issues were often the first to be highlighted. Therefore, even though Cornish and Dorman (2015) agreed that the MOD had largely achieved its short-term financial targets¹³, a growing national debt would most likely demand further reductions to public expenditure, including defence. Richard Reeve (2015, p. 2) recognised the significant tensions between the Conservative Party's manifesto commitments to fiscal austerity and military re-equipment, and concluded that "aspiring to do less militarily with less money is the most realistic option." However, most of the speculation over defence cuts was quietened by the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his July 2015 budget statement, where he committed to spending two per cent of UK GDP on defence until at least 2020 (Hansard House of Commons, 2015). That said, questions were then raised as to how the government would meet this commitment (see Reeve and Street (2015)).

¹³ Considered to be addressing its unfunded liability of around £38 billion, absorbing the costs of the nuclear deterrent replacement, and reducing the planned defence budget by seven and a half per cent.

As well as observations over the anticipated financial difficulties, a number of commentators focused pre-review on changes both to the international security situation and the national political landscape. A common view was that the global situation was far less secure than it had appeared in 2010 (see Reeve and Street (2015) and Chalmers (2015a)); furthermore, given the focus on budget cuts, *The Economist* (2014) argued that the military establishment had not seriously considered the emerging threats and what it could realistically accomplish to counter them. In addition, Reeve and Street (2015, p. 1) believed that the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party, and the rise in support for the Scottish National Party had fractured the long cross-party consensus on the UK's role in the world. Specifically, they identified that “alternatives to foreign military interventions and the possession of nuclear weapons [were] very much back on the political agenda.” Although, in the short-term, this did not directly affect the nation’s security strategy, it may yet do so – and the consequences could be significant. A fundamental re-set by the UK of how it conducts itself internationally would undoubtedly alter the strategic direction given to the MOD and the armed forces.

Finally, and perhaps surprisingly, the pre-SDSR 15 literature contained very little in the way of specific and original suggestions on how the national security strategy could be revised. Reeve (2015) wrote about an increased focus on conflict prevention and recommitting to the UN and multilateral peacekeeping, and Chalmers (2015a) developed these themes to propose a ‘force for order’ principle, which would extend the use of the UK armed forces beyond major military operations to include their peacetime deployment to defend norms of international society (for example, freedom of movement on the high seas). He argued that this would be a more credible role for the military, rather than continuing to use them as a ‘force for change’, deployed to overthrow hostile regimes and directly build new states. However, outside these ideas, academic discussion ahead of the review tended to focus more on short-term, economically driven issues.

SDSR 15 was published on 23 November 2015, and included an updated NSS. Initial opinion was generally positive. Chalmers (2015c) described it as a “steady as she goes review” and recognised that it offered some stability in defence planning,

which he believed was welcome after five years of substantial reductions. According to Elizabeth Quintana (2015), SDSR 15 put the RAF in a more positive position than in 2010, and Peter Quentin (2015) confirmed that the SDSR had “rubber stamped the Army’s direction of travel.” However, by contrast, Peter Roberts (2015) observed that the review failed to prioritise much-needed investment in the RN, and Andrew Curtis (2016) highlighted that it did not reconcile any of the outstanding joint logistics issues. As commentators had more time to consider the outcomes of the review, a number of broader themes emerged.

The start-point for most analysis of SDSR 15 was how it compared with its predecessor (see Chalmers (2016a), Chapman (2016), Dorman et al. (2016), Hampshire (2015), Keohane (2016), Louth (2016), and Molinelli (2016)). The unanimous view was summed up by John Louth, who wrote: “overall, the 2015 document is a substantial improvement on its 2010 predecessor both in terms of the process that led to its construction and the outcomes it aims to deliver.” It is unsurprising that comparisons were drawn, as these are the only two reviews of the modern era, held at a known regularity, cross-government and within the emerging national security strategy construct. The near universal condemnation of SDSR 10 also provided an easy comparator for what was believed by most to be a considerably more positive review.

In addition to assessing SDSR 15 against SDSR 10, a number of commentators also drew comparisons between it and the SDR 98. For example, Edward Hampshire (2015) confirmed that both reviews were strategy-led, which resulted in major announcements of new equipment purchases. However, he also pointed out that the government’s comprehensive spending review (CSR), which followed SDR 98, did not allocate sufficient funding to cover the aspirations of that review. This led to cuts in the short term, which contributed to the capability shortfalls that plagued operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and, subsequently, were a major contributor of the severity of SDSR 10. In his view, the same problems were repeated in the aftermath of SDSR 15. For example, the stretching of major equipment programmes, such as F-35 and Type 26, may have led to reduced or better controlled costs in the short term, but would inevitably result in greater costs overall. Thus, Hampshire’s deduction was that SDSR 15 also stored up problems that would have to be addressed in a future review. This

conclusion is also reached by Dorman et al. (2016, p. 52) who suggested that SDSR 15 “contains vulnerabilities worryingly reminiscent of its 1998 predecessor” and “is predicated on a series of financial assumptions that simply do not stack up.” In particular, they cite unrealistic efficiency targets and optimistic revenue expectations from further sale of the defence estate, as well as the adverse long-term effect of delaying programmes, recognised by Hampshire.

Whilst not directly comparing SDSR 15 with SDR 98, Louth (2016) also expressed doubts about the review’s affordability. He identified that the review did not include a clear and unambiguous analysis of how the new capability investment would be funded, which he considered remarkable given the effort the coalition government had made to close the circa £38 billion unfunded liability in the equipment programme that it had inherited in 2010. Louth’s conclusion was the issues of affordability may well lead to the unravelling of SDSR 15.

It is clear that most of the criticism aimed at SDSR 15 in the secondary literature focused on financial issues; however, James De Waal (2015) also criticised some political aspects of the review. For example, in order to achieve the international perception that the UK had reasserted itself as a major military power, De Waal argued that many of the decisions in the review were taken on the basis of their political and presentational impact rather than because they made sense from a security perspective. He also questioned how many decisions were based on objective analysis, highlighting instead the impact of lobbying efforts by various national security interest groups. His point was that, even though this lobbying may have in many cases aligned with government objectives, by proving receptive to lobbying, the government may have stored up problems for itself in the future, with interest groups in national security being more likely to adopt a similar approach in future reviews, rather than relying on the formal internal policy processes. The effect of both concerns is the undermining of the review process, which in De Waal’s view may make the next SDSR “a much more bloody and controversial business.”

Even though analysis of SDSR 15 remains ongoing, a clear pattern has emerged in the secondary literature. Prior to the review, there was a prevalence of concerns around how the review would tackle the unanswered questions passed on by its

predecessor, especially given the anticipation of further budget cuts. Immediately after the review was published, the majority of interpretations were positive, with agreement that it had re-affirmed the UK's 'place in the world', and strengthened its position as a serious military power. However, over time, concerns have been raised as to the ability of the government to deliver on the promises contained in the review, with little confidence that the resource required to meet the increases in the MOD's Equipment Plan will be found from the planned efficiency and savings measures.

2.3 Pan-Defence Review Themes

Whilst the majority of academic considerations of defence reviews since 1945 contribute to the collective understanding of the 'what' and the 'so what' of the reviews, a small number focus on the mechanics of the process in general, with the aim of establishing what this might mean for the future. This is the vital ground of this thesis, because recognising the factors that impact on defence decision making, and determining why they have the effect that they have, is fundamental to understanding why the UK has the military capability that it has.

Determinants of Decision Making

The first attempt to understand the factors that impact on defence decision making in the UK was made by Baylis (1975). He recognised that defence decision making is far from an orderly and cohesive activity, and that the government of the day is regularly forced into making decisions, with incomplete information about the subject in question, often with little time to consider alternatives, and always with myriad other pressing issues of state demanding attention. Baylis' analysis suggests that decisions are "often made more by accretion than selection" (Brzezinski and Huntington, cited by Baylis, 1975, p. 42), and that "issues and values, ends and means are hopelessly confused" (1975, p. 42).

Baylis developed his analysis by identifying generic factors that affect choices for defence planners and shape their subsequent decisions. These included: personality; the machinery for making decisions; interest groups; Parliament; public opinion; the economy; and the International environment. He concluded that understanding these factors could help determine the key causes of specific defence

decisions; however, he also cautioned that “the arbitrary isolation of various determinants tends to ignore the importance of their dynamic inter-relationship and the impact of a ‘mix’ of factors on policy-making” (1975, p. 47). Arguably Baylis’ most significant analytical contribution was to suggest that the decision making resulting from this approach, i.e. ‘incrementalism’ or ‘muddling through’, has been the dominant method of formulating defence policy since the end of World War II (see Lindblom (1959), and Lindblom (1979)). His evidence was that the main pillars of defence policy – the nuclear deterrent, membership of NATO, the close relationship with the US, and the provision of independent military capabilities for operations outside Europe – have remained consistent during the period; furthermore, “sweeping changes have been avoided and piecemeal adjustments have been favoured” (Baylis, 1989, p. 3). That said, he also recognised that listing factors does not expose the sequencing of decision making, which is also instrumental in how conclusions are reached. As a result, although Baylis’ work was an encouraging first step in recognising the factors at play in defence decision making, he understood that more conceptual and empirical study was needed to provide cogent insights into the decisions reached by defence planners.

Significant debate on the issue of whether defence decision making should be characterised as an exercise in rational choice or ‘muddling through’ did not take place for another forty years. On the one hand, a series of articles by Cornish and Dorman built on Baylis’ original analysis to develop the concept of ‘smart muddling through’ to characterise processes by which defence policy makers and the planners required to implement those policies might better align the fidelity between defence policy and implementation in the form of capability generation (see Cornish and Dorman (2011), Cornish and Dorman (2012), Cornish and Dorman (2013), and Cornish and Dorman (2015)). On the other, Gary Blackburn (2015) investigated the muddling through versus rational choice debate within defence decision making, and did so by undertaking a quantitative content analysis of the relevant defence review white papers “to determine how previous policy-makers sought to reconcile these divergent pressures” (2015, p. 87). Significantly, Blackburn chose to restrict his analysis to what he considered to be declared policy. To that end, he focused on: the UK economy; nuclear deterrence; terrorism; allies; and novel technology. He deliberately discounted

undeclared factors, such as personality or the influence of constituency politics, for two reasons: he did not assess them to be *major* [italics used by Blackburn] drivers of policy; nor could he see how they could be easily isolated and analysed (2015, p. 88). This restrictive view was unfortunate as it left Blackburn's analysis incomplete. Although his conclusion that the main factor in defence decision making was the "waxing and waning" of external threats, rather than the economy, was supported in the data he presented, the overlay of a qualitative analysis of some of the less tangible influences could have had an impact on his more quantitative-based assessments of declaratory policy. For example, the approach taken respectively by Duncan Sandys and John Nott to the 1957 and 1981 defence reviews marginalised the service chiefs to such an extent that the service chiefs' effect on the reviews' outcomes was minimal (see Self (2010), and McIntosh (1990)). A consideration of how this lack of professional military input by the service chiefs – or, indeed, Nott's decision to seek military inputs from elsewhere within his department – affected the decision-making process and resultant recommendations of both reviews would have strengthened Blackburn's analysis and could have altered his conclusions.

The goals of Baylis' and Blackburn's work were not the same; indeed, Blackburn did not even cite Baylis' 1975 article. Furthermore, they were not complete: Baylis recognised the need for additional study to develop his ideas, and Blackburn intentionally restricted his analysis to declaratory policy. However, their explicit recognition of the determinants of defence decision making provides a dichotomy that offers an initial framework for this thesis' investigation of previous defence reviews, in order to identify enduring trends that impact specifically on the translation of strategic direction into military capability.

Suitability of Defence Review Process

The methods by which defence reviews are undertaken have always attracted attention, sometimes to the point where process has overshadowed outcome (see Chalmers (1985)). More recently, Dorman (2001a, p. 24) suggested that "many of the novel features of the [1998] SDR surround its conduct rather than its findings." Nevertheless, there has been little analysis in the secondary literature of pan-defence review processes and, in particular, whether or not they all have a cyclical connection,

or common attributes. One exception is research undertaken by Cornish and Dorman (2010), which concluded that UK defence reviews throughout the Cold War and Early Expeditionary period have followed a flawed, four-phase, policy development process. They argued that policy failure is followed by policy inertia, which leads to policy formulation, and, finally, policy mis-implementation. Furthermore, they contended that this led to an as-yet inescapable cycle of incomplete and unsustainable defence reviews. More recently, Cornish and Dorman (2015) have developed this thinking to identify ten 'unwritten rules' that influence the character and quality of defence reviews, which can be summarised thus:

- Reviews are quickly overtaken by events.
- Governments find it difficult to sustain the logic of their own strategy review.
- Reviews are inevitably underfunded.
- Reviews are constrained by the capability decisions by which they are immediately preceded.
- In any review, certain areas will be considered 'off-limits' for party political, domestic or international reasons.
- The unanimity of service chiefs cannot be maintained, as their allegiance to their respective service takes precedence over their commitment to defence overall.
- Allies and partners will attempt to influence the outcome of the review directly and will also be drawn in by the individual services.
- The threat of defence cuts leads to inter-service rivalry.
- The government will be subject to intensive media scrutiny, both prior to and during a review.
- On completion of a review, the government will claim to have gained control of defence inflation and cost overruns.

The ad-hoc cycle of defence reviews, taken to task by Cornish and Dorman, has since been replaced by the quinquennial review process, which now underpins the MOD's operating model and control framework (Director Corporate Strategy Ministry of Defence, 2015). However, to date, there has been no follow-up investigation to determine if this new way of working is proving more successful or has broken the

flawed cycle previously identified. Moreover, the validity of Cornish and Dorman's ten 'unwritten rules', formulated between 2010 and 2015 SDSR processes, have not been subject to any further scrutiny. As part of their policy mis-implementation analysis, Cornish and Dorman (2010, p. 407) concluded that "it has proved all too easy for a gap to develop between overall defence policy on the one hand and its implementation in the form of military equipment programmes on the other." If this remains the case today, it will impact on the translation of strategic direction into military capability and is therefore relevant to this research. An examination of the extant SDSR process and its future application in defence decision making will expose the validity of this supposition and, at the same time, advance the study of the defence review process.

2.4 Military Capability

As recognised in chapter one, the term 'military capability' only entered the UK defence lexicon as recently as 1997, following the introduction of the Smart Procurement Initiative. Before that, the generic term 'equipment' was used as a catch-all for weapons systems procured for the armed forces. However, neither military capability nor equipment are subjects that have attracted significant academic scrutiny over the years, at least not in isolation. Studies that did include them tended to focus on broader topics, such as: acquisition and procurement (see Murgatroyd (2012), Taylor (2014), Heidenkamp (2015), Uttley and Wilkinson (2016), and Bangert et al. (2017)); defence expenditure and economics (see Cooper (1983), Hartley et al. (1990), Hartley (2010), Reeve (2015), and Hartley (2015)); and the management of defence (see Stewart (1993), Taylor (2012), Heidenkamp et al. (2013), and White (2017)).

Exceptions to this pattern are difficult to find, especially recent analysis that considers the latest MOD initiatives to improve the provision of military capability; for example changes introduced following the post-SDSR 10 Defence Reform Report (DRR) (Lord Levene of Portsoken, 2011), or recommendations from The Report of the Iraq Inquiry (Chilcot Sir John et al., 2016). Yi Yue and Michael Henshaw (2009) attempted an holistic view of UK military capability development, although the result was limited to a basic critique of the newly introduced Through Life Capability Management (TLCM) concept. They concluded that TLCM required significant

changes in the approach taken by the MOD and industry, in order to optimise planning, development and management of military capability; however, no follow up studies have been undertaken.

Of more relevance to this research was Stephan De Spiegeleire's (2011) investigation of capability planning for defence and security. He confirmed the adoption of capability-based planning as the default defence planning concept throughout NATO, from the beginning of the twenty-first century, and recognised its basic idea as: "planning under uncertainty, to provide capabilities suitable for a wide range of modern-day challenges and circumstances while working within an economic framework that necessitates choice" (Davis cited by De Spiegeleire, 2011, p. 20). In his view, it was a revolution in defence planning, replacing threats with capability packages as the core element in a more systemic defence-planning approach. He concluded that the best way to improve performance was to concentrate on the approach to developing armed forces, specifically the way in which requirements are defined, derived and procured. Moreover, he believed the best way to achieve this was further to develop and refine capability-based planning, putting capabilities (and not just threats) centre stage and focusing on questions like 'What do we need to do?' instead of 'Which system do we need to replace?' (De Spiegeleire, 2011, p. 26). This analysis is useful, but generic. To help answer this thesis' general research question, it needs to be advanced and, particularly, to concentrate on how the single services' capability organisations of the post-Defence Reform period are tackling the additional responsibilities that have been devolved to them from MOD head office. Given that these changes are considerable, and only recently enacted – for example, Headquarters Air Command graduated its capability and acquisition development programme in December 2015 (Chief of Staff Capability, 2015) – it is unsurprising that there is no contemporary academic analysis to draw upon. Exposing the contribution of the single services' capability managers, within the department-wide process articulated in the Defence Operating Model (DOM), will close an existing gap in the defence-related literature.

2.5 Summary

The secondary literature reviewed in this chapter can largely be grouped into three categories: strategy; defence reviews; and military capability. Each group offers a different level of assistance, and yields distinctive shortfalls, when considered in relation to the thesis' research questions. Journal articles that consider strategy are plentiful; however, distilling the analysis specifically relevant to the transmitting and receiving of strategic direction proved challenging, as most commentators concentrate on the broader arguments around 'what is strategy?' and 'how well is it practised?' There is a shortage of articles concerning UK defence reviews prior to 2010, and of those that do exist, only a small number are relevant to the actual general research question addressed in this thesis. By contrast, analysis of SDSR 10 has been extensive, and the same is likely of its successor, although at time of writing, the selection remains somewhat limited. Finally, military capability is not a subject regularly researched in isolation. It is usually considered as part of wider analysis, typically concerning defence management, acquisition or economics. Furthermore, there are no contemporary journal articles that address capability planning within the MOD's extant ways of working.

When considering pan-defence review themes, some headway has been made by Baylis and Blackburn in understanding the determinants of defence decision making. Their analysis provides a credible construct to explore themes from previous defence reviews that may impact on decision making in the future. Finally, the furtherance of Cornish and Dorman's theory of a four-phase defence policy development process, and their ten 'unwritten rules' for defence reviews – in particular, whether or not they remain relevant in today's quinquennial review process – will both support this research and extend wider understanding of the UK's defence review process.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The methodology chapter details the methodological approach taken and the methods used to conduct the research, to allow an evaluation of its trustworthiness and authenticity. The chapter includes five sections that cover four broad areas: the methodological approach; data selection and collection; a chronology of analysis undertaken; and an evaluation and justification of the methodological choices. The methodological approach is explained across two sections. The first details the rationale behind the research strategy, the research design and the research methodology. The second expands on the chosen methodology.

The problem space of this thesis coalesced around the question ‘why does the UK have the military it has?’ It should be recognised that this simple query had been in the mind of the researcher ever since his first exposure to defence acquisition in the mid-1990s, becoming more pronounced as a result of subsequent appointments in procurement and support, as well as strategic planning and capability management. Creswell and Creswell (2018) observed that the researcher’s own personal training and experience influence their choice of methodological approach, an observation which was borne out during the planning for this research. The researcher’s long-term association and practical familiarity with the research area had a positive effect on the strategy, design and methods choices identified below.

3.1 Methodological Approach

Research Strategy

The methodological approach began with the identification of a suitable research strategy, which was developed using Punch’s (2014, p. 5) simplified model of research, detailed at Figure 3-1, as a guide. The thesis’ research proposal had already developed the initial question ‘why does the UK have the military that it has?’ to define the boundaries of the research, confirming the research area as UK defence policy and the research topic as military capability. However, the research proposal’s original purpose of the thesis ‘to investigate the factors relating to the transition of

strategic direction into military capability, in order to increase understanding of the way defence works' remained too broad. This problem was solved during the literature review, when it was identified that the majority of relevant secondary literature concentrated on defence policy at the political level, resulting in an absence of scrutiny of how that decision making affected activity at the military level. To that end, the purpose of the thesis was amended to support a more focused general research question that targeted this gap in the literature: 'how is strategic direction translated into military capability by defence decision makers, to ensure the UK's armed forces are fit for purpose?'

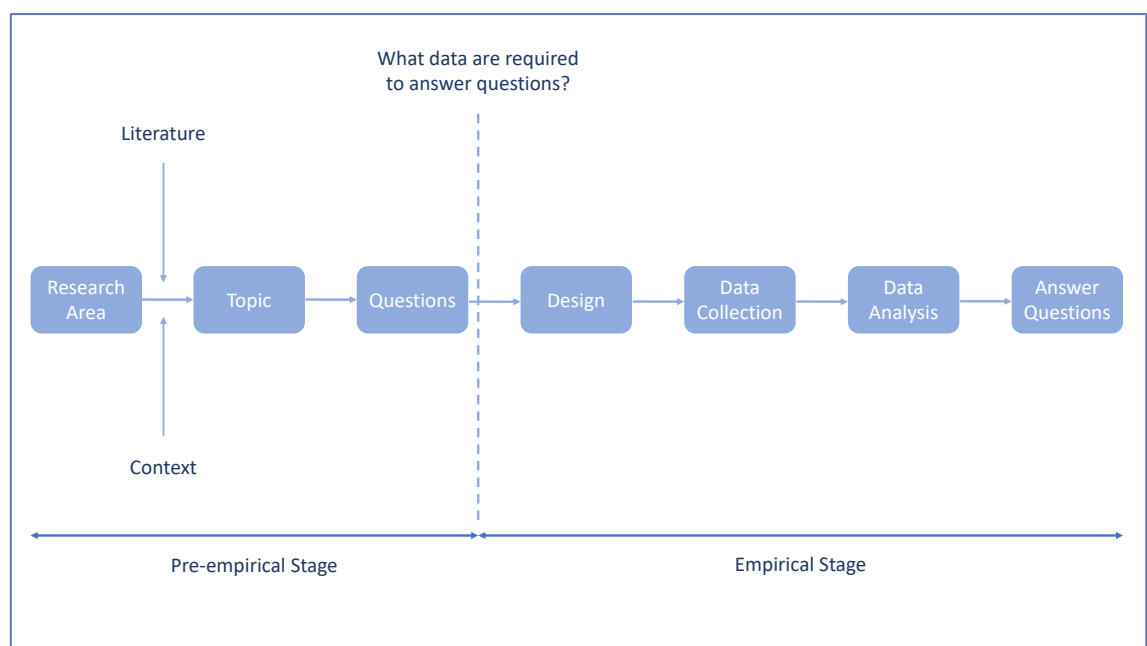


Figure 3-1: Punch's Simplified Model of Research.

As Urquhart (2012) observes, the key influence within any research project is the philosophical position of the research, which can be defined as the researcher's belief about the manner in which data relevant to the thesis should be gathered and analysed. This belief is underpinned by the researcher's perception of reality – ontology, and how knowledge is constructed – epistemology (see Orlikowski and Baroudi (1991)). Bryman (2012) identifies two epistemological considerations with regard to a philosophical position: positivism and interpretivism. He explains that positivism "is an epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond" (2012,p. 28), and interpretivism "is predicated upon the view that a strategy is required that

respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the meaning of social action" (2012, p. 30). A simpler interpretation is that positivists seek to describe social behaviour through scientific reason and rigour, and interpretivists contend that the study of human society must include subjective views (i.e. opinions, emotions, values) in addition to empirical and supposedly objective evidence (see tutor2u (2018b) and tutor2u (2018a)). When considered against these definitions, it is clear that the researcher's methodological approach was guided by an interpretivist philosophical position.

At this point, the research strategy had bounded the thesis and confirmed its underpinning philosophical position. This information became the start point for the development of the thesis' research design.

Research Design

The research design provides the framework for the collection and analysis of data (Bryman, 2012). It confirms decisions about the type of research to be undertaken, and the type of data required to support it.

The first decision to be made concerned the type of research most appropriate to meet the thesis' research aims. Although the literature review established that formulation of defence policy in general was a well-researched area, it also confirmed that the specific translation of strategic direction into military capability by defence decision makers was not. In addition, even though the researcher had been mindful of the high-level question 'why does the UK have the military that it has?' for some time prior to the commencement of the research, initial research planning had not been driven by a hypothesis based on any theoretical considerations in relation to the research area and topic. Instead, the overall aim of the thesis had been to develop a theory, drawing, in the first instance, on the researcher's professional knowledge and experience to provide the start point for theoretical reflection. Accordingly, the type of research adopted was exploratory rather than explanatory, and inductive rather than deductive.

Once the most appropriate type of research had been identified, the next step was to confirm the type of research data that best supported it. In his simple subdivision of data for empirical research, Punch (2014) recognises quantitative data as data in the form of numbers and qualitative data as data in the form of words. This highlights the fundamental difference between the two types of data. Quantitative data are a fixed and measurable reality, whereas qualitative data are a negotiated and dynamic reality. From the researcher's own knowledge and experience, and analysis from the literature review, it was clear that the evidence needed to unlock the thesis' general research question would come primarily from investigation of past and present official documentation – for example, defence reviews, doctrine publications, and policy documents – and interpretation of the attitudes, behaviours and experiences of relevant practitioners within defence. This suggested a reliance on descriptive rather than statistically based data, i.e. a qualitative approach. Furthermore, Bryman (2012) argued that quantitative research entails a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which the accent is placed on the testing of theories; whereas, qualitative research predominantly emphasises an inductive approach, in which the emphasis is placed on the generation of theories. In Bryman's view, the exploratory, inductive type of research already identified as part of the research design required qualitative data to support it. This accords with the conclusion drawn from the consideration of the researcher's professional opinion and the secondary literature.

Research Methodology

To this point, the methodological approach had been largely determined by the researcher's professional knowledge, experience and philosophical position. However, when considering research methodologies, a number of qualitative alternatives were identified as potential candidates.

Narrative Research

Narrative research is a design of inquiry in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives (Riessman, 2008). Although a tailored version of this methodology, targeted at a select group of senior military officers and civil servants and specifically focused on their professional experiences in key appointments, could generate valid data, this

restrictive case approach would have difficulty capturing the wide and cross-sectional views necessary to answer the thesis' general research question.

Action Research

In action research, the researcher works in close collaboration with a group of people to improve a situation in a particular setting. The researcher does not 'do' research 'on' people, but instead works with them as a facilitator (Dawson, 2009). Although this type of research is regularly used to tackle organisational management challenges, evidence from the literature review indicated that it would provide too narrow a focus when considering the thesis' general research question. Moreover, this research had no mandate to facilitate change within any of the organisations involved in the translation of strategic direction into military capability. As a result, action research was not considered an appropriate methodology for this thesis.

Ethnography

Ethnography is a design of inquiry in which the researcher studies the shared patterns of behaviour, language, and actions of a complete cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time (see Fetterman (2010), and Creswell and Creswell (2018)). Although this approach supports the deep understanding of a design problem, it would have been more relevant if the thesis was concentrating on the detailed procedures used at levels below defence decision makers. To that end, ethnography was also not considered an appropriate methodology for this thesis.

Case Studies

In a case study, the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, which could be a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995). Individual defence reviews could be candidates for case studies; however, the potential number to be studied would be excessive. At the other end of the scale, the activity of translating strategic direction into military capability could be investigated as a single case study, although treating the entire research problem as a single case study may create a delineation problem.

Grounded Theory

In grounded theory the researcher uses thematic analysis to derive a general, abstract theory of a process, action or interaction grounded in the views of the participants. It involves multiple stages of data collection and the refinement and interrelationship of categories of information (see Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Charmaz (2014)). This design of inquiry aligned well with the thesis' initial research planning, which had not been developed from a predetermined supposition and would support the wide data-gathering approach needed fully to understand the complexities that affected the translation of strategic direction into military capability activity.

Selecting the Research Methodology

Action research and ethnography were discounted as possible methodologies for the reasons highlighted above. In addition, although a narrative research approach was feasible, it would have involved only a limited number of cases, which would have restricted the data available, potentially impacting the credibility of the thesis' conclusions. Research planning had already highlighted the need to source data through a detailed study of primary literature and from practitioners within defence. Given the quantity of primary literature to be analysed, treating individual defence reviews as case studies would be prohibitively time consuming and potentially generate more information than was necessary to answer the relevant specific research questions. On the other hand, grounded theory offered a credible approach to analysing data from practitioners and also aligned with the research strategy, which had deliberately eschewed a hypothesis around the translation of strategic direction into military capability. Furthermore, a methodology of grounded theory would also benefit from insights generated from analysis of the primary literature, during thematic coding and theory generation. To that end, grounded theory, was selected as the research methodology. It is explained in more detail in the next section.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Bryman (2012) identifies reliability and validity as the default concepts used to evaluate the quality of research, with reliability about consistency of a measure and validity about its accuracy. However, he also recognises that these concepts are more

suited to quantitative research, and some academics have suggested that qualitative studies should be judged by quite different criteria (see LeCompte and Goetz (1982), Yardley (2000), Guba and Lincoln (1994), Spencer et al. (2004), and Mills et al. (2006). To that end, this research has been evaluated against the two primary criteria Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose for assessing a qualitative study: trustworthiness and authenticity.

Trustworthiness is considered through four criteria: credibility; transferability; dependability; and conformability. The credibility of research findings was established through the use of triangulation, whereby a mix of sources of data (primary literature, secondary literature and elite interviews) and methodologies (content analysis and grounded theory) were used (see Denzin (1970)). Whilst the research findings are obviously oriented to the research area (UK defence policy), the rich accounts of MOD head office and the single services ways of working provide the 'thick description' that Geertz (1973) suggests is necessary for others to make judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other environments. Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that to establish dependability, researchers should ensure complete records are kept of all parts of the research process. To that end, a specific project was created and maintained in NVivo throughout the research period to house all of the insights from the qualitative content analysis, as well as the interview transcripts and associated open, selective, and theoretical coding detail. Finally, by adopting Charmaz's constructivist approach to the grounded theory methodology¹⁴, the researcher achieved the demands of the confirmability criterion, ensuring that personal values or theoretical tendencies did not obviously effect research findings (see Lincoln and Guba (2013)).

Bryman (2012) suggests that the authenticity criteria, whilst thought-provoking, have not been influential and their affinity is greatest with action research. To that end, ontological, educative, catalytic and tactical authenticity have minimal application to GTM; however, the fairness criterion is relevant. In this instance, authenticity was

¹⁴ As detailed in section 3.2 below.

realised as the analysis in chapters eight and nine research clearly confirm the representation of different viewpoints among members of the social setting.

3.2 Grounded Theory Methodology

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Bryman (2012, p. 712) defines grounded theory as “an iterative approach to the analysis of qualitative data that aims to generate theory out of research by achieving a close fit between the two.” However, he also recognises that there remains disagreement within the academic community on what grounded theory is, suggesting that to some, it is “a distinct method or approach to qualitative research in its own right”, but to others it is “an approach to the generation of theory” (2012, p. 387). The reason for these differing views is that Glaser and Strauss, the original creators of grounded theory, developed the theory along different paths over time (see Glaser (1978), Strauss (1987), Strauss and Corbin (1990), and Glaser (1992)). The result of this divergence of views is that there are now myriad approaches to GTM, all with subtle differences in the way they are applied. One of these approaches is constructivist grounded theory, the principal architect of which is Kathy Charmaz. Starting with the assumption that social reality is multiple, processual and constructed, Charmaz (2014) argues that the researcher’s position, privileges, perspective, and interactions must be taken into account as an inherent part of the research reality. Aligned to this, Mills et al. (2006, p. 9) suggest that a constructivist approach to GTM requires “the creation of a sense of reciprocity between participants and the researcher in the co-construction of meaning and, ultimately, a theory that is grounded in the participants’ and researcher’s experiences.” Given this researcher’s professional knowledge and experience of the research area and topic, an approach that embraced these as positive contributors to the development of the thesis was a logical fit. Accordingly, the specific research methodology used in this thesis was constructivist grounded theory.

Tools of Grounded Theory

Bryman (2012) identifies four key tools of grounded theory: theoretical sampling; coding, constant comparison; and theoretical saturation. The use of GTM implies overlapping data collection and analysis, which, as Urquhart (2012) recognises,

means that researchers analyse data collected and use the emerging concepts from that analysis to decide where to sample from next. This is theoretical sampling. According to Bryman (2012), coding is the key process in grounded theory. It consists of breaking data down into their components parts and then attaching concepts to that data for the purpose of analysing it. Constant comparison is “the process of comparing every slice of data with all existing concepts and constructs, to see if it enriches an existing category, forms a new one, or points to a new relation” (Urquhart, 2012, p. 16). Finally, theoretical saturation is the end point of theoretical sampling when a category has been saturated with data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest this occurs when no new or relevant data seem to be emerging regarding a category, the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and the relationships among categories are well established and validated. The employment of these tools during this research is chronologized later in this chapter.

Developing Grounded Theory

Charmaz (2014) highlights that, in their original statement of method, Glaser and Strauss (1967) invited their readers to use grounded theory strategies flexibly in their own way. To that end, providing the basic methodology is employed, there is no right or wrong process to develop grounded theory. Whilst it is possible to represent the logic of grounded theory in linear form, in practice, grounded theory research is not always incremental. The researcher found that Charmaz (2014, p. 17) was correct in her assertion that “a flash or instantaneous realisation of analytic connections can happen any time during the research process”, and, therefore, “grounded theorists stop and write whenever ideas occur to them.” Nevertheless, it is possible to represent a basic visual representation of GTM as applied during this research, outlined in Figure 3-2.

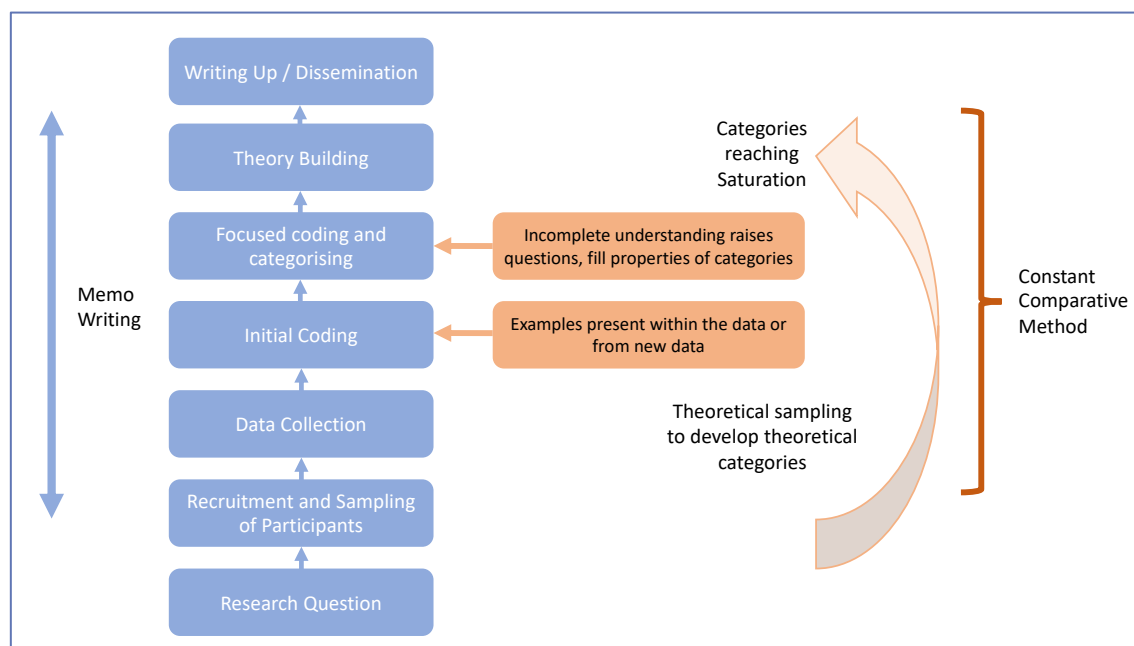


Figure 3-2: Visual Representation of Grounded Theory Methodology (Charmaz, 2014, p. 18).

3.3 Data Selection and Collection Methods

Charmaz (2014) believed that the credibility of a researcher's study is determined by the relevance, substance, scope and depth of the data. In support, Birks and Mills (2015) recognized the vast diversity in the potential areas of study that can be investigated using grounded theory; however, their extensive list of examples of usable data in grounded theory research can be better summarized through Punch's (2014) shorter, but broader, checklist for qualitative data collection: interviews (including focus groups), direct and participant observation, and documents. Direct observation involves the observation of a 'subject' in certain conditions, whilst in participant observation the researcher becomes involved in the lives of the people being observed – the central data collection technique in ethnography (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Neither form was a valid collection method for the data underpinning this research and, therefore, observation was discounted. The remaining two data collection types, interviews and documents, both supported the thesis' research design and methodology and were used as data collection methods within the research.

Ethical Considerations

The MOD Research Ethics Committee (MODREC) ensures that all research involving human participants either undertaken, funded or sponsored by MOD meets nationally and internationally accepted ethical standards (Gov.uk, 2019a). As a key

data source for the research project was the interpretation of the attitudes, behaviours and experiences of practitioners within defence, which would be obtained first-hand through interviews, the researcher was obliged to investigate the need for MODREC approval prior to commencement of data collection.

The MOD policy for research involving human participants is detailed in Joint Service Publication (JSP) 536. Within the document's 'Investigator's Decision Aid for Ethics Review Requirement', there is a condition to confirm whether the information collected as part of the research could be linked to individual participants (Surgeon General, 2014, p. C-2). Even though any data gathered during the research would be un-attributable, given the small number of potential participants, especially at the more senior levels within defence, there was a risk of third-party attribution of specific quotations included in the thesis. As a result, MODREC approval was sought.

In accordance with the JSP 536 'Ethics Review Process Flow Chart' (2014, D-1), a formal application for MODREC approval was submitted through the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory Scientific Advisory Committee on 18 February 2016, and formal MODREC approval was given on 26 May 2016¹⁵.

Interviews

At an early stage in research planning, the general research question was narrowed down to concentrate on the role of defence decision makers in the translation of strategic direction into military capability. To that end, potential research participants were identified as those senior military officers and civil servants who were able to provide an in-depth and first-hand opinion of that activity. This focus on senior practitioners indicated that the principal data collection mechanism should be elite interviews. McDowell (1998, p. 2135) classifies interviewees as elite because they are "highly skilled, professionally competent, and class specific", whilst Harvey (2011, p. 5) defines elites as "those who occupy senior management and Board level positions within organisations [and] have significant decision-making influence within and

¹⁵ 725/MODREC/16 dated 26 May 2016 – Letter from Professor David Baldwin, Alternate Vice Chairman of the MODREC.

outside the firm.” Both of these definitions confirmed that the research participants targeted should be treated as elite interviewees.

Aberbach and Rockman (2002, p. 674) advise that semi-structured interviews using mainly open-ended questions is the best method for interviewing elites. In particular, they identify that elites “do not like being put in the straitjacket of close-ended questions.” Accordingly, the researcher developed a general interview guide, initially through a combination of personal professional knowledge and insights from the literature review, but which developed over time as a result of the thematic analysis of conducted interviews. All of the elite interviews undertaken were semi-structured, and were shaped by the interview guide that consisted predominantly of open-ended questions grouped around the major headings of defence reviews, strategic direction, and military capability. Data from the thirty-two interviews were transcribed and anonymised, in accordance with the terms of the MODREC ethical approval.

Documents

Punch (2014) recognized that, even though both historical and contemporary documents are a rich source of data, they are regularly neglected by researchers. Initial research planning and the literature review confirmed the need to include official documentation in any consideration of the translation of strategic direction into military capability. Specifically, defence review command papers were identified as a primary source for understanding how strategic direction is communicated, and doctrine publications, policy documents and process maps were acknowledged as containing information that shaped the development and maintenance of military capability.

Bryman (2012) suggested that interpreting and understanding primary literature is best achieved through qualitative content analysis, an approach to the analysis of documents and texts that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systemic and replicable manner. To that end, a content analysis was undertaken on all of the defence review command papers (see Table 4-1 and Table 4-2 in Chapter Four for a complete list), as well as appropriate joint

doctrine publications¹⁶ (JDP) and other noteworthy primary literature¹⁷. This was supplemented with associated policy analysis from the commentariat, which was principally used to confirm the significant factors that impact the translation of strategic direction into military capability, identified in the first instance through the content analysis.

Use of NVivo Qualitative Data Analysis Software

Bryman (2012) believes that one of the most notable developments in qualitative research in recent years is the emergence of computer software that can assist in the analysis of qualitative data. One such application is NVivo, which was developed for the analysis of unstructured text, audio, video and image data. According to the application developer, NVivo provides a single repository to organise, store and retrieve data; moreover, with built-in data management, query and visualisation tools, it also facilitates complex questioning of the data (QSR International, 2019). As the application was available licence-free through King's College London, the researcher elected to use it to support both the content analysis of the primary and secondary literature and the analysis of data from the elite interviews.

3.4 Chronology of Analysis

The research was undertaken in three distinct phases that overlapped in time. The first phase was preparation, which included research planning and the literature review. It commenced in September 2015. The second phase was data gathering and analysis, which began as soon as ethical approval had been received in May 2016. The final phase was substantive theory development. It commenced once no new significant themes were being presented in the data and involved the generation of the thesis' conclusions and theory, plus the articulation of the research findings. The final phase started in April 2018. This section details the thesis' chronology of data gathering, data analysis, and theory generation.

¹⁶ For example, JDP 0-01 UK Defence Doctrine and JDP 01 UK Joint Operations Doctrine.

¹⁷ For example, How Defence Works – The Defence Operating Model and The Report of the Iraq Inquiry.

Data Gathering

The iterative nature of GTM encourages interviews to be arranged and conducted in groups or tranches (Saldana, 2015). Initial research planning and deductions from the literature review suggested that the interview sample should be serving or recently retired senior military officers or civil servants (two-star rank or above), with experience of undertaking translation of strategic direction into military capability activity from at least as recently as SDSR 10¹⁸. However, with the aim of establishing as many of the broad concepts associated with the translation of strategic direction into military capability as possible, the first round of interviews was targeted at senior officers and civil servants who were, or had been, defence decision makers (see Figure 1-2). All of the six potential participants identified agreed to be interviewed and interviews were arranged as soon as ethical approval had been received. The first tranche ran from May to November 2016 and included the interviews detailed at Table 3-1.

Interviewees	Rank / Grade	Service	Interview Date
Interviewee 01	Four-Star	RN	03 November 2016
Interviewee 02	Four-Star	British Army	28 November 2016
Interviewee 03	Four-Star	RAF	25 May 2016
Interviewee 04	Four-Star	British Army	20 July 2016
Interviewee 05	Three-Star	British Army	21 July 2016
Interviewee 06	Three-Star	Civil Service	21 July 2016

Table 3-1: Tranche One Interview Details.

Data from the tranche one interviews were coded and theoretical sampling undertaken as soon as practicable after each interview. Insights generated were considered alongside information produced from the concurrent content analysis to reinforce existing avenues of inquiry and to identify new ones. A second list of potential interviewees was raised, specifically chosen for their expected ability to contribute to the revised lines of inquiry. It was sourced from an amalgam of the researcher's own professional knowledge and high-level organisation charts for

¹⁸ The final list of interviewees included four RN officers, ten British Army officers, nine RAF officers and nine civil servants. The disparity between the individual services is a reflection of the balance of officers in senior joint appointments over the period in which the interviews were conducted.

defence. The second tranche of elite interviews took place between March and September 2017, with interviews listed at Table 3-2.

Interviewees	Rank / Grade	Service	Interview Date
Interviewee 07	Three-Star	Civil Service	12 September 2017
Interviewee 08	Four-Star	British Army	20 April 2017
Interviewee 09	Four-Star	RAF	07 April 2017
Interviewee 10	Four-Star	Civil Service	10 April 2017
Interviewee 11	Three-Star	RN	10 April 2017
Interviewee 12	Three-Star	RN	26 May 2017
Interviewee 13	Three-Star	British Army	21 April 2017
Interviewee 14	Three-Star	British Army	26 April 2017
Interviewee 15	Three-Star	British Army	11 May 2017
Interviewee 16	Three-Star	RAF	20 July 2017
Interviewee 17	Three-Star	RAF	08 May 2017
Interviewee 18	Three-Star	RAF	21 March 2017
Interviewee 19	Three-Star	Civil Service	26 April 2017
Interviewee 20	Two-Star	RAF	12 April 2017
Interviewee 21	Three-Star	RAF	10 June 2017
Interviewee 22	Three-Star	RAF	28 April 2017
Interviewee 23	Two-Star	Civil Service	20 April 2017
Interviewee 24	Four-Star	Civil Service	25 April 2017

Table 3-2: Tranche Two Interview Details.

As before, data were coded, and theoretical sampling undertaken as soon as practicable after each interview. At this point, some of the original lines of inquiry had reached saturation point, i.e. no new information was being provided. However, others were still generating new insights, and a small number of new avenues of inquiry were also identified. To that end, a third tranche of interviews was organised, with the same sourcing and selection criteria as before. The third tranche of interviews was undertaken from November 2017 to March 2018, as detailed at Table 3-3.

Interviewees	Rank / Grade	Service	Interview Date
Interviewee 25	Four-Star	RN	01 November 2017
Interviewee 26	Four-Star	British Army	10 January 2018
Interviewee 27	Three-Star	Civil Service	06 November 2017
Interviewee 28	Four-Star	Civil Service	06 November 2017
Interviewee 29	Two-Star	Civil Service	10 November 2017
Interviewee 30	Two-Star	British Army	19 March 2018
Interviewee 31	Two-Star	British Army	02 March 2017
Interviewee 32	Three-Star	RAF	06 December 2017

Table 3-3: Tranche Three Interview Details.

Theoretical sampling undertaken on the third tranche of interviews revealed no new information on existing avenues of inquiry, nor any original data that required further investigation. At that point, it was considered that theoretical saturation had been reached and the elite interview process was concluded.

Data Analysis

All GTM begins with open coding (Urquhart, 2012). To that end, the first stage of analysing the data from the thirty-two elite interviews undertaken was the line-by-line open coding of the interview transcripts. Schwandt (1997, p. 16) recognises that coding is “a procedure that disaggregates the data, breaks it down into manageable segments, and identifies or names those segments.” Attaching a conceptual label to data is the cornerstone of building grounded theory. Urquhart (2012, p. 35) confirmed this when she wrote: “When we attach a particular label to a particular chunk of data, we start to analyse that data. If we start to link together these codes in relationships, we can start to theorise about the data.”

To provide a simple construct within which to manage open codes, Aberbach and Rockman (2002) developed the following three basic types of code, which the researcher utilised as individual nodes in NVivo to separate the circa 500 open codes derived from the elite interviews:

- **Manifest coding items** involved direct responses to specific research questions, or questions related thereto.
- **Latent coding items** were those where the characteristics of the response coded were not explicitly called for by the questions themselves.
- **Global coding items** were where the researcher formed a judgement from the interview transcript about general traits and styles.

The next stage of GTM is to scale up the open codes into categories that are important to the research problem. This is selective coding (Urquhart, 2012). However, the bottom-up nature of this approach tends to generate a considerable number of open codes and grouping them directly into categories can be problematic. To alleviate this, subcategories can be used where appropriate. An example of the linkage between open codes, subcategories and categories, generated through the

selective coding process, is detailed at Figure 3-3. During selective coding of the open codes, five categories were identified that are analysed in chapters eight and nine.

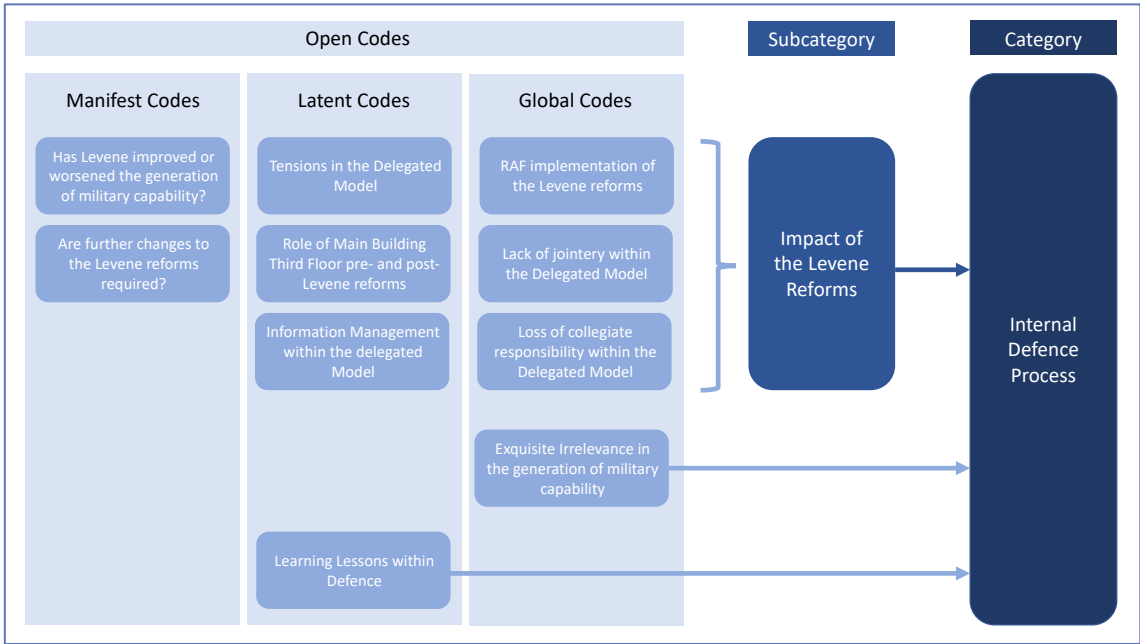


Figure 3-3: Example of Elevating Open Codes to Categories through Selective Coding.

A fundamental element of the analytical process in GTM is theoretical memo writing, which Glaser (1978, p. 83) describes as the “bedrock of theory generation.” Birks and Mills (2015, p. 179) define ‘memoing’ as “the recording of processes, thoughts, feelings, analytical insights, decisions and ideas in relation to a research project.” Bryman (2012) adds that memos also serve as reminders about what is meant by specific terms used within the research project, and also provide the building blocks for reflection. The researcher used memos extensively during all stages of coding to mature thoughts around concepts and to keep track of ideas on potential categories. Memos were written and maintained in NVivo; an example of a memo on the unintended consequences of deterrence, used during open coding, is at Figure 3-4.

THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF DETERRENCE

The enduring theme of UK defence policy during the Cold War was prevention of war with the Soviet Union through deterrence. The American strategist, Bernard Brodie, believed that, in the nuclear age, the chief purpose of the military establishment was no longer to win wars, but to avert them. This theme was incorporated into UK defence policy following the 1957 Defence Review, which asserted that 'the overriding consideration in all military planning must be to prevent war rather than to prepare for it'. The result, to quote Richard Dannatt, was that during the Cold War, 'everything had been in the shop window with little stock put behind in the store room'. There is ample evidence to support this. Both John Nott and Edwin Bramall have confirmed that when Nott assumed the role of Secretary of State for Defence in 1981, the BAOR's ammunition stocks were less than one week at war-fighting rates of effort; it is well known that the UK had to 'borrow' AIM-9L from NATO stockpiles during the Falklands Conflict – having obtained a guarantee that they would be backfilled by the US from its national stockpile; and the HCDC recognised, in its *Preliminary Lessons of Operation GRANBY* report of July 1991, that the despatch of one armoured division to Saudi Arabia was only possible as a result of 'ruthless cannibalisation of the two armoured division left behind in Germany'. For reasons that may be understandable, deterrence during the Cold War prioritised perception of the quantity of FEs available over their sustainment.

We are still living with the consequences of this today, more than twenty-five years since the end of the Cold War. In its immediate aftermath, the 1994 Defence Cost Study exacerbated the problem by taking further savings in support whilst maintaining the 'Front Line'. In 1998, George Robertson acknowledged that 'forces must have genuine coherence and not just the appearance of strength', but his 1998 SDR then reduced war reserves of guided weapons and ammunition. In 1992, HM Government recognised that military effect was, once again, required to contribute to the nation's wider security interests, suggesting the need to recommence preparing for conflict, rather than just planning to prevent it. Moreover, operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya et al confirmed this. However, at no time since the acceptance that the discretionary use of military force was once more part of UK national strategy, has the sustainability of FEs caught up with the aspirations for their use. Piecemeal efforts have been made to improve our ability to maintain some FEs in line with defence planning assumptions, but, in the main, legacy capability continues to be supported with equipment scales that have changed little since the Cold War, contingency stockpiles – particularly munitions – are under-funded, and new capability is seldom procured without 'supportability risk' baked in.

As a result, a significant reason why the UK has the military capability that it has (the title question of my thesis) is that the unintended consequence of the Cold War policy of deterrence outlined above means that, even after over twenty-five years, we have been unable to bridge the gap between the sustainability levels bequeathed by the Cold War and the aspirations of policy today. To return to Richard Dannatt's analogy, even though both the quantity and quality of goods in our shop window have moved on since the end of the Cold War, our ability appropriately to re-stock the store room has not.

Figure 3-4: Example Memo used during Open Coding.

Theory Development

The final element of GTM is theoretical coding. In this stage, codes were related to each other, because, as Urquhart (2012) suggests, theory consists of constructs and relationships. Urquhart identifies three possible sources of connections between categories: other categories; ideas from the literature; and theoretical codes (2012, p. 50). The first two sources are self-explanatory, whilst Glaser (1978, p. 55) confirms that a theoretical code "conceptualises how the substantive codes [or categories] may relate to each other." He also posits the idea of coding families, which are identified groupings that contain theoretical codes (see Glaser (1978) and Glaser (2005)); although Urquhart (2012) argues that theoretical codes can also be self-generated by the researcher.

The aim of the theoretical coding process was to generate a substantive theory, which can be defined as "the type of theory that GMT produces in the first instance. It is substantive in the sense that it pertains only to the phenomena being studied and makes no claims to generalise beyond [it]" (2012, p. 193). Ideally, the substantive theory should be generated through the identification of a core category or concept that explains and accounts for what is central to all of the data generated during the research. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 116) define a core category as "the central

phenomenon around which all the other categories are integrated.” The conclusions from the theoretical coding process are detailed in chapter ten.

3.5 Evaluation and Justification of Methodological Choices

The methodological choices that underpinned this research were one of its two original features. Once the researcher’s philosophical position had been confirmed, and the general research question established, the remainder of the research strategy and design followed their direction. Although GTM was not the most standard approach to the research area and topic, it provided a credible framework within which to study the translation of strategic direction into military capability. Moreover, by not entering the research with any strong pre-conceived notions or hypotheses, the use of grounded theory permitted an exploration of the totality of the research topic – the researcher was able to ‘go where the data takes you’. Finally, by adopting the constructivist strand of grounded theory, the researcher was able to exploit his own professional knowledge and experience, rather than be constrained by it. This approach maximised reflexivity and delivered a theory that was genuinely grounded in both the participants’ and the researcher’s experiences.

The twin track approach to data collection allowed the researcher to blend historical orthodoxies with contemporary insights from today’s practitioners. The result was a much more credible evidence base from which to construct the substantive theory. Whilst defence review documentation and UK defence doctrine are accessible to all, this thesis undoubtedly benefitted from the researcher’s ability to secure interviews with the most senior officers and civil servants in defence. Access to eleven four-stars and sixteen three-stars guaranteed the research’s other original feature – the first empirical investigation into translation of strategic direction into military capability activity from the viewpoint of defence decision makers. Furthermore, whilst it is accepted that semi-structured interviews usually produce results that cannot be generalised beyond the sample group, they did provide a more in-depth understanding of the participants’ perceptions and motivations, which were fundamental in unlocking the thesis’ general research question.

The use of NVivo to support data analysis and theory development was a definite strength of the research. Although the application of Aberbach's and Rockman's (2002) open code construct added little beyond simplifying the initial coding process, following the path offered by constructivist GTM, together with the handrail of a specialist qualitative data analysis application, certainly lightened the research load. In particular, judicious use of the memo writing technique was pivotal to the confirmation of the core construct and thence the substantive theory. Finally, maintaining a single, on-line repository for all research data reduced the research's administrative burden to a manageable level, as well as strengthening the thesis' ethical case and reinforcing its trustworthiness evaluation criterion.

Chapter 4: Strategic Direction and Military Capability

This chapter focuses on the two elements that come together to be investigated in this thesis: strategic direction and military capability. They were briefly presented in chapter one; however, a more comprehensive explanation is necessary before the thesis embarks on its detailed examinations in accordance with its chosen research methodology. To that end, this chapter is less investigative than the data chapters; instead, it aims to provide the background information required to support the analysis that will follow.

As has already been recognised, there is a risk of this thesis getting lost, or at least side-tracked, by the vastness of academic discourse over strategy. The literature review avoided this by concentrating only on the generation of strategic direction at the national level, and its receipt and interpretation at the military level. To remain within scope, this chapter must exercise similar restraint. That said, there is no easily identifiable and bounded manner in which strategic direction is imparted; it is generated through a number of different approaches and methods that have, understandably, not remained constant from the commencement of the Cold War to the present day. The most notable methods for communicating strategic direction are introduced below, and expanded upon in the first section of this chapter.

At the highest level, strategic direction is provided by the most senior, relevant figures within the UK government. Speeches given and newspaper and journal articles written by Prime Ministers, defence and foreign Secretaries of State and Chancellors of the Exchequer all provide insight and guidance on how any given government is approaching its defence obligations. More recently, with the convergence of defence and security through the articulation of an NSS, this list of relevant government ministers has grown to include other ministers, for example the Home Secretary. In addition, there are a number of non-elected officials who also write and speak on defence and security matters in an official capacity, the most notable being the National Security Advisor (NSA), Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) and the service

chiefs, as well as the permanent secretaries to the ministries served by the politicians listed above¹⁹. Flowing from verbal and written direction from politicians and senior non-elected officials, is defence and security policy, which, in simple terms, is what the government chooses to do, or not do, about a particular defence- and/or security-related issue or problem. The government has a generic approach to the formulation of policy; however, there are peculiarities specific to departments, including those responsible for defence and security. An example of this is the defence review process. The first section of this chapter explores both the high-level input and the policy mechanisms that it influences.

As previously determined, the term ‘military capability’ has not been in continuous use over the time period considered by this thesis. Before the introduction of the SPI – later smart acquisition – in 1998, defence had been concerned with the supply of equipment, across all of its ministries prior to 1971, and through the MOD Procurement Executive (PE) thereafter (see Cooper (1983), Bell (2000), and Kirkpatrick (2003)). While the years since the adoption of ‘smart acquisition’ have not been without further reform, the central tenet of MOD’s approach to acquisition remains management at the capability level, which has been underpinned since 2005 by the DLOD structure. The most significant developments with regard to the management of military capability have been the restructuring of the organisations within the MOD responsible for the procurement of new equipment and its through-life support, the seemingly constant drumbeat of transformation initiatives aimed at improving process, and the department-wide financial realignment that occurred as part of the Defence Reform Programme introduced after SDSR 10 (Lord Levene of Portsoken, 2011, pp 36-44). An explanation of all these changes is included in the second section of this chapter.

4.1 Strategic Direction

Direction from Politicians and Senior Non-Elected Officials

As chapter five explores further, the cornerstone of UK national strategy during the Cold War was prevention of war with the Soviet Union through deterrence, which

¹⁹ Recognising that contributions from this group are invariably first cleared by their political masters.

was first publicly acknowledged by Winston Churchill in the House of Commons in 1955 (Hansard House of Commons, 1955). However, it was another Churchill speech almost ten years earlier, on 5 March 1946 in Fulton Missouri, that introduced still-in-use phrases such as ‘the special relationship’ and ‘the iron curtain’ and is generally recognised to be the date of the beginning of the Cold War (International Churchill Society, 2017). Often referred to as ‘The Sinews of Peace’ speech, it shaped the strategic direction that would drive UK defence policy until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

During the period of the Conservative government from the end of the Cold War until 1997, although the UK was adapting its force structure to provide the “flexibility and mobility to respond to new circumstances” (Secretary of State for Defence, 1991), no explicit new strategic direction was forthcoming at the national level. It was not until two years after the Labour Party won the 1997 general election that Tony Blair unveiled his ‘Doctrine of the International Community’ in a speech to the Chicago Economic Club (The National Archives, 1999). The doctrine outlined the circumstances that, in Blair’s opinion, warranted the international community to intervene in the affairs of other nations, and built upon the ‘force for good’ approach that underpinned the UK’s pivot to an expeditionary posture in SDR 98 (see Robertson (1997)). This new strategic direction resulted in the increased use of UK military capability in intervention operations during the Blair’s administration, most notably in Kosovo (1999), Sierra Leone (2000), Afghanistan (from 2001) and Iraq (from 2003).

After 2010, the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government’s strategic direction continued to be based on an expeditionary approach, although it shifted from an “over-reliance on military intervention to a higher priority for conflict prevention” (Gov.uk, 2010c). This subtle but significant change of direction was announced by Prime Minister David Cameron in a statement to the House of Commons on SDSR 10. Since then, senior members of government have reinforced this position, through carefully selected speaking opportunities, although these may have been less about providing strategic direction, and more about reassuring an international audience of how the UK saw its place in the world once it had left the EU (see Johnson (2016), and

Gov.uk (2018b)), or, in more recent times, for furthering individual political aspirations (see DefenceNews (2019), and BBC News (2019)).

Senior non-elected officials also influence strategic direction through speeches and in writing, although an examination of their contribution suggests it is usually either in support of an already-stated government position or is intended to highlight a specific issue or concern that is quite tactical in nature. For example, in 2018, during his first speech at RUSI since taking over as the Permanent Secretary at the MOD, Stephen Lovegrove reinforced the government's position on the MDP (rusi.org, 2018b), and in his annual CDS RUSI lecture in 2017, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach warned of the vulnerability of communication lines under the sea and the resultant need to match and understand Russian fleet modernisation (see rusi.org (2017), and The Independent (2017)).

Set-piece oral and written input, from both senior government and non-elected officials, has played its part in the articulation of strategic direction from the end of World War II to the present day. Its role has varied widely, from the introduction of an enduring defence policy or a minor change in policy direction, to the reinforcement of an existing course of action or explanation of particular, and normally tactical, situation. Moreover, the choice of messenger or the place and time of transmission are also relevant. Unsurprisingly, senior politicians tend to reserve the major policy announcements for themselves and leave the more tactical announcements to their non-elected officials. Furthermore, when Blair chose the Economic Club in Chicago in 1999, he was clearly seeking to maximise the global exposure that the occasion offered. Similarly, Theresa May outlined her vision for security co-operation with Europe in a post-Brexit world at a security conference in Munich in 2018 (Gov.uk, 2018b). Big ideas demand a big stage. However, having decided to undertake the NSCR after the 2017 General Election (Gov.uk, 2017c), the government's study was beset by negative media attention concerning anticipated reductions in military capability (see BBC News (2017a), Financial Times (2017b), and The Guardian (2017)). Possibly as a result of this, notification of the publication of the NSCR's final report was limited to no more than a written statement by the Prime Minister (parliament.uk, 2018), released a day before the start of the 2018 Easter holiday. The political landscape and the anticipated

reaction to any given defence and security related policy, at the time of its conception, undoubtedly has a bearing on how that policy is announced. It should not be a surprise that political spin²⁰ impacts the articulation of strategic direction.

Defence Policy

A logical place to begin an understanding of defence policy is to affirm what is actually meant by the term. In doing so, this thesis joins with George Dillon (1988) in borrowing Hugh Heclo's and Aaron Wildavsky's definition of policy as "a series of ongoing understandings built up by political administrators over time, understandings left to run where practicable, repaired where necessary, and overturned where they are desperate" (1974, p. 346). Furthermore, Dillon (1988, p. 11) goes on to assert that "in defence [these understandings] happen to be concerned primarily with the provision and use of armed forces to protect the state from external attack and internal subversion, as well as to advance what those in power consider to be the country's international interests."

In a recent study of British defence in the twenty-first century, Louth and Taylor (2019) recognise there are a number of identifiable objectives and purposes for defence policy. They wrote: "In principle, a country's defence policy may be neither in the public domain or ever written down. It can take the form of a series of implicit assumptions and beliefs that form a significant element of the culture of a government's defence sector" (2019, p. 29). Of course, if this were applied utterly and explicitly by the UK government, researching a thesis such as this would be impossible. Louth and Taylor go on to confirm that a publicly available written policy can serve four valuable purposes, namely to:

- Shape the development of the armed forces.
- Promote the civilian and political direction of defence.
- Inform national stakeholders and publics; and so:
- Send messages to international audiences.

²⁰ Defined as the attempt to control or influence communication to deliver a preferred message (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019).

The first two of these purposes can be considered strategic direction that has an influence of the development of military capability.

This definition and subsequent amplification of defence policy aligns with an earlier observation from chapter one. In the same way that the UK has always had military capability, it has always had defence policy. Correspondingly, policy made in the past influences policy being made in the present, which will, in turn, influence policy to be made in the future. This point is reinforced by the adage: “the policy-maker’s difficulty is not to decide where to go, but where to go from here” (Dillon, 1977, pp. 209-210). To this end, politicians are like actors in a long-running West-End stage production. As today’s stars of the show, they are simply the custodians of the series of ongoing understandings at a given point in time. During their time in the spotlight, it is incumbent upon them to maintain those understandings – repairing and overturning where necessary – and then hand them over to their successors, when their time comes permanently to leave the stage.

Heclo’s and Wildavsky’s definition of policy could conjure an image of steady-state serenity, suggesting the role of the political administrator is not an arduous one; however, with regard to the maintenance of defence policy, this could not be further from the truth. Although commentators on defence policy may disagree on many things, they are almost unanimous in confirming the complexity of the task (see Owen (1972), Carver (1992), Black (2006), and Gray (2014)). Jeremy Black aptly described the challenges facing defence planners:

“Defence policy unites several key problems facing Britain. It stands at the juncture of foreign and fiscal policy, external goals and domestic security. Defence policy has to respond to rapidly changing circumstances; at the same time, an able execution of its unpredictable tasks requires adequate preparation in the shape of appropriate doctrine, training and weaponry.”

(Black, 2006, p. 67)

Formulation of Defence Policy

In considering the formulation of defence policy, many academics defer to the work of two social scientists, David Braybrooke and Charles Lindblom. Braybrooke and Lindblom (1963) discuss two methods of policy decision making: the cost-benefit

analysis approach and serial disjointed incrementalism. As the name suggests, in the first approach all of the costs and benefits associated with a specific course of action are assembled so policy-makers can compare benefits to costs, in order to decide if a policy is worthwhile, or, given a choice, which policy is the more or most worthwhile. The second approach involves making policy through a series of small decisions, which, as they are taken in steps, can be reversed, or at least amended, if they subsequently prove to have been a mistake. Clearly, the idea of keeping options open is central to this approach. Baylis (1989) believed the latter approach, more popularly known simply as 'incrementalism' or 'muddling through', has been the dominant method of formulating defence policy since the end of World War II. His evidence is that the main pillars of defence policy – the nuclear deterrent, membership of NATO, the close relationship with the US, and the provision of independent military capabilities for operations outside Europe – have remained consistent during the period; furthermore, "sweeping changes have been avoided and piecemeal adjustments have been favoured" (1975, p. 3). This point of view was endorsed by Dillon (1977, p. 209) who wrote "it is accepted that the defence policy process, like any other, is incremental", and also, more recently, by Cornish and Dorman (2012), who introduced the concept of 'smart muddling through' in their investigation into the longer-term implications of the 2010 SDSR.

Considering the merits of a cost benefit analysis versus an incrementalistic approach to the formulation of defence policy is beyond the scope of this study. In order to progress with the investigation of historical UK defence policy, and the identification of trends that may be relevant to current and future behaviours, it is sufficient simply to recognize the primacy of incrementalism in the post-World War II formulation of defence policy (see Uttley et al. (2019)).

Promulgation of Defence Policy

The methods by which defence policy has been promulgated have, unsurprisingly, evolved since the end of World War II. This is as much to do with improvements in methods of communication available to the government (for example, increased use of the internet), as it is with changes to the organisational structure of the MOD and the armed forces. In the immediate post-World War II

period, the Minister of Defence presented an annual 'Statement on Defence' to Parliament. By way of example, the 1949 Statement of Defence ran to sixteen pages, and included a strategic context introduction, as well as sections on developments in the last year, finance, manpower, and equipment (Minister of Defence, 1949). By the mid-1960s, this report had become known as the 'Statement on the Defence Estimates', and had grown into a wide-ranging document that set out a comprehensive overview of policy, as well as detailing the annual activities of the armed forces, and listing plans for the provision of manpower, equipment and budgets (Walker and Mills, 2015). Following the establishment of the unified MOD in 1964 (Minister of Defence, 1963), the report increased in size, but still kept to a standardised form. However, as Dillon (1988) notes, from 1979 onwards, when defence became a major political issue, the annual statements became 'big and glossy affairs' accompanied by detailed statistical appendices. By the late 1980s, the document had grown to between 40,000 and 50,000 words long, plus illustrations and graphics. The last formal statement on the defence estimates was published in the final year of John Major's Conservative government in 1996, and ran to 154 pages (Secretary of State for Defence, 1996). The Labour government produced a single Defence White Paper in 1999, which was a statement on the defence estimates in all but name (Secretary of State for Defence, 1999). Thereafter, the practise ceased, because the government considered that defence policy was relatively stable and an annual restatement of policy was no longer required (Select Committee on Defence, 2001).

In 2008, the MOD published its first 'Defence Plan', an unclassified command paper that "set out the defence objectives for the current, and next three, financial years" (Secretary of State for Defence, 2008, p. 2). Although it included sections on strategic context and expenditure, it was considerably more management-orientated than its predecessors, with over half of the document – some thirty-six pages – devoted to a 'Defence Balanced Scorecard'. At time of writing, the MOD publishes a 'Single Departmental Plan'. It is no longer a stand-alone command paper; instead, it is maintained on the government's web-site and is regularly updated (Gov.uk, 2019b). Its aims are twofold: to describe the MOD's priority objectives; and to allow the public to track the department's progress towards achieving them. In addition to the web-based departmental plan, the MOD also presents an annual report to the House of

Commons, which includes sections on performance, accountability and annual accounts (Secretary of State for Defence, 2018a). Both of these productions are readily obtainable and are the basis of the UK's publicly available written defence policy. However, the MOD also maintains an internal annual plan, classified SECRET UK EYES ONLY. It is designed to allow organisations across the department to formulate and finalise all subordinate planning documents. This is the part of defence policy not in the public domain, and the strategic direction it provides cannot be considered in this unclassified thesis.

The MOD's single departmental plan and annual report reflect a reasonably balanced view of all three services' contributions to defence output; as a result, they are relatively uncontentious. However, the same cannot be said for its predecessors. Up until the 1999 defence white paper, this annual document, according to Dillon (1988, pp. 17-18), was "a powerful statement about defence plans that locked the defence programme into place in political terms." He also asserted that: "The Defence White Paper is an annual statement about where we are at! Little surprise, therefore, that different groups in the MOD should want it to define their current positions as accurately or favourably as possible." For a long time, the process for promulgating defence policy was adversarial, encouraged self-serving behaviour and perpetuated inter-service rivalry. Although that may not be entirely the case today, corporate memory is long-enduring, and all three services are unlikely to have forgotten both the successes they have enjoyed, and the failures they have endured, in past figurative battles they have fought amongst themselves over securing their share of the defence budget. These experiences cannot be overlooked when considering how each of the single services approach the translation of strategic direction into military capability.

Defence Reviews

Cornish and Dorman (2010, p. 396) recognised that, as well as being a difficult process, the term 'defence review' is contested. As a result of subsequent analysis, they determined that the term is appropriate "where there has been an overt reference to a defence review, or a significant change to overall defence policy, which may have led to a new policy document being produced, or a major change to the defence equipment programme" (2010, p. 398). Thus, their emphasises is on the level of adjustment or

change, rather than titles of documents. Caterina P Thomson and David Blagden developed this thinking by considering the overall aims of an SDSR. They suggest that an SDSR seeks to “procure and assign forces/capabilities to address such risks [assessed within the NSS]” and is therefore intended to “conduct comprehensive cross-departmental analysis of national security/defence needs, in line with the NSS, before setting/allocating resources via capability choices” (2018, p. 583).

Defence Reviews of the Cold War and Early Expeditionary Period

The reason Cornish and Dorman, and Thomson and Blagden, had to undertake their analysis is because there is no UK government-endorsed definition for a defence review, and, therefore, no conclusive list of the number of reviews that have taken place during the period between the end of World War II and the present day. For example, Claire Taylor (2010a, p. 3) has pointed out that “many analysts consider the first major, wholesale strategic defence review conducted after the Second World War to be the Sandys review as it represented the first proper forward looking assessment of Britain’s strategic interests and requisite military requirements.” Conversely, Robert Self (2010) stated that the Sandys white paper, published in April 1957, was the seventh review of defence policy undertaken since the end of World War II. The House of Commons briefing paper of defence reviews, published immediately prior to SDSR 15 (Walker and Mills, 2015), asserted that there have been only eight defence reviews between 1945 and 2004, although the document fails at any point to explain specifically what is meant by the term. To add a further complication, part one of the 1966 statement on the defence estimates is titled ‘The Defence Review’ (Secretary of State for Defence, 1966), but additional major changes to defence policy were also published by the Labour government as supplementary statements in the following two years (see Secretary of State for Defence (1967), and Secretary of State for Defence (1968)). This led Bill Jackson and Dwin Bramall (1992, p. 360) to observe that Healey’s review was, in fact, a “rolling programme of studies with three major revisions.” There is, therefore, no clear time period for a defence review either.

More recently, Nott was adamant that his 1981 command paper ‘The UK Defence Programme: The Way Forward’ was not a defence review, but simply a review of the MOD’s long-term costing plans (Dorman et al., 2001). His view is

supported by Dorman (2001a) who claimed “the Nott Review was never formally a review but instead a re-alignment of forces to meet the financial situation of the time.” In a similar vein, according to Freedman (1999), the Options for Change exercise of the early 1990s was never described by the incumbent secretary of state for defence as a defence review. That said, Tony Dodd (1993, p. 13) argued that “Options bears all the hallmarks of a defence review.” Options for Change was also the first occasion when the incumbent Secretary of State, perhaps learning a lesson from the 1981 Nott review, did not lend his name to the output of the review – a trait that has continued to this day. It has been suggested that this may be because the latest generation of politicians are more attuned to the public’s perception of them, and do not want to be associated with the negative consequences of military and civil service redundancies, or cuts in capability.

An examination of the purpose of the reviews, as identified by their authors, is also revealing. In the introduction to his defence review in 1957, Sandys wrote that “the time has now come to revise not merely the size, but the whole character of the defence plan” (Minister of Defence, 1957, p. 1). His only stated reasoning for this approach was that, although the threat from communism remained extant, its nature had changed, although the nature of this change was not specified. This explanation may seem a little scant, considering, in Sandys’ opinion, it drove “the biggest changes in military policy ever made in normal times” (1957, p. 9). Nine years later, Healey asserted that the Labour government’s “far-reaching examination of the nation’s defence needs” had two objectives: “to relax the strain imposed on the British economy by defence programmes which it had inherited, and to shape a new defence posture for the 1970s” (Secretary of State for Defence, 1966, p. 1). The first objective, which is expanded considerably in the paper’s opening paragraphs, is a thinly disguised attempt to assign the blame for the cuts to come onto the previous Conservative government. This is an early example of political manoeuvring that is present in most defence review documents, particularly those that have been undertaken immediately after the return to government of a political party following a general election.

The same tactic was used by Mason, author of the next defence review, which was published in 1975. In his ‘Background to the Review’ paragraph, he wrote “when

the Government came into office in March 1974 it inherited a defence programme of world-wide political and military commitments, and military forces stretched to meet those commitments" (Secretary of State for Defence, 1975, p. 1). Significantly, Mason's review was driven directly from a manifesto pledge to "progressively reduce the burden of Britain's defence spending to bring costs into line with those carried out by our main European allies" (politicalresources.net, 2012a). To that end, the explicit aim of the review was to "achieve savings on defence expenditure of several hundred million pounds per annum over a period" albeit "while maintaining a modern and effective defence system" (Secretary of State for Defence, 1975, p. 1).

By contrast, in 1981, Nott avoided completely any notion that the outcome of his "fresh and radical look at the defence programme" would be cuts or reductions. Instead he stated the appraisal "in no way rests on a desire to cut our defence effort. On the contrary, it reflects a firm resolve to establish how best to exploit a substantial increase, which will enable us to enhance our front-line capability in very many areas" (Secretary of State for Defence, 1981, p. 3). The protection of the Conservative Party's reputation is very much in evidence here. As Saki Dockrill (1989) explained, during the 1979 General Election campaign, the Conservatives had promised to make greater efforts than the Labour government in improving Britain's defences. Regardless of the adverse effect of the world depression on the British economy at that time, and Margaret Thatcher's insistence of the imposition of rigid monetary control on public expenditure, Nott could hardly release a command paper constructed around a decrease in military capability. To that end, Cm 8288 was very carefully written, especially the 'maritime tasks' section. Enhancements to maritime patrol and attack submarine capability were introduced early and explained in great detail, before the surface fleet reductions were exposed (Secretary of State for Defence, 1981, pp. 8-10).

As analysis in the next chapter will demonstrate, the end of the Cold War changed the landscape for defence reviews. In the statement of the defence estimates that followed the 1990/91 Options for Changes exercise, Tom King recognised that, because of "total changes in eastern Europe ... we can make some reductions in defence" (Secretary of State for Defence, 1991, pp. 5-6). However, not forgetting the importance of preserving his party's reputation for being strong on defence (see

Harrois (2015)), he concluded his introduction to the command paper with “our determination is to produce forces which, while smaller, are well equipped, properly trained and housed, and well-motivated” (1991, p. 6). Three years later, Malcolm Rifkind published ‘Front Line First – The Defence Costs Study’. The study was also never called a defence review, nor was it presented to Parliament as a command paper. However, under the heading ‘Why a Defence Costs Study Was Needed’ it confirmed “there was good reason to believe that even greater savings could be achieved, without damaging operational capability, by taking a much more radical look at the way in which we did business across the whole range of support activities” (Secretary of State for Defence, 1994b, p. 6). The final, explicitly stated, defence review of the Early Expeditionary period was SDR 98. In this command paper, George Robertson was extremely clear about the purpose of the review: “the publication of this White Paper fulfils the Government’s manifesto commitment to conduct a foreign policy-led strategic defence review to reassess Britain’s security interests and defence needs and consider how the roles, missions and capabilities of our Armed Forces should be adjusted to meet the new strategic realities” (Secretary of State for Defence, 1998a, p. 5).

Although there are obvious similarities in the purpose of the reviews undertaken during the Cold War and Early Expeditionary period, as stated by their authors, there are also differences. It is, therefore, unsurprising that no government during the period sought formally to codify what a defence review actually was or was not. Flexibility, or ambiguity, was more useful to them. Moreover, few scholars who have studied defence reviews from the end of World War II onwards have offered a definition either (even Cornish and Dorman’s analysis detailed above, whilst helpful, falls short of specifically defining what a defence review actually is). One exception is Freedman (1987) who defined a defence review as an examination of “the whole range of defence commitments to see if existing priorities are correct, whether resources are being used most efficiently, and, if cuts are necessary, where they should be made.” Although a good start-point, this definition does not offer an opinion on who should be doing the examining. For example, many commentators appropriately point to the significance of the service chiefs’ 1952 global strategy paper with regard to UK defence policy in general, and its influence on Sandys’ 1957 defence review in particular (see Darby (1973), Navias (1989), and Dorman (2001a)). However, even though its findings

were subsequently adopted in part by the government, it was a report submitted for “consideration by the Defence Committee” (Chiefs of Staff, 1952, p. 2), and not, on its own standing, government policy. Moreover, it was also classified TOP SECRET, and therefore not available in the public domain until 2003, over fifty years after it was produced (the same is true for a similar strategy report produced by the service chiefs two years earlier (Chiefs of Staff, 1950)). A defence review must be led, and hence endorsed, by the government of the day; to that end, the definition of a defence review, for the period from the end of World War II until immediately prior to 2010, used in this thesis is: ‘an examination, by the UK government, of its defence commitments and resources to ascertain whether or not they are correct and, if necessary, initiate corrective action’. As a result, notwithstanding the influence it had on shaping policy, which is identifiable in a number of the Cold War defence reviews, the 1952 global strategy paper cannot be considered a defence review in its own right. In line with this definition, and regardless of assertions made in some cases to the contrary by their authors, the command papers listed at Table 4-1 are considered to be defence reviews undertaken during the Cold War and Early Expeditionary period.

Year	Command Paper
1957	Cm 124 – Defence: Outline of Future Policy (Sandys’ Review).
1966 - 1968	Cm 2901 – Statement on the Defence Estimates 1966: Part 1 – The Defence Review (Healey’s Review), supported by: • Cm 3357 – Supplementary Statement on Defence Policy 1967. • Cm 3701 – Supplementary Statement on Defence Policy 1968.
1975	Cm 5976 – Statement on the Defence Estimates 1975: Chapter I – The Defence Review (Mason’s Review).
1981	Cm 8288 – The United Kingdom Defence Programme: The Way Forward (The Nott Review).
1991 - 1994	Cm 1559-I – Statement on the Defence Estimates 1991: Volume 1 – Britain’s Defence for the 90s (Options for Change), supported by: • Front Line First – The Defence Costs Study 1994.
1998 - 2009	Cm 3999 – The Strategic Defence Review 1998, supported by: • Cm 5566-I – The Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter 2002 Volume I. • Cm 6041-I – Delivering Security in a Changing World 2003 Volume I. • Cm 6269 – Delivering Security in a Changing World – Future Capabilities

Table 4-1: List of Defence Reviews undertaken between 1945 and 2010.

In trying to ascertain why the defence reviews between 1945 and 2010 were undertaken when they were, a simple examination of the left-hand column in Table 4-1

confirms that they were not initiated against any regular timetable. However, ignoring the immediate post-World War II election, each time the Labour party returned to government during this period, i.e. in 1964, 1974, and 1997, it initiated a defence review. Furthermore, on all three occasions, it did so as it was beholden to pre-election pledges, which were not necessarily defence related. For example, Mason's review was an undisguised mechanism to generate the financial headroom to fund the government's higher, political priorities (see Greenwood (1975), Younger (1976), and Chichester and Wilkinson (1982)). Without making judgements on Labour Party priorities, non-defence related political ambitions certainly appear to have been factors in that party's decision making around the commissioning of defence reviews.

At first glance, the same does not appear to be the case for the Conservative Party's defence reviews of the period. In 1981, the newly appointed Nott was faced with an ongoing and increasing MOD overspend (see Chalmers (1985), and Dorman (2001b)) and, ten years later, King had to contend with the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Neither of these factors can be linked to pre-election pledges, and, therefore, were not underpinned solely by political ambition. However, the situation in 1957 was much less clear. The strategic shock of the Suez Crisis is frequently identified as the reason why a defence review was undertaken in 1957 (see Dodd (1993), and Dorman (2001a, p. 12)), which suggests that "the failure of the Anglo-French expedition [in Suez in 1956] served as a trigger for a major reconsideration of British defence policy" (Navias, 1989). However, in the view of Sir Richard Powell, who was Deputy Secretary at the MOD in 1957:

"The aftermath of Suez to me was not the most important element in this situation. Suez was certainly the proximate cause of the White Paper, in the sense that it led to a change of Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. If these things had not happened, the White Paper would not have happened in the form that it did."

(Kandiah and Staerck, 1988, p. 2)

Jackson and Bramall (1992) also recognised the significance of Harold Macmillan becoming Prime Minister in January 1957, suggesting that his political aspirations were the real reason behind the defence review later in the year. Specifically, they identify he had three years in which to establish himself, before the

next general election was due, and his aspirations were underpinned by radical changes in defence policy: “improving standards of living demanded swingeing cuts in defence spending to release skilled manpower into the economy ... and an imaginative defence policy, which was perceived as providing adequate security at much lower cost, could help his Party’s electoral image” (1992, p. 314). If Jackson and Bramall’s conclusions are accepted, this is another example of political ambitions impacting on defence review timings.

There is ample evidence to support the view that political ambition was a significant factor in the decision to undertake defence reviews during this period. This should not be a surprise. In accordance with the definition of policy introduced earlier in this chapter, the government allows stated defence policy to run over time, until it requires revision or, in certain circumstances, overturning. Minor revisions to defence policy have been achievable via the annual statement on the defence estimates process; whereas significant change has required a more comprehensive response through a formal review. Thus, defence reviews occurred when the government decided that its policy required either some revision, which could not be undertaken through the statement on the defence estimates process, or its policy needed to be changed.

Strategic Defence and Security Reviews

With the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government’s decision in 2010 to undertake an SDSR and produce a new NSS every five years (Her Majesty’s Government, 2010b, p. 35), identifying recent defence reviews should be a simple task. However, for a seventeen month period between July 2017 and December 2018, and completely outwith the quinquennial review cycle, the government was in an almost constant state of review – initially through the Cabinet Office-led NSCR, followed by the MOD co-ordinated MDP²¹ (see Curtis (2019)).

The Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy (JCNSS) identified that the NSCR had “inadvertently become an uncomfortable ‘hallway-house’ between a refresh [of capabilities] and a full review” (Joint Committee on the National Security

²¹ The impact of the NSCR and the MDP on the SDSR process and consequences for the future are examined in chapter six.

Strategy, 2018, p. 23), while the House of Commons Defence Committee (HCDC) considered the MDP to be a “defence policy review” (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2018b, p. 3). However, neither resulted in a significant change to overall defence policy (although it could be argued that the introduction of the Fusion Doctrine, introduced in the NSCR, did have some impact on defence policy), nor did they generate a major change to the defence equipment programme. Moreover, neither activity was an examination of the whole range of defence commitments, nor did they take a view on priorities or the efficient use of resources. On balance, against these measures, it is difficult to consider either the NSCR or the MDP to be a defence review; therefore, the command papers listed at Table 4-2 are acknowledged as SDSRs undertaken since 2010:

Year	Command Paper
2010	Cm 7948 – The Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010 – Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty.
2015	Cm 9161 – National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015 – A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom, supported by: • National Security Capability Review. • Modernising Defence Programme.

Table 4-2: List of Strategic Defence and Security Reviews undertaken since 2010.

4.2 Military Capability

The breakdown of MOD expenditure, for financial years (FY) 2016/17 (Secretary of State for Defence, 2018a, p. 16) and 2017/18 (Secretary of State for Defence, 2017a, p. 14) is detailed at Table 4-3 below. With the exception of operations and peacekeeping, and war pensions benefits, the majority of all other expenditure contributes to the generation and maintenance of military capability²². However, the two major areas of expenditure are equipment²³ and personnel²⁴, which together can account for up to three quarters of the MOD’s annual budget. Although the financial summaries are not

²² Even though the definition of military capability is the combination of equipment, trained personnel and support that gives the armed forces the capacity to achieve the tasks they are given, all DLOD costs must be taken into account. Therefore, for example, elements of infrastructure, inventory and arm’s length bodies are also included.

²³ Of the £15.9 billion capital expenditure and equipment support cost in FY 2017/18, £15.3 billion was spent on equipment, some forty-one point eight per cent of the total spend.

²⁴ In FY 2016/17 personnel costs (service and civilian) accounted for some £10.2 billion or twenty-eight point nine per cent of the total spend.

presented in the same manner, statistics from previous years' MOD annual reports support this (see, for example, Secretary of State for Defence (2006), and Secretary of State for Defence (2011)).

Area of Expenditure	2016/17 (in £ billions)	2017/18 (in £ billions)
Capital Expenditure	8.80	9.43
Service Personnel	8.90	8.97
Equipment Support	6.40	6.55
Infrastructure	4.10	4.06
Administration	1.50	1.47
Civilian personnel	1.30	1.36
Inventory	1.20	1.19
Defence Equipment & Support	1.00	1.11
Cost of Operations and Peacekeeping	0.40	0.80
Other Costs	0.70	0.79
War Pensions Benefits	0.80	0.72
Arm's Length Bodies	0.20	0.61
Total	35.30	36.61

Table 4-3: Breakdown of MOD Expenditure for Financial Years 2016/17 and 2017/18.

When considering effectiveness improvements or efficiency savings in the generation and maintenance of military capability, defence policy makers are naturally drawn to the major areas of expenditure. However, although changes to terms and conditions of service can reduce spending, the main cost driver for personnel is the number of service and civilian manpower actually being paid for by the MOD. Research later in this thesis will confirm that the size of the armed forces and supporting civil service workforce is a very emotive subject, and decisions concerning headcount revisions (which have consistently been revisions downwards) are invariably the preserve of politicians. Moreover, they are generally made as part of a wider examination of policy, i.e. a defence review, where they can be included within a package of change that also contains positive announcements; including, for example, the purchase of new weapons systems or enhancements to existing capability. That is not the case for equipment. The management of defence equipment can broadly be divided into its initial purchase – procurement – and its through-life operation in

service – support²⁵. Since the introduction of the SPI as part of SDR 98 (see Spellar (1998b)), there have been a large number of organisational changes and major reforms to procurement and support policy and processes, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the management of military capability. The most prominent are introduced at Figure 4-1, and explained in more detail in the next sub-section.

²⁵ The Acquisition (or CADMID) cycle also includes disposal stage; however, with a few notable exceptions (for example nuclear-powered submarines), the vast majority of costs lie within procurement and support.

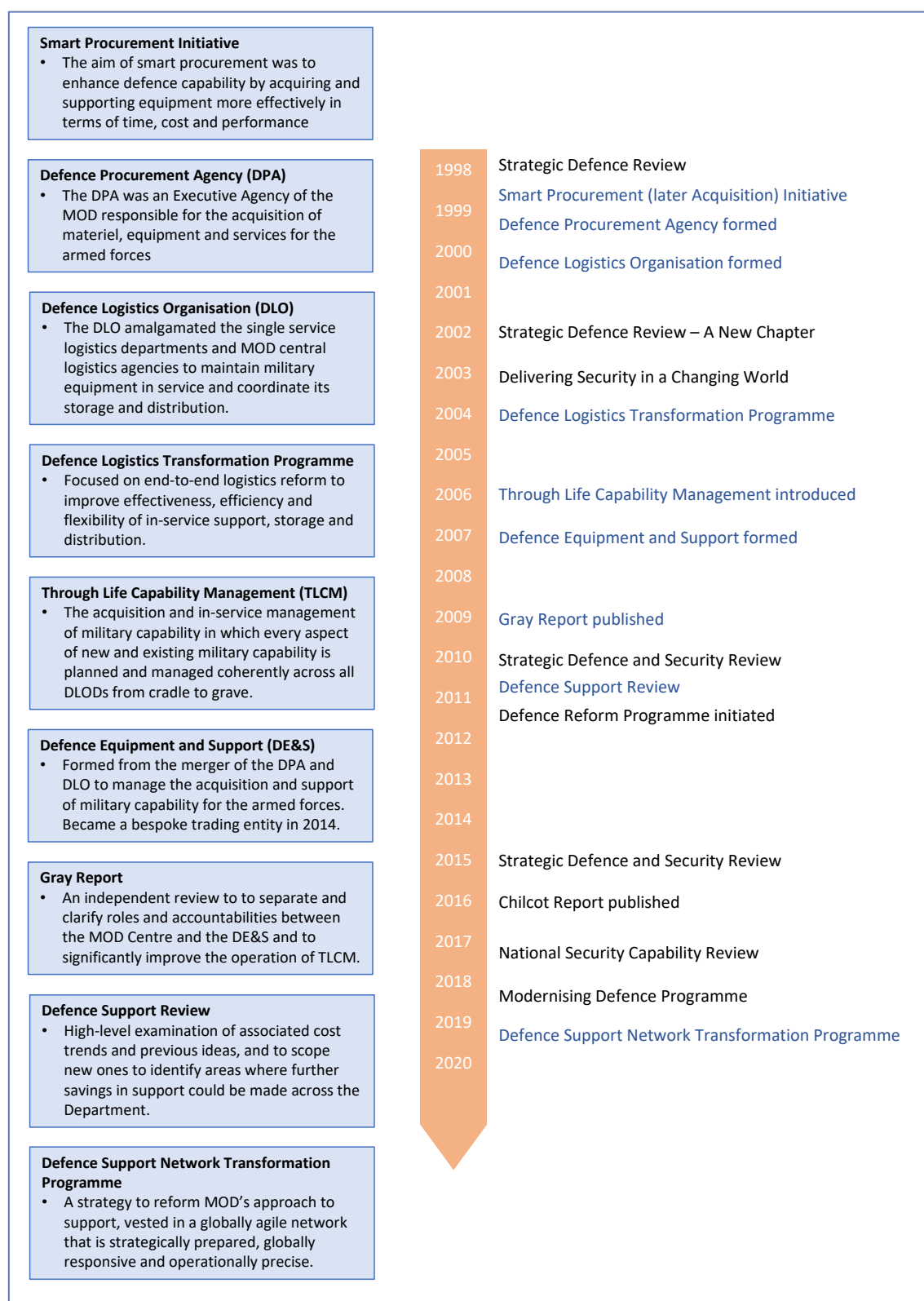


Figure 4-1: Major Procurement and Support Organisation and Process Reform since 1998.

In addition to the acquisition reforms imposed since SDR 98, the single, greatest influence on the management of military capability has been the Defence Reform Programme, initiated in 2011. The two key recommendations that had the most impact were (Lord Levene of Portsoken, 2011, p. 4):

- Make the MOD head office smaller and more strategic, to make high level balance of investment decisions, set strategic direction and a strong corporate framework, and hold to account.
- Focus the service chiefs on running their service and empower them to perform their role effectively, with greater freedom to manage, as part of a much clearer framework of financial accountability and control.

These recommendations resulted in major changes to some of the key features of 'smart acquisition' (for example, the first and second customer concept was discarded), and also fundamentally revised financial responsibilities. At time of writing, the rules governing the management of military capability are still primarily influenced by the DRP, the implications of which are explored later in this section.

Procurement and Support Organisation and Process Reform

Prior to the SPI, new equipment projects were managed in phases, with funding for each phase only being approved once the work in the previous phase had been completed. This approach followed the acceptance of recommendations from a report produced by a Steering Group on Development Cost Estimating in 1969, chaired by William Downey²⁶ (Downey, 1969a). In addition, for many years after World War II, the UK defence industry was seen an essential component of national security, and the MOD was obliged to maintain a close relationship with it. As Kirkpatrick (2003, p. 5) recognised, at one stage the MOD PE had "specific responsibility for 'promoting the welfare' of the defence-related sectors of UK industry." The most obvious effects of this were limited competition for defence contracts and a preponderance of cost-plus contracts²⁷. However, this policy was radically altered by Peter (later Lord) Levene, following his appointment as Chief of Defence Procurement (CDP) in 1985. He believed that defence equipment acquisition should be more commercially focused, with open competitions wherever possible and fixed price contracts replacing the traditional cost-plus approach. He also favoured a more 'hands-off' approach with projects entrusted to prime to contractors to manage (see Markowski and Hall (1998)

²⁶ Generally known as the 'Downey Report'.

²⁷ Cost-plus contracts guaranteed payment of the industry's costs plus a (limited) profit.

and Bell (2000)). Notwithstanding these reforms, Kirkpatrick (2003, p. 6) noted that many equipment projects still substantially exceeded the predicted values of their procurement cost and timescale, and much of the associated MOD process to manage them remained unduly bureaucratic and cumbersome. It was against this backdrop that the Labour government introduced the SPI as part of SDR 98.

The Smart Procurement Initiative and Smart Acquisition

The Smart Procurement Initiative was launched under the strapline 'faster, cheaper, better'. Within two years, it had been re-branded as 'Smart Acquisition', to "stress the point that the MOD is concerned not only with buying equipment, but with acquiring the means to support it throughout its in-service life" (Defence Acquisition, MOD Policy Paper No 4, December 2001 cited in Taylor, 2003, p. 3). That said, the key features of the SPI were fundamentally unaltered (see Defence Procurement Agency (2002) and Taylor (2003)):

- A streamlined process for project management and approvals – the Acquisition (or CADMID) Cycle – to replace the existing Downey Cycle.
- The introduction of a through-life systems approach, embodied in a single Integrated Project Team (IPT) that brought together all of the main stakeholders in a project, including Industry (except where competition made it impracticable). IPTs were designed to exist for the life of a project, transitioning from the Defence Procurement Agency (DPA) to the Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO) at an appropriate time.
- The creation of clearly identifiable customers of the IPTs. An Equipment Capability Customer (ECC) in MOD head office, responsible for requirement setting and acting as lead customer for the equipment until it entered service. A second customer (the service ultimately to receive the equipment, or the majority user) responsible for in-service management.
- A new 'open and constructive' relationship with Industry, based on partnering.
- More comprehensive project planning earlier in the procurement cycle with appropriate trade-offs between military requirements, time and costs in an effort to assuage later cost overruns and delays.

- The introduction of new equipment techniques including incremental acquisition, whereby equipment would be initially accepted into service with less ambitious capability and subsequently upgraded in lower-risk steps.

The SPI was primarily focused on MOD practises and procedure, although it did take into account views from Industry (see Smith (1998)). It also included three changes in MOD organisation. The single services' operational requirements teams were amalgamated and expanded into a central defence customer – the ECC – under a newly-established three-star Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Equipment Capability). MOD PE became an executive agency²⁸ and was renamed the DPA. The third change was not specifically driven by the SPI but was analogous, and certainly improved the conditions for the successful implementation of the SPI. A new, four-star Chief of Defence Logistic post was created to assume overall control of the three single service logistics organisations to maximise the scope for rationalisation of logistics functions and processes on a defence-wide basis. The result was the formation of the DLO.

The changes to the acquisition landscape that the SPI introduced have been built upon over the years; however, the whole-life approach has endured and the CADMID cycle is still the framework for equipment projects today. The role of the IPTs remains relatively unchanged, although, as David Moore and Peter Antill (2001, pp. 183-184) predicted, there is no longer a requirement from them to transfer from the DPA to the DLO as these organisation merged to form Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) in 2007 (Gov.uk, 2018a). Partnering continues to be an element of the government's defence industrial policy, although it is recognised that long-term partnering arrangements only best serve defence interests where competition is not available or feasible (Secretary of State for Defence, 2017b, p. 11). The one feature of the SPI that has been completely superseded is the customer roles, which was instigated as a result of the DRP.

²⁸ Executive agencies were semi-autonomous organisations within the MOD with their own budget and an element of freedom to reform organisational structures and process. Agency personnel remained in the military or civil service and budgets were subject to the rules of public accountability.

Transformation Initiatives in Procurement and Support

Since the commencement of the SPI, there have been a number of transformation initiatives within Defence, aimed at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of procurement and support. They have broadly followed two approaches: an internal study, usually supported by external consultants, followed by an implementation period (see Dowdy (2003), Director Defence Support Review (2010), and Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff (Logistic Operations) (2017)); or an independent review of defence practises that is accepted by the MOD or government with its recommendations adopted over time (see Gray (2009), and Yue and Henshaw (2009)).

These initiatives have had mixed success. Of the internal studies, the Defence Logistics Transformation Programme, which ran from 2003 to 2006, was extremely successful in removing costs from in-service support, particularly in the air domain. For example, the replacement of four lines of aircraft servicing with a simple forward and depth approach reduced military headcount and increased fleet availability (parliament.uk, 2006). It remains the standard model for supporting aircraft from all three services today. By contrast, even though the Defence Support Review suggested a potential value for money savings profile of almost £3 billion over 10 years ((Director Defence Support Review, 2010, p. 50), its outline plans to optimise industrial performance and employ support-chain leverage though life were never progressed.

The external studies fared somewhat better. After completing his review of acquisition in 2009, Gray was invited by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government to implement his recommendations as the Chief of Defence Materiel (CDM) in January 2011 (Gov.uk, 2010a). Gray did preside over significant improvements in procurement programme and project management during his tenure as CDM (see Comptroller & Auditor General (2014); however, his flagship proposal, that the DE&S should convert to a Government-Owned, Contractor-Operated (Go-Co) entity (Gray, 2009, p. 8), proved impossible to achieve (Comptroller & Auditor General, 2015, p. 7), and he had to be content with his minimum option for it to become a Bespoke Trading Entity, which it attained in 2014 (Hansard House of Commons, 2014).

The final transformation initiative, and the one that has potentially had the greatest impact on the way military capability is managed today is Through Life Capability Management. Through Life Management had been a key feature of the SPI; in 2003, however, the NAO reported that Through Life Management had “yet to become fully embedded in the Department and to yield widespread benefits in terms of demonstrable improvements in military capability” (2003, p. 1). This was due, in part, to the continuance of the MOD’s traditional narrow focus on equipment. To rectify this, the MOD introduced new ways of working to improve its acquisition management, under the auspices of TLCM (see Secretary of State for Defence (2005)). TLCM required capability to be managed, over time, by a series of creative activities that synthesised a set of fundamental inputs, or components, expressed as lines of development (Yue and Henshaw, 2009). As has already been explained, these lines of development were formalised as the DLODs, which were described by the MOD as “a ‘checklist’ to be used by Senior Responsible Owners (SRO), Top Level Budget (TLB) holders and other deliverers of capability to ensure all key factors relevant to the capability have been considered, and that issues for resolution have been identified” (Joint Concepts and Doctrine Centre, 2005, p. 1). Yue and Henshaw (2009, p. 55) also recognised the interdependent nature and operational focus of the DLODs, confirming that a “desired capability can only be achieved if the activities within all eight DLODs are at an appropriately matched level of readiness.”

The enduring nature of TLCM was confirmed following an internal MOD study (McKane, 2006) that emphasised the importance of capability planning and strengthened the role of the ECC (the Enabling Acquisition Change report was also the conduit for the creation of the DE&S through the merger of the DLO and DPA in 2007). TLCM was also reinforced through both the contemporaneous Defence Industrial Strategy (Secretary of State for Defence, 2005) and Defence Technology Strategy (Minister for Defence Procurement, 2006). It overlaid a six-stage capability planning process²⁹ (Acquisition Operating Framework Team, 2007) onto the CADMID cycle that

²⁹ Stage 1 – capability definition; stage 2 – capability goal setting; stage 3 – baseline review and audit; stage 4 – shortfall and opportunity analysis; stage 5 – capability investigation; stage 6 – endorse the capability management plan.

survived the DRP, and remains in use by capability managers across the single services today.

The Defence Reform Programme

SDSR 10 is examined in detail at chapter five; however, as Michael Dunn et al. (2011) pointed out, there was not time for that review to consider the topic of MOD reform. Instead a follow-on piece of work was commissioned, under the chairmanship of Lord Levene. Its remit was to “conduct a fundamental review of how the MOD is structured and managed, in order to design a model for departmental management which is simpler and more cost-effective, with clear allocation of responsibility, authority and accountability” (Lord Levene of Portsoken, 2011, p. 9). The subsequent report identified fifty-three recommendations on the reorganisation of the MOD. As already discussed, there were two key recommendations that impacted the management of military capability. Following the resizing and refocusing of MOD head office, and the empowering of the service chiefs, Taylor recognised a shift in the manner in which strategic direction was given, and received, to provide military capability: “under the new model, the service chiefs would receive clearer strategic direction from the Defence Board, carry out the detailed military capability planning required across equipment, manpower and training, and then propose how best to deliver that strategic direction through the provision of an annual Command Plan” (2011, p. 4).

Levene developed a consolidated summary of the core functions that the MOD needed to undertake to meet its basic purpose of defending the UK and its Overseas Territories, citizens and interests:

- **Direct** – understand the strategic context, make defence policy and strategy, define and resource the necessary military capability and strategically direct operations and Defence diplomacy.
- **Generate and Develop** – generate force elements to meet current operations and potential military tasks and develop the future force; a key enabler of which is to:
- **Acquire** – procure and support the equipment systems and commodities needed in the short and long term;

- **Enable** – enable the other functions by performing or commissioning supporting services, such as infrastructure, corporate services and science and technology;
- **Operate** – use military capability on operations and other military tasks, as directed by government; and,
- **Account** – manage, control and account for the resources voted by Parliament, and report on defence activities to Parliament and the public.

These functions were grouped into a construct that articulated who was responsible for each function, gave owners the authority and resources to discharge them, and identified how they would relate to each other. The result was the DOM schematic at Figure 4-2.

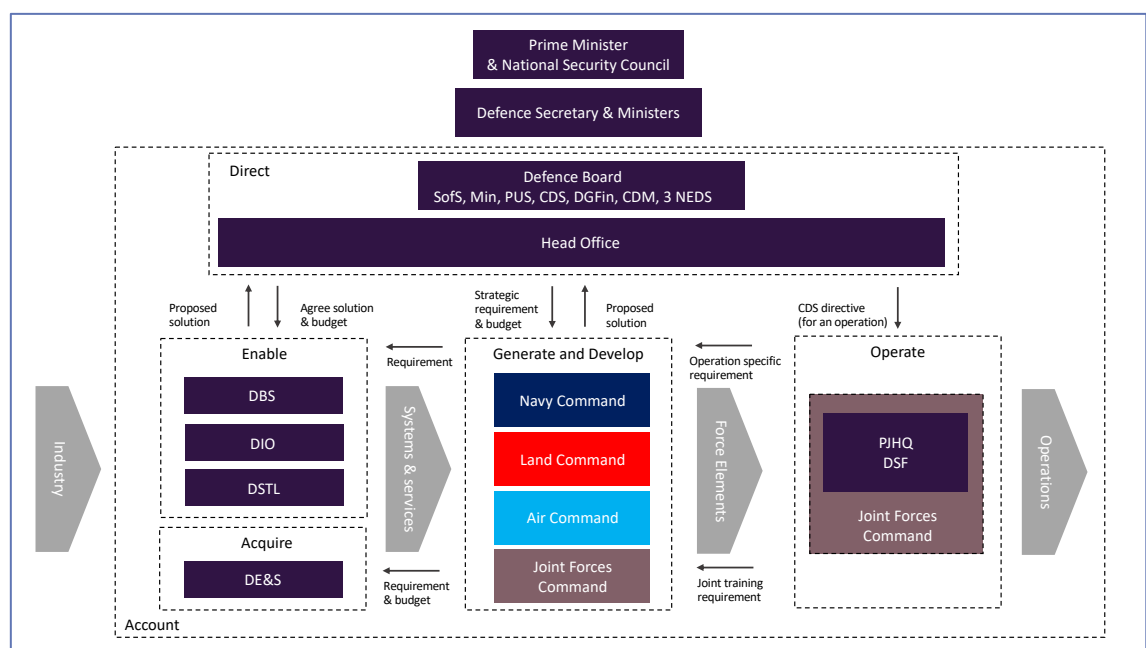


Figure 4-2: Levene Report - Defence Operating Model: Future.

The Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government published Levene’s report on 27 June 2011, and Defence Secretary Liam Fox endorsed its recommendations in a statement to the House of Commons the same day (Hansard House of Commons, 2011a). He considered it a “thorough and compelling analysis that deserves close attention.” He also suggested that “people in defence” would recognise it as a

“constructive critique of a Department in need of reform” and “relish ... the challenges that it represents.”

Whilst there is no evidence to confirm whether or not the ‘people in defence’ agreed with their Secretary of State, it is clear that MOD set about implementing the DRP at pace. The Defence Reform Unit that had supported Levene during the study, was retained to provide assistance to the reforming directorates within MOD head office and, within four months, Fox was able to confirm the establishment of the new Defence Board and Major Projects Review Board; the creation of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation and the Defence Business Services organisation; and the appointment of the first commander of the new Joint Forces Command (JFC)³⁰ (Hansard House of Commons, 2011b). Understandably, the organisational changes necessary to accommodate the single services’ new financial delegations for capability management took longer to implement, and it was not until April 2014 that they achieved full operating capability (Chief of Staff Capability, 2015). In his 2015 annual review of the DRP, Levene recognised that the MOD had “achieved the great majority of the reform programme I set for it in 2011” (Gov.uk, 2016a). He also confirmed that the one activity on which the department still needed to concentrate to complete the defence reform agenda was changing behaviours.

At time of writing, the MOD has an extremely well documented process for the department-wide management of military capability. At the highest level, the operating model and control framework outlined in ‘How Defence Works’ remain constructed around Levene’s core functions and include a detailed explanation of how the single services are expected to deliver capability (Director Corporate Strategy Ministry of Defence, 2015, pp 27-33). Beneath this direction is a layer of overarching functional guidance, which primarily consists of department-wide operating models for finance and military capability (Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Military Capability) and Director General Finance, 2015) and the acquisition system (Director General Head Office and Commissioning Services, 2017). The Acquisition System Operating Model is underpinned by the Acquisition System Handbook³¹ (Director

³⁰ Air Chief Marshal Sir Stuart Peach.

³¹ The Acquisition System Handbook has replaced the Acquisition Handbook.

General Head Office and Commissioning Services, 2018). At the bottom of the governance structure is the internal direction written by the single services for their own capability managers. Unsurprisingly, this direction has taken different forms, with the British Army including it in its own service-wide operating model (Director General Capability, 2016), the RN producing a capability management handbook (Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff Capability, 2015), and the RAF opting for a specific finance and military capability operating model (Air Capability Executive Officer, 2015).

4.3 Summary

Strategic direction has does not have clearly defined boundaries and has evolved over the period of this research. It is provided through a mix of set-piece events, such as defence reviews, and both verbal and written articulation by senior politicians and their officials. The repository for strategic direction is defence and security policy, which, in its simplest form, is an expression of the government's approach to a particular situation. From the commencement of the Cold War to the present, the principal approach to creating defence policy has been incrementalism. Often described as 'muddling through', this involves taking a series of small decisions about a subject that can be subsequently be amended or reversed if required. For much of the research period, defence policy was promulgated through a regular statement of the defence estimates; however, today it is expressed through the combination of a web-based departmental plan and yearly report to the House of Commons, both in the public domain, plus an internal, classified MOD annual plan. During the Cold War and Early Expeditionary period, major changes to defence policy were considered during defence reviews, which can be defined as an examination, by the UK government, of its defence commitments and resources to ascertain whether or not they are correct and, if necessary, initiate corrective action. There were six defence reviews held during this period. In 2010, the government introduced a quinquennial SDSR cycle to conduct comprehensive cross-department analysis of defence and security needs, in line with the NSS, followed by the allocating of resource via capability choices.

The management of military capability has evolved since its introduction as a concept in 1997 but remains the central tenet of the MOD's approach to acquisition. It is defined as the combination of equipment, trained personnel and support that gives the armed forces the capacity to achieve the tasks they are given. Its two main cost-drivers are personal and equipment. Due to the contentious nature of manpower numbers, decisions on the size of the armed forces have traditionally been made at the political level during defence reviews. However, since the SPI was introduced, there have been a significant number of change initiatives, introduced and managed within the MOD, designed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of equipment procurement and support. Although not solely focused on military capability, the initiative that has had the greatest impact on it was the DRP, which introduced a new operating model for defence with clear allocation of responsibility, authority and accountability. The most noteworthy changes delivered through the DRP were to re-focus MOD head office to make high level balance of investment decisions and set strategic direction, whilst providing service chiefs with greater freedom to manage their service as part of a much clearer framework of financial accountability and control. At the macro level, the processes and procedures used by defence today remain those introduced by the DRP.

Chapter 5: Themes from Past Defence Reviews

Although this thesis is focused on the present day translation of strategic direction into military capability, it does acquiesce to the often misquoted line from George Santayana (1980, p. 284): “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” To that end, chapter five examines historical UK defence reviews, with the aim of identifying factors and trends that may be relevant to current and future behaviour. The UK’s previous defence reviews are central to this analysis because they are core policy elements that link strategic direction to the generation of military capability. This chapter concentrates on the period from the end of World War II up until the commencement of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government in May 2010. The reasons for establishing this left and right of arc are simple. To reach back any further would be to include a period when all UK government policy was consumed by a war of national survival, which certainly skewed most, if not all, decision making. To reach forward any closer to the present day would result in the incorporation of the extant NSS and SDSR process, and this is the current behaviour for which relevant trends from the past are being sought in this analysis.

This chapter builds on previous analysis concerning the contested question of what does and does not constitute a defence review, through an investigation of the specific defence reviews that have been undertaken between 1945 and 2010. However, rather than concentrating narrowly on the actual outcomes of each review, it focuses on wider questions, the answers to which will, in turn, inform the thesis’ general research question. For instance, it explores the reasons why defence reviews were undertaken when they were. It also seeks to uncover the associated factors that had a bearing on defence reviews of the period and why they have had the impact that they had. In doing so, it suggests why these experiences from previous defence reviews could be relevant to future reviews. The analysis has been divided into two distinct periods, separated by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The period between 1945 and 1989 was, of course, the Cold War; the time thereafter has been labelled the Early

Expeditionary period. The reasons for dividing the reviews in this way will become clear as the analysis unfolds.

If it is accepted that defence reviews between 1945 and 2010 were ‘an examination, by the UK government, of its defence commitments and resources to ascertain whether or not they are correct and, if necessary, initiate corrective action’, then undertaking one should, on the face of it, have been a reasonably simple, linear task. The ideal, as Quinlan (1992, p. 160) suggests, should be “one starts by identifying one’s commitments; one assesses professionally what forces are needed to meet them; one costs these; and then one sends the bill to the Treasury, which pays up.” However, evidence from the literature review indicates that reality is somewhat different from Quinlan’s ideal, with a multitude of internal and external factors making defence reviews far from simple or linear. This is also supported by analysis of strategic direction from the preceding chapter. Accordingly, the remainder of this chapter analyses the factors that have had an impact on the defence reviews of the period, to determine what, if any, themes from the past may be relevant when considering the future translation of strategic direction into military capability.

5.1 Cold War Defence Reviews

Policy

The single decision that had the most significant impact across all of the Cold War defence reviews was the UK’s adoption of the policy of deterrence. John Baylis and Alan Macmillan (1993) recognised that the service chiefs had been thinking in terms of deterrence as early as 1945. It was included in the overall strategic plan document of 1947, as well as being the cornerstone of their defence policy and global strategy papers of 1950 and 1952 (1993, pp. 206-208). However, the first public acknowledgement of deterrence policy was made by Churchill in a speech to the House of Commons on 01 March 1955, in which he said:

“Unless a trustworthy and universal agreement upon disarmament, conventional and nuclear alike, can be reached and an effective system of inspection is established and is actually working, there is only one sane policy for the free world in the next few years. That is what we call defence through deterrents. This we have already adopted and

proclaimed. These deterrents may at any time become the parents of disarmament, provided that they deter. To make our contribution to the deterrent we must ourselves possess the most up-to-date nuclear weapons, and the means of delivering them."

(Hansard House of Commons, 1955)

The adoption of the policy of deterrence was confirmed in the 1957 defence review (Minister of Defence, 1957) and restated in all of the subsequent Cold War reviews (see Secretary of State for Defence (1966), Secretary of State for Defence (1975), and Secretary of State for Defence (1981)). Sandys' argument was simple. He recognised that, at the time, there was no means of providing adequate protection for the UK against the consequences of an attack with nuclear weapons. Therefore, the only existing safeguard against major aggression was the power to threaten retaliation with nuclear weapons. Notwithstanding this, certainly during the early part of the Cold War, the UK's wider interests could not be overlooked. Wyn Rees (1989, p. 224) noted: "the fulfilment of treaty obligations and colonial commitments was an important objective for Britain in maintaining its position in the cold war." However, it was the maintenance of an effective deterrent that underpinned Sandys', and indeed all of the Cold War, defence reviews.

The enduring theme of UK defence policy during the Cold War was, undoubtedly, prevention of war with the Soviet Union through deterrence. Viewed through a strategic lens, this was the nation's most significant 'end'. However, although this objective was fixed, the manner in which it should best be accomplished ('ways'), and the specific resources to be used ('means'), most certainly were not. Notably, it was the decisions made as to how to accomplish this end, and with what resources, that were subject to external factors. At the highest level, the employment of resources to realise policy were articulated as defence roles. As Table 5-1 below shows, with the reduction of the nation's world-wide commitments and the resultant move towards retrenchment, these roles coalesced around the UK's commitment to NATO.

Defence Review	Defence Roles
Sandys' Review 1957	Sandys (1957, p. 2) stated that Britain's armed forces must be capable of performing two main tasks:

	• <i>To play their part with the forces of Allied countries in deterring and resisting aggression.</i> • <i>To defend British colonies and protected territories against local attack, and to undertake limited operations in overseas emergencies.</i>
Healey's Review 1966	Healey (1966, p. 5) did not list specific defence roles; however, he did confirm: • <i>The first purpose of our armed forces will be to defence the freedom of the British people.</i>
Mason's Review 1975	Mason (1975, pp. 9-10) articulated his defence roles by identifying the areas where he believed that Britain could make the most significant contribution to her security and that of the NATO Alliance: • <i>Maintenance of the British Army of the Rhine and Second Tactical Air Force in the Central Region.</i> • <i>Defence of the Eastern Atlantic and the English Channel.</i> • <i>Defence of the UK and its approaches.</i> • <i>Maintenance of the strategic nuclear deterrent.</i>
The Nott Review 1981	Nott (1981, p. 5) re-affirmed Mason's four defence roles, and re-established a 'within resources' out-of-area commitment (often referred to as the 'half role'): • <i>An independent element of strategic and theatre nuclear forces committed to the [NATO] Alliance.</i> • <i>The direct defence of the UK homeland.</i> • <i>A major land and air contribution on the European mainland.</i> • <i>A major maritime effort in the Eastern Atlantic and the Channel.</i> <i>We [also] exploit the flexibility of our forces beyond the NATO area as far as our resources permit, to meet both specific British responsibilities and the growing importance to the West of supporting our friends and contributing to world stability more widely.</i>

Table 5-1: Cold War Defence Roles.

In sum, what the armed forces needed to accomplish during the Cold War was easily identifiable, agreed by successive governments throughout the period, and did not change. In the 'ends' equals 'ways' plus 'means' equation, the 'ends' were fixed and the 'ways' and 'means' were variables as a result of external factors. This resulted in a complex, but manageable, calculation for defence planners to solve.

Process

As there was no set standard for a Cold War defence review, it should be no surprise that there was no set methodology for undertaking one either. Furthermore, and understandably, processes both matured over time and developed in line with

revisions to the central organisation of defence – most notably the establishment of a unified MOD in 1964. Prior to the 1957 review, Macmillan believed the power of the single services had to be reduced. As Jackson and Bramall (1992, pp. 315-315) explained “he was convinced that no major changes in the status quo would be negotiable unless the Minister of Defence was given the power to overrule the special pleadings of the Admiralty, War Office and Air Ministry.” To that end, he extended Sandys’ responsibilities to include “deciding all questions on the size, shape organisation and disposition of the forces” (1992, p. 315). A second significant factor in how the 1957 review was undertaken was Sandys himself. His forcefulness, determination and personal political ambition underpinned the process of the review; indeed, it was these very attributes that had prompted Macmillan to appoint him in the first place. Sandys retained personal control throughout the short, two-month process, which, according to Powell (Kandiah and Staerck, 1988), also included actually drafting the document. Whilst Sandys’ character is regularly cited as fundamental to the outcome of the 1957 review, Macmillan’s contribution should not be overlooked. After all, he appointed Sandys, increased his ministerial authority, and backed him throughout. In his first speech as Prime Minister, he promised that “no vested interest, however strong, and no traditions, however good, would obstruct the government’s reassessment of defence policy” (Self, 2010, p.162). The strength of the two politicians working together was summed up by Ewen Broadbent (1988, p.20), who observed that “they [Defence review outcomes] were brought about by Mr Sandys’ willpower and strong views reinforced by the knowledge of the prime minister’s full support.”

Although the outcomes of Healey’s subsequent defence reviews were arguably no less controversial than Sandys’, the manner in which they were undertaken appears to have been far less divisive. According to Darby (1973), this was due to the primacy of the Treasury in determining the shape of the review, which trumped even the fierce inter-service rivalry that accompanied the process. That said, the efficacy of the process itself was questioned by Chalmers, who reinforced his point with a telling quotation from Richard Crossman, a minister in Harold Wilson’s cabinet:

“I never suspected that when I got inside O.P.D [the Cabinet Subcommittee on Overseas Policy and Defence], and discovered what was actually being done by those

colleagues it would be so crude, so unskilful – a futile attempt to remain Great Britain, one of the three world powers, while slicing away our defences.”

(Crossman, cited by Chalmers, 1985, p. 86)

In sharp contrast to Crossman’s observations about the process that supported Healey’s reviews, the way in which Mason undertook his 1975 review is widely applauded. The MOD’s permanent undersecretary of state (PUS) at the time of the review – Sir Michael Cary – said it was “the best managed review in which I have been involved” (Cary and Foxley-Norris, 1976, p. 1). Greenwood saw both good and bad in the way in which the review was conducted. He recognized that the simultaneous scrutiny of claims, commitments and capabilities – without preconceived cost ceilings or pre-determined effectiveness criteria – testified to a logically sound appreciation of the defence resource allocation problem. That said, he was particularly critical of the lack of analysis surrounding the impact of the review on UK industry. He concluded that “over the last decade the procedural aspects of setting defence priorities has greatly improved” (1975, p. 226).

A stronger CDS supported by a capable central staff within the MOD certainly improved the military contribution to the 1975 review. However, the input from the service chiefs remained relevant, particularly their contribution to, and acceptance, of the ‘Critical Level’, which was defined as “the minimum military contribution to NATO that Britain’s alliance partners would find credible and which the country could, at the same time, afford” (Dodd, 1993, p. 8). Although the adoption of the ‘Critical Level’ was generally seen as positive in 1975, it had a distinctly negative impact six years later, during the Nott review. In 1981, the service chiefs argued that the strategic landscape had not altered since Mason’s review and, therefore, the critical level of capability identified therein could not be reduced further. Nott disagreed, but the service chiefs would not back down. As a result, they were side-lined, and the secretary of state sought advice elsewhere. As Michael Carver (1992, p. 135) observed: “Cm 8288 reflected the views of the scientists and civil servants in the Ministry more than it did those of the chiefs of staff committee.” It can never be known if the full involvement of the service chiefs would have yielded a different result in 1981, but that

is not of consequence. The point here is there can be no guarantee that a principle previously established by a government will be honoured in the present, or the future, especially by a different political party.

Contemporary Events

There is ample evidence to support the view that contemporary events had an impact on decision-makers during all of the Cold War defence reviews. In 1957, repercussions from the Suez Crisis were to the fore. As Baylis (1989, p. 61) noted “the cornerstone of the Macmillan government’s foreign and defence policy after Suez was therefore to try and re-establish close ties with the United States.” During Healey’s tenure, Carver (1992) discusses two events that impacted on UK defence-related decision making, both had a French connection. In March 1966, the French President, Charles de Gaulle, removed France from the military organization of the North Atlantic Alliance (NAA) and subsequently demanded the removal from French territory of all its installations and the withdrawal of all fellow-members’ forces. The other event was Wilson’s decision again to apply to join the European Economic Community. As recognised, the result of both was it became more than ever necessary that the UK should continue to be seen as a committed member of the alliance, by both the US and its fellow European members. To that end, the government had no leeway in fulfilling its extant Treaty obligations, for example the maintenance of agreed troop levels and a tactical air force in North West Europe.

The situation in the mid-1970s was somewhat different. Most of the contemporary events had an impact on the economic situation, which, in turn, impacted defence decision making. An example of this was the strategic instability of the Middle East after the events of 1973 (Chichester and Wilkinson, 1982). However, the ongoing troubles in Northern Ireland, and the resultant strain of maintaining high force levels in the province, was also recognised by Jackson (1990) as a significant reason as to why none of the British Army’s infantry units were disbanded in the 1975 review. Likewise, relevant at this time was the increase in prominence of public perception. Mason recognised the importance of convincing people not only of the need for resources in security, but also of the impact any decisions in the review might

have on jobs. He acknowledged the importance of unions, conveners, and shop stewards – very much an indicator of the times – and summed up a key aspect of this issue with the following:

"... it is one of the paradoxes of defence policy that, once you have attained peace, you soon lose – in the eyes of all too many people – the justification for maintaining military forces, or anything more than a minimal state of readiness for resisting political and military pressures from other countries."

(Mason, 1975, p. 220)

Dorman (2001d) points out that, as a backdrop to the 1981 review, the Cold War was at one of its 'frostiest' moments. The détente initiative of the 1970s had become less and less relevant and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which began in December 1979, had significantly worsened East-West relations. This was evident in the very first paragraph of the Nott review: "Soviet military power, already massive, continues to grow in size, quality and reach, and the Soviet leaders continue to demonstrate their readiness to use it brutally" (Secretary of State for Defence, 1981, p. 3). However, the contemporary event that is most often linked to the Nott review is the following year's conflict in the Falkland Islands. As Dorman (2001d) acknowledges, the actual impact that the conflict had on the implementation of the 1981 review's outcomes is a moot point. What is important is that it did have an impact. Contemporary events, before, during and after a defence review period do affect, in some cases disproportionately, the outcome of that review.

Finance and the Economy

All four defence reviews of the Cold War had to contend with financial and economic issues, and all four ministers approached them in a different way. Sandys recognised that the UK's internal economy and export trade underpinned its military power and global influence. Rees (1989) concluded that Sandys realised the struggle against the Soviet Union would be long and drawn out and, therefore, only a healthy economy would be able to support a prolonged effort. To that end, Sandys broad-

brush measures of success were not numbers driven³²; instead, he predicted that the full implementation of his defence plan would “appreciably reduce the burden on the economy ... releasing badly needed scientists and technicians, for employment in civilian industry. Both exports and capital investment will gain” (Minister of Defence, 1957, p. 10).

Healey also understood the primacy of the economy, confirming that “military strength is of little use if it is achieved at the expense of economic health” (Secretary of State for Defence, 1966, p. 1). However, in his review he elected to set a financial target for defence spending³³ even though, as Chalmers (1985, p. 81) notes, the actual figure was “arbitrary and chosen without any real consideration of the possible implications for commitments and programmes.” Regardless of whether or not monetary target-setting is the best method by which to focus a defence review, Healey had no doubt as to the importance of the financial context when undertaking military decision making, as he explained during a lecture at the RUSI towards the end of his tenure at the MOD:

“If I were to identify one lesson, which a Minister must learn when he is in office, it is the way in which financial constraints must limit a Government’s freedom of choice – even the richest country in the world. No Minister of Defence can hope to acquire every military capability which is desirable on purely defence grounds.”

(Healey and Cross, 1969, p. 15)

The parlous state of the UK economy in the mid-1970s impacted on all of the government’s budgetary decisions, and defence was no exception. Writing shortly after the publication of his 1975 review, Mason (1975, p. 218) observed “the imperatives of economics, no matter how illogical this may be, do in fact exercise a commanding influence over the level of resources which we can devote to defence.” Before the review, rather than set a specific monetary target, the government instead directed that the UK should not spend more on defence than its principal European trading competitors (Dodd, 1993). Nevertheless, as Michael Cary and Christopher Foxley-

³² Cm 124 only included figures for one FY – 1957/58. It forecast a saving of about £280 million, or sixteen point five per cent, against a £1.7 billion defence estimate made in the previous year.

³³ Cm 2901 included a financial target of £2 billion, at 1964 prices, to be reached in 1969/70.

Norris (1976, p. 2), recognised, although this had the advantage of not prejudicing the review's analysis of commitments and priorities, the resulting figures "at least had to come out in the right ball park." Greenwood was similarly sceptical about the lack of an explicit financial limit:

"Getting defence's share of GDP down to around 4-5 per cent was undoubtedly regarded as a clear minimal obligation. Since a 'working projection' of future national income is an integral part of public expenditure planning, this means that, in practice, a budgetary target of about £3,750 million (at 1974 prices), to be achieved by the end of the planning period, was implicit in the exercise."

(Greenwood, 1975, p. 225)

The problem facing Nott was significantly different to his predecessors. Even though, at the time, the government was committed to an annual three per cent increase in real terms to the defence budget, the MOD's ten-year programme was unrealistic and unfunded (Carver, 1992). According to Quinlan, the Deputy Undersecretary of State (policy) at the time, "the programme and the budget were out of sync" (Dorman et al., 2001, p. 36); the purpose of Nott's review was to bring them closer into line. As a result, the reductions in Nott's review were not driven by the state of the economy; instead, as Dorman (2001d, p. 116) asserts - "the cut in the defence budget in terms of the long-term costings was merely money that was hoped for but which was never likely to be realised" – a most salutary caution that presages the outcomes of the 2010 and 2015 SDSRs, which are scrutinised later in this thesis.

With the exception of the Nott review, all of the Cold War defence reviews were predicated on the need to reduce government spending, as a result of the prevailing economic situation. Moreover, although Nott may argue that the poor state of the economy did not directly drive his review, the poor state of budgetary planning in the MOD definitely did (see McIntosh (1990), and Dorman (2001b)). This suggests that finance and the economy are perennial factors in defence reviews. Furthermore, although Sandys, Healey and Mason adopted different methods to cut defence spending, none of them achieved any long-term success, as the figures in Table 5-2 confirm. Although spending did reduce in the immediate aftermath of all three reviews on every occasion, within a few years, it was on the rise again.

Year	Cash by £ million	As % of GDP	As constant (at 2014) US\$ million	% change	
1950	849	6.4	32657		
1951	1149	7.4	38451	+15.1	
1952	1561	9.3	49188	+21.8	
1953	1681	9.8	54648	+10.0	
1954	1569	9.0	51881	-5.3	
1955	1567	8.1	49399	-5.0	
1956	1615	7.7	48485	-1.9	
1957	1574	7.1	46819	-3.5	Sandys' Review
1958	1591	6.8	45592	-2.7	
1959	1589	6.5	45361	-0.5	
1960	1655	6.3	46299	+2.0	
1961	1709	6.1	46254	-0.1	
1962	1814	6.2	46848	+1.3	
1963	1870	6.0	47648	+1.7	
1964	2000	5.8	48939	+2.6	
1965	2091	5.7	49085	+0.3	
1966	2153	5.5	48823	-0.5	Healey's Review
1967	2276	5.5	50071	+2.5	
1968	2332	5.2	49358	-1.4	
1969	2303	4.8	46644	-5.8	
1970	2607	4.6	48045	+2.9	
1971	2815	4.5	47937	-0.2	
1972	3258	4.6	50990	+6.0	
1973	3512	4.4	51159	+0.3	
1974	4160	4.5	51173	0.0	
1975	5571	4.8	53763	+4.8	Mason's Review
1976	6132	4.6	52975	-1.5	
1977	6810	4.4	50663	-4.6	
1978	7616	4.2	52273	+3.1	
1979	9029	4.2	53908	+3.0	
1980	11542	4.5	57483	+6.2	
1981	12144	4.5	56307	-2.1	The Nott Review
1982	14870	4.8	61389	+8.3	
1983	15830	4.8	64119	+4.3	
1984	17511	4.9	67299	+4.7	
1985	18352	4.8	67931	+0.9	
1986	18639	4.5	67092	-1.3	
1987	19269	4.2	66361	-1.1	
1988	19290	3.8	64010	-3.7	
1989	20868	3.6	64574	+0.9	

Table 5-2: Defence spending between 1950 and 1989 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019).

The simple reason why spending did not continue to reduce over time was that the reviews were successful in restraining the growth in defence costs, but failed to reduce the defence budget's total demand on national resources (Chalmers, 1985).

Defence costs grow because the MOD traditionally plans continuously to maintain its extant force laydown to meet its extant commitments. The effect of this was captured by Mason in his review: “the cost of these forces was bound to increase progressively over time to keep pace with the constant development of technology and the growing sophistication of modern weapon systems” (1975, p. 2). Research by Hartley (2016) attributes this growth to defence inflation³⁴ and intergenerational cost escalation³⁵. A recent UK study based on 1955-2011 data estimated intergenerational real cost escalation of almost three per cent for submarines, around four per cent for aircraft carriers and frigates, and some six per cent for combat aircraft and main battle tanks (Davies et al cited in Hartley, 2016). This evidence suggests that defence costs growth is enduring and, as such, will undoubtedly impact on reviews in the future.

Allies

The importance of allies, and in particular the US, is to the fore in all of the Cold War reviews. Although in the 1950s, this included the South East Asia and Baghdad alliances, the UK’s most critical commitment was to NATO and, in particular, keeping the US involved in European security. In this regard, T G James³⁶, confirmed the UK’s development of an independent nuclear deterrent as a vital contribution because “it was a factor which would help keep the Americans involved in Europe, in the sense that they could not afford to be uninvolved as there was a European power with a significant nuclear capability of its own” (Kandiah and Staerck, 1988, p. 33). In 1966, Healey regarded the continuation of the NAA as vital the UK’s survival; similarly, he confirmed the nation would continue to honour its commitments to its Middle East and Far East allies. However, he was also explicit that the UK would “not undertake major operations of war except in co-operation with allies” (Secretary of State for Defence, 1966, p. 7).

³⁴ The average change in pay and prices of goods and services making up the defence budget with quality and quantity held constant.

³⁵ The rising real unit costs between successive generations of new equipment.

³⁶ Principal private secretary of state for air, 1951-55. Assistant secretary, Air Ministry, 1955. Official historian of the RAF.

By 1975, NATO had become the “linchpin of British security [and] the first and overriding charge on the resources available for defence” (Secretary of State for Defence, 1975, p. 7). This was reflected in the government’s willingness to delay the publication of the defence review for three months to allow consultations with NATO allies³⁷. Moreover, the command paper included a section on reactions to NATO’s suggestions, which outlined changes in the details of the original proposals to help alleviate the main points of concern. Mason was not explicit regarding the UK’s capacity to deploy forces unilaterally, stating only that general-purpose forces should be maintained as an insurance against the unforeseen³⁸. In the short period between Mason’s and Nott’s reviews, the prominence of the UK’s commitment to NATO only increased. As in 1975, pressure from within NATO, and especially the US, caused Nott to re-visit a number of his proposals. For example, destroyer and frigate numbers were raised through the use of the standby squadron, and the British Army on the Rhine was not reduced below 55,000 (Dorman, 2001b, p. 118). This led to Admiral of the Fleet Sir Terence Lewin, the CDS at the time, to claim that NATO approval for the outcomes of the defence review was more important than the ability of the elected government to run the defence programme:

“My strongest feeling about the 1981 defence review was that the United Kingdom was making this change in its contribution to NATO unilaterally without consultation at a time when our allies were facing the same financial pressures and we ran the risk of distorting NATO’s capability ... NATO is vital to our future defence. It’s the cornerstone of our defence policy and so this country cannot really have a defence strategy of its own. It’s a NATO strategy.”

(Lewin cited by McIntosh, 1990, p. 119)

The UK armed forces were involved in operations continuously during the Cold War period (see Dannatt (2016)); indeed, at time of writing, 1968 and 2016 were the only two years since the end of World War II during which a UK serviceman was

³⁷ Parliament was informed of the government’s provisional proposals in December 1974; Cm 5976 was not published until March 1975, to allow for an assessment of, and subsequent response to, the proposals by NATO allies.

³⁸ In 1968, the UK had a committed specialist reinforcement forces, originally designed to meet former world-wide commitments, to NATO.

not killed on active service (The Telegraph, 2016). However, whilst many of these conflicts were undertaken unilaterally, the UK's major warfighting experiences leading up to, and at the commencement of, the Cold War – World War I, World War II, the Korean War – had all taken place within alliances. To that end, the significance of allies and alliances in the Cold War defence reviews should not be surprising. Moreover, as the UK's world-wide commitments reduced, and the threat from the Soviet Union increased, the rise in the importance of NATO was inevitable. Of course, the world order has changed considerably from the confrontation of the Cold War, and the threat to the UK homeland is no longer the same; such that the reliance on allies, so vital during this period, is not required for the same reasons today. That is not to say the UK will never again face the same threat as it did during the Cold War, nor that allies are no longer relevant. Crucially, the only way that the UK was able to counter the Soviet threat during the Cold War was as a member of NATO. Similar alliances may be required to respond to similar threats in the future.

Other Factors

Another significant influence on defence reviews of the Cold War, especially in the 1950s and 1960s, was the insistence of the government of the day that the UK continued to be, and must continue to be seen as, a major world power. Macmillan and Sandys made no attempt to reduce the nation's substantial post-World War II commitments (Dockrill, 1989), and Dorman (2001a, p. 12) observed that "despite the experience of defeat at Suez, the government still wanted to maintain the world role and the review focused on the implementation of existing policy."

It is notable that change in government did not bring a change in policy. The Labour government from 1964, like its Conservative predecessor, was also determined to maintain a world military role. Wilson and Healey believed that an economic plan driven by socialist principles could restore the country's prosperity and power, such that all extant military commitments could be retained, providing the burden of defence spending could be offset by more efficient management (Jackson and Bramall, 1992). However, as Dockrill (1989) explains, severe and repeated financial crises over the next two years forced change upon change to declaratory policy; most, if not all, of

which were made with the utmost reluctance. The government accepted the UK's reduced status in the world only because it had no other choice. Today, although few, if any, politicians consider the UK to be a major world power, it still maintains and exploits an expeditionary military role. In the eyes of many, it still has 'a place in the world'. What that place is, and how it is perceived by current and future politicians, will certainly have a bearing on future defence reviews.

The impact of political ambition on defence reviews has already been highlighted, and there is also evidence that intra-party politics played a part across the Cold War reviews. In particular, both Healey and Mason had to cope with dissent from their fellow MPs and the wider Labour party. The Labour government's increased majority after the 1966 general election enabled its back-benchers to become far more vocal in their opposition to the government's determination to maintain Britain's world-wide role and retain its independent nuclear deterrent (see Chalmers (1985) and Jackson and Bramall (1992)). Darby (1973, p. 322) also highlights this issue, pointing to MP Michael Foot's querying the validity of his own government's defence savings by saying "Healey's £100 million turns up like a free coupon in every package." Nine years later, large sections of the Labour Party did not believe that the 1975 review had got the balance right between the conflicting pressure of security interests and economic growth, and pressed for larger cuts in defence spending. Prior to the 1974 General Election, a resolution had been overwhelmingly passed at the Labour Party conference calling for cuts of at least £1 billion a year to defence spending (Mason, 1999). Even after the 1975 review, Labour's National Executive's defence study group suggested that a further twenty per cent cut in planned defence spending was needed to fulfil their manifesto target (Mason, 1975). Michael Chichester and John Wilkinson (1982) believed Mason did well to withstand the pressures from within his party and maintain a credible outcome.

During the Cold War period, one minister resigned following reviews – Christopher Mayhew (Minister for the Navy) – together with the First Sea Lord (1SL) in 1966, because of Healey's decision to invest in land-based airpower over the carrier-based option. In addition, Keith Speed (Parliamentary Undersecretary of State) was

sacked after he spoke out against the Chief Scientific Advisor's role in the 1981 review during a constituency speech. However, neither action forced a change in policy, and although Speed's action was popular within the RN, it spawned the fictitious but humorous order "Less (K)Notts, more Speed" (Jolly, 2011). According to Jackson and Bramall (1992, p. 370) Mayhew's resignation caused "scarcely a ripple in Westminster." Even though the internal pressures highlighted did not result in a significant change of direction, they could not be ignored by the government of the day. Moreover, the nature of the UK's parliamentary system, and the diverse make-up of all political parties within it, suggests that intra-party politics is an enduring factor affecting defence reviews.

5.2 Early Expeditionary Defence Reviews

Many of the factors that impacted on the defence reviews of the Cold War were also prevalent in the defence reviews of the Early Expeditionary period. That said, analysis suggests that their details, and the degree to which they affected reviews after 1990, were not always consistent with that which had gone before. Accordingly, this section focuses on similar factors that impacted Cold War reviews but avoids repetition by analysing cases only where a factor's detail, or the degree to which it affected a review, is different.

Policy

Throughout the Cold War, the predominant threat to the security of the UK from the Soviet Union, and the deterrence policy that countered it, did not change. However, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, together with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and subsequent disbanding of the Warsaw Pact two years later, completely transformed the landscape on which UK defence policy was constructed. As Self (2010, p. 171) observed, "the bipolar tensions of the Cold War, which had so decisively shaped British policy objectives for over forty years were now a thing of the past." The certainty of the Cold War threat had given way to an uncertainty that defence planners struggled to accommodate. As Freedman (1999, p. 14) suggested "without a Soviet threat, 'Options for Change' was faced with the awkward question of whether there was anything left that the country really needed to defence against." Rather than

respond to this situation with a major change to defence policy, the Conservative government opted for a more incrementalistic stance (see Baylis (1975)), introducing an approach based on the ability to adapt to change, maintaining force structures with the flexibility and mobility to respond to new circumstances (Secretary of State for Defence, 1991).

The Options for Change response to the removal of the Soviet threat to the security of the homeland began the transition towards a capability-based, rather than threat-based, defence policy (Dorman, 2001a). It also acknowledged that choice had been re-introduced into defence policymaking. As Phillip Sabin (1993a, p. 271) pointed out, “more demanding missions than protecting British territory have now become much more *discretionary* than hitherto.” The use of the armed forces for discretionary activity was certainly a theme favoured by the Labour government that came to power in 1997. Writing prior to SDR 98, Defence Secretary George Robertson (1997, pp. 3-4) confirmed “we believe there is a consensus for using our military assets to support the United Kingdom’s role as a *force for good* in the world.” This approach underpinned SDR 98, which confirmed the expeditionary focus of the UK’s military strategy (Codner, 1998). By default, it also affirmed the aspiration for the UK to re-establish a global role.

The defence roles of the Cold War clearly did not align with the policy that was developing during the Early Expeditionary period. The first change to defence roles, outlined in Table 5-3 was made by Rifkind a year after Options for Change. The new roles reinforced the government’s strategic aims to make the armed forces more mobile and flexible and less focused upon a single contingency of defence against the former Soviet Union. They were, however, vague and lacked real guidance for defence planners (see Sabin (1993a)). In contrast, SDR 98 summarised future security priorities, both within Europe/NATO and outside Europe, and from this formed eight distinct missions, which fully reflected the UK’s continuing commitment to increased military activity at reach.

Defence Review	Defence Roles

Options for Change 1991	The Options for Change command paper did not explicitly state any roles for defence. However, the 1992 Statement of the Defence Estimates (Secretary of State for Defence, 1992, p. 9) introduced the following: • <i>To ensure the protection and security of the UK and our dependent territories, even when there is no major external threat.</i> • <i>To insure against any major external threat to the UK and our allies.</i> • <i>To contribute to promoting the UK's wider security interests through the maintenance of international peace and stability.</i>
SDR 1998	Robertson (1998a, p. 13) presented a completely new set of eight defence missions, based on the government's security priorities of the future: • <i>Peacetime Security.</i> • <i>Security of the Overseas Territories.</i> • <i>Defence Diplomacy.</i> • <i>Support to Wider British Interests.</i> • <i>Peace Support and Humanitarian Operations.</i> • <i>Regional Conflict outside the NATO area.</i> • <i>Regional Conflict inside the NATO area.</i> • <i>Strategic Attack on NATO.</i>

Table 5-3: Early Expeditionary Defence Roles.

What the armed forces needed to accomplish during the Early Expeditionary period was no longer easily identifiable; moreover, it was also subject to change over time as a result of the views and aspirations of successive governments. This meant the UK's strategic 'ends' were no longer fixed and, crucially, strategic decision making was now subject to external factors that had only impacted on 'ways' and 'means' during the Cold War. This significantly altered the Early Expeditionary period's 'ends' equals 'ways' plus 'means' equation. The introduction of variables to the left-hand side of the equation greatly increased the complexity on the right-hand side. That is to say the potential for many more 'ends' increased the number of 'ways' and 'means' that had to be considered, as well as the balance between them, in order to solve the equation. The resultant calculation that faced defence planners was, therefore, substantially more complex, to the point of being potentially unsolvable.

Process

The various reviews of the Expeditionary Period were undertaken in considerably different ways. In 1990/91, the government's narrative was that Options for Change was a two-phased, MOD-led process: the first being an analysis by

ministers; the second an evaluation of the resultant broad assumptions against a number of options for each capability area and defence role (Mottram, 1991). However, this opinion was not shared by all, with the alternative view being that it was a Treasury-led pursuit of expenditure reductions (see Perkins (1992), and Self (2010)). In contrast, in 1994, the Defence Cost Study process attracted far less controversy. Indeed, Dodd (1994) described a relatively simple construct of a Secretary of State-led steering group, giving direction to a Minister of State for Defence Procurement-chaired executive group, overseeing thirty-three separate studies, which each sought to examine a particular support area across services lines. He also identified that the Defence Costs Study report maintained that every recommendation was examined against one major criterion: would it directly or indirectly reduce the operational capability of the armed forces. If the judgement was made that a proposal would damage the operational capability of the armed forces, it was rejected. Both of these reviews were carried out by a Conservative government, which remembered the acrimony that had surrounded the Nott review, and were determined not to repeat it (see Dodd (1994), and McInnes (1993)). This is more evidence that defence reviews are inherently political in nature.

The processes that the Conservative government of the early 1990s used to underpin its reviews were generally similar to those used in the Cold War; however, the Labour government that followed was prepared to adopt a far more innovative approach. In the first instance, it established a policy baseline, in conjunction with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). This was followed with an “analysis of defence needs and the drawing up of a force structure to meet them” (Dodd, 1997, p. 9). The work involved a wide range of academics, industrialists, civil servants, politicians and opinion formers. It was also supported by a number of seminars held around the country. Colin McInnes (1998) recorded some telling observations regarding the SDR 98 process. In the first instance, he recognised how easy it was to be cynical about the consultative approach adopted, as it was unclear how much influence those external contributions had in determining specific policy outcomes. He also suggests that those within the armed forces, but not involved with the review process, suspected that “when the tough decisions over resources and force structures

were made, it would be 'business as usual', with civil servants and the three services fighting protracted bureaucratic battles within the MOD and perhaps with other Whitehall departments (especially the Treasury)." His conclusion, however, was most relevant, as he wrote:

"What has happened is that the culture of defence policy has been opened up. It is no longer solely the preserve of military officers, civil servants and government ministers; decisions are no long simply promulgations by Whitehall. Of course, the extent to which the process has been opened up is limited, but a start has been made, defence is becoming more open and accountable, and the culture is not ruled by the assumption that Whitehall knows not only what is best but what can be legitimately discussed as part of the defence debate."

(McInnes, 1998, p. 830)

The openness and inclusivity of SDR 98 marked a significant deviation from previous Cold War reviews, to the extent that, at the time, the novel features surrounding its conduct received more attention than its findings, which were considered rather conventional (Dorman, 2001a). Furthermore, the time taken to complete the review – fourteen months – was more than double the anticipated period, and considerably longer than all of its predecessors. Increasing the number and diversity of contributors was bound to lengthen the review's timeline; however, McInnes (1998) also recognised the sheer scale and complexity of the review as a contributing factor. This confirms the implications of strategic 'ends' being impacted by factors highlighted above. It also confirms the considerable amount of time needed to complete such a wide-reaching and strategic review, time which politicians may not always be willing or able to give.

Finance and the Economy

In 1991, King recognised that the dissolution of the Soviet Union and disbanding of the Warsaw Pact allowed the government to "make some reductions in defence but only in a careful and prudent way" (Secretary of State for Defence, 1991, p. 6). In reality, talk of a 'peace dividend' started almost before the last of the of the Berlin Wall's concrete blocks had hit the ground (see Greenwood (1991) and Dodd (1993)). However, although this strategic shock was the obvious driver for the Options

for Change process, the impact of financial decisions taken during the 1980s was also a significant factor. Sabin (1993a) opined that defence spending had fallen by roughly ten per cent in real terms between FYs 1984/5 and 1990/91, although, as detailed in Table 5-4, data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) suggest the figure was closer to five per cent.

Year	Cash by £ million	As % of GDP	As constant (at 2014) US\$ million	% change	
1990	22287	3.6	64666	+0.1	Options for Change
1991	24380	3.7	65413	+1.1	
1992	22850	3.5	61097	-7.1	
1993	22686	3.2	58306	-4.8	Defence Costs Study
1994	22490	3.0	56702	-2.8	
1995	21439	2.8	53183	-6.6	
1996	22330	2.6	52865	-0.6	SDR 98
1997	21612	2.5	51200	-3.3	
1998	22477	2.4	51485	+0.6	
1999	22548	2.3	51421	-0.1	SDR – A New Chapter Delivering Security in a Changing World
2000	23552	2.3	52766	+2.5	
2001	24874	2.3	54901	+3.9	
2002	26991	2.4	58458	+6.1	
2003	29338	2.4	62661	+6.7	
2004	29524	2.3	63392	+1.2	
2005	30603	2.3	63922	+0.8	
2006	31454	2.2	64334	+0.6	
2007	33486	2.2	66370	+3.1	
2008	36431	2.4	69332	+4.3	
2009	37425	2.5	70679	+1.9	

Table 5-4: Defence spending between 1990 and 2009 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019).

Nevertheless, the seriousness of the defence funding situation was confirmed by the service chiefs' instigation of an in-house review because, in conjunction with CDS, they believed that "the procurement programme had become so far removed from the rest of policy that a review was needed to bring it back into line and force the government to make some politically difficult decisions" (Dorman, 2001a, p. 21). As the 1990s progressed, the UK's worsening economic position forced the Conservative government to re-examine its defence commitments, even as it was still in the process of major restructuring resulting from Options for Change. The MOD's response was 'Front Line First – The Defence Costs Study', which sought to find the necessary

savings without reductions to frontline capabilities. The financial influence over the study was confirmed by the Secretary of State, who announced that the subsequent report was “the culmination of a major exercise to review the possibilities for reducing costs and increasing efficiency across the whole of the MOD’s support and administrative activities as [Defence’s] contribution to the Government’s campaign to contain public expenditure” (Rifkind, 1994, p. 1).

Although SDR 98 did not explicitly state the need for financial savings, it was undertaken within the constraint of the Labour government’s commitment to maintain the previous Conservative government’s spending plans for its first two years in office (see politicalresources.net (2012b)). However, although academic reflection on SDR 98 is largely positive (see McInnes (1998), Codner (1998) and Self (2010)), as Dodd (1997, p. 18) observed “whatever its construction, the defence review takes place, as with any previous review, within a resource context.” The Labour government in 1998 also faced the same problem as its predecessors. As Crum Ewing (1998, p. 326) recognised “at the very heart of the political arguments about the SDR lies the push and pull between the need for a sufficient defence budget and the need to contain that budget in order to provide for other desired public expenditure purpose.” Freedman (1999) saw that this was further exacerbated by the lack of military experience amongst Labour MPs, with their interests being overwhelmingly in domestic affairs. He suggested they were not hostile in the Secretary of State’s battle to defend his budget, but indifferent.

The financial and economic influences on the defence reviews of the Early Expeditionary period were different to those experienced during the Cold War; nevertheless, they still had a major impact on their outcomes. In the current climate of ongoing national austerity, it is difficult to envisage a point in time when defence spending will not be subject to the most intense scrutiny from both within government and from think-tanks, academia, the media, and the country at large. As a result, it is almost inevitable that financial and economic influences will play a part in future defence reviews.

Allies

The Early Expeditionary period saw the focus on the defence of the homeland reduce to the point where, in 2003, the government considered there to be no major conventional military threats to the UK or NATO (Secretary of State for Defence, 2003, p. 7). Nevertheless, this did not diminish the significance of working with allies and, in particular NATO. Christopher Bellamy (1992, p. 448) explained the rationale in the simplest of terms: “no country, apart from the United States, or possibly Russia, can defend all of its interests alone. The only way to achieve these islands’ security nowadays is as part of an alliance. So collective security, under NATO, the UN or whatever, is the key.” Moreover, as this period experienced the expansion of NATO from sixteen nations at the end of the Cold War, to twenty-eight by 2009³⁹, successive reviews re-affirmed its prominence in UK defence planning. Following SDR 98, John Spellar, the then Undersecretary of State for Defence, asserted that “we cannot achieve all our foreign and security policy aims on our own. Our collective security continues to be based on our membership of NATO” (1998a, p. 31). Five years later, the ‘Delivering Security in a Changing World’ command paper confirmed “the UK recognises the pre-eminence of NATO as the alliance upon which Europe and North America depends for collective defence and global crisis management” (Secretary of State for Defence, 2003, p. 6). Even in its expanding expeditionary role, allies and alliances continued to be an influencing factor on UK defence policy.

5.3 Summary

Analysis of defence reviews of the Cold War and Early Expeditionary period provides insights and evidence on how external factors shaped the reviews’ outcomes. Furthermore, much of this evidence suggests enduring factors that are highly likely to impact on reviews in the future. In the first instance, students of defence studies may often be tempted to view this subject from a purely military perspective; however, if defence policy in the round is considered in conjunction with broader government decision making, it becomes apparent that defence reviews will always be subject to

³⁹ The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined in 1999, followed by Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004, and finally Albania and Croatia in 2009.

political ambition. Both the timing of a review, and the decisions that flow from it, have to fit into the wider political landscape, as seen by the government of the day. As a result, a decision that may appear incomprehensible when viewed purely through a military lens, makes perfect sense from a political perspective. The need to appease rebellious backbenchers, the strengthening of support in marginal constituencies, and the preservation of a national defence industry are all examples of political influences prevalent during this period. This political primacy also extends to the manner in which defence reviews are carried out. Whilst the overall trend towards more open government, begun by the Labour Party's pledge in its 1997 general election manifesto to introduce a freedom of information act, is unlikely to be reversed in the immediate future, there is no guarantee that future reviews will be as diverse or inclusive as SDR 98. Moreover, there is no guarantee that the extant, quinquennial review process will endure. For example, before the 2015 General Election, the Labour Shadow Defence Secretary indicated that his party had no wish to be constrained by the existing defence and security review timetable (Coaker cited by Cornish and Dorman, 2015). Defence planners may have a much longer wait than expected for the next review, and, when it comes, the manner in which it is undertaken may bear little resemblance to the current and familiar SDSR process.

The pre-eminence of the political over the military will always have the potential to introduce uncertainty, in both the timing and process of future reviews. Concomitant to this is the lesson that must be learned from the adoption of the 'Critical Level' by Mason in 1975, and its abandonment by Nott only six years later. There can be no guarantee that a past principle established by government will be honoured at a future review, especially by a different political party.

The removal of the single threat to the security of the UK, brought about by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the disbandment of the Warsaw Pact, demanded a complete re-think of the deterrence policy that had endured for the duration of the Cold War. The resultant Early Expeditionary defence roles unfixed the nation's strategic ends and made defence planning substantially more complex. Analysis later in the thesis will suggest an answer as to whether or not this situation is likely to

extend into the future, and for how long. At this stage, however, it must be acknowledged that when events and influences impact on 'ends' as well as 'ways' and 'means', the complexity of the 'ends' equals 'ways' plus 'means' equation increases markedly.

Economic considerations have been at the heart of every defence review of this period, with the possible exception of SDR 98. This will undoubtedly endure because, as Healey confirmed as long ago as 1969, financial constraints must limit a Government's freedom of choice, and that includes decisions on its policies for defence. From a purely military perspective, it is easy to argue that the nation's defence policy should be determined by the threats it faces, and the nature of those threats (Younger, 1976); however, the reality is somewhat different. Writing after the 1975 review, Mason asserted that "we can only provide for the purpose of defence – as with anything else in the Government's programme – only what we can *afford* to provide" (Mason, 1975, p. 218). Of course, the word 'afford' is very flexible, and will mean different things at different times. When the economy is buoyant, it is easier for the government to spend more on defence; conversely, if the defence need becomes more pressing, it will rise on the government's list of priorities, so more money can be made available to fund military capability. The most obvious example of the latter during this period was the increased defence spending of the early 1950s, which supported the rearmament programme driven by the Korean War (see Table 5-2). That said, there will always be a limit, above which a government simply cannot continue to fund defence. As Arthur Hockaday (1979, p. 4) points out "it is no good mounting a military effort which bankrupts the society that it is designed to protect. We did that during World War II, because we had to; but it is not something you can do in peacetime." This limit was arguably reached in the mid-1970s, as Jackson (1990, p. 134) observed "such was the plight of the British economy that the Soviet military threat has to be discounted as the lesser of two evils facing the government: risks had to be taken with national security to re-establish the national economy." Whether or not a more recent example of this situation occurred after the global economic crisis in 2008 will be examined later in this thesis. Notwithstanding this, regardless of whether its impact is

positive or negative, the influence of the economy will always be prevalent during a defence review.

By definition, contemporary events will always be taking place immediately prior to, during, and in the aftermath of a defence review. These may be 'strategic-shocks' (for example, the Suez Crisis or the Falklands Conflict), which are remembered long into the future and have a very obvious impact on decision making at the time. However, they may also be lower-profile occurrences, which are easily forgotten but nevertheless focused the minds of decision makers at a specific moment in time. An example was King's Options for Change strapline: "... forces which while smaller, are well equipped, properly trained *and housed* [italics added], and well-motivated" (Secretary of State for Defence, 1991, p. 6). The 'and housed' was included as a result of actions forced on the government at the time, in response to extensive criticism in the media over the woeful standard of married quarters that some service personnel were having to live in. In a year that was considered "the most momentous for defence since the end of the Second World War" (1991, p. 5), it is unlikely that defence planners anticipated having to include a reference to service accommodation in the Secretary of State's introduction to the statement on the defence estimates. It may be impossible to predict the future, but it is possible to predict that future contemporary events will regularly impact on defence reviews.

A final consideration from defence reviews between 1945 and 2010 is the impact of the personalities involved in the associated decision making and, in particular, the views of those in power regarding the UK's place in the world. The strong-willed Sandys and Nott imposed themselves on their reviews, which directly impacted the roles that other relevant actors could play. For example, in both the 1957 and 1981 reviews, the influence of the service chiefs was limited (see Cooper and Tuzo (1983), and Navias (1989)). A further example is Healey's military experience – he saw service in North Africa and Italy in the Royal Engineers. This was considered by some commentators as being a definitive advantage during his time as Secretary of State for Defence (see Broadbent (1988) and Jackson and Bramall (1992)); however, that very experience would have had an effect on his decision making, regardless of if it was

negative or positive. Both Conservative and Labour governments in the 1950s and 1960s saw the nation as fulfilling a world role. Furthermore, although retrenchment may have made this expectation less obvious in the latter stages of the Cold War, it certainly re-emerged during the Early Expeditionary period, most obviously with the Labour government's 'force for good' approach to foreign policy post-1997. An examination of the extent to which governments since 2010 have continued this theme is conducted in the next chapter. There can, however, be little doubt that both the character and the experience of politicians involved in the development of UK defence policy will continue to have an impact on defence reviews.

Chapter 6: Strategic Defence and Security Reviews – A New Approach

In 2009, Cornish and Dorman (2009a, p. 261) concluded that “defence policy, planning and analysis in the United Kingdom ha[d] reached a state of organizational, bureaucratic and intellectual decay.” In the same journal article, they also explored a ‘four-part pattern’ for defence reviews of the Cold War and Early Expeditionary Period, none of which, they argued, had proved to be successful in anything but the short term. However, as the opening decade of the twenty-first century was drawing to a close, a new approach to defence reviews was taking shape. This approach been developed by the incumbent Labour government through a series of reforms aimed at bringing together the plans and objectives of all departments, agencies and forces responsible for national security. The reforms covered strategic, structural, resource and legislative elements, and culminated in the production of the UK’s first NSS in 2008. This all-inclusive approach to national security signalled that the government no longer intended to consider principal defence matters in isolation; furthermore, all three major political parties confirmed a similar approach in their 2010 general election manifesto (see The Conservative & Unionist Party (2010a), The Labour Party (2010), and The Liberal Democrat Party (2010)). The Cold War and Early Expeditionary Period defence review construct would be consigned to the past.

This chapter investigates the new approach to defence reviews that resulted from the convergence of all government-related national security plans and objectives outlined above. It begins with an analysis of NSS 08 and NSS 09, focusing in particular on those aspects of the strategies that directly influenced the new approach to defence matters⁴⁰. It then considers NSS 10 and SDSR 10. However, in the same manner as the previous chapter, rather than focusing simply on the actual outcomes of the SDSR, it uses the thesis’ specific research questions to help unlock the thesis’ general research

⁴⁰ Taken from the terminology used by the Conservative Party in its pre-election publication on national security – A Resilient Nation – the approach became known as a ‘strategic defence and security review’.

question. Most significantly, it seeks to uncover the associated factors that had a bearing on the 2010 SDSR and why they had the impact that they had.

6.1 Introducing a National Security Strategy, 2008 and 2009

The need for the UK government to produce a strategy for national security is a relatively recent compulsion. The first document of its kind – ‘The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom: Security in an independent world’ was published in March 2008, during Gordon Brown’s first year as Prime Minister (Her Majesty’s Government, 2008). By contrast, the US’s first NSS was published twenty-one years previously, under the presidency of Ronald Reagan (President of the United States of America, 1987), albeit when a legal requirement to do so had been placed on the president under the Goldwater-Nichols Defense Department Reorganisation Act of 1986 (NSSarchive, 2017).

Only fifteen months after the publication of the 2008 NSS, the UK government produced an update, titled ‘Security for the Next Generation’ (Her Majesty’s Government, 2009). This document ran to 112 pages (over fifty more than its predecessor), and also included a foreword by the Prime Minister, suggesting an increasing level of attention at the very top of government. In trying to determine what prompted this demand for a NSS, Richards (2012) suggests that, during the Cold War, national security in the UK was framed squarely around the expansionist Soviet military and nuclear threat, which impelled a strong military conception of security, whereby “a balance of hard power was the underpinning principle of national security” (2012, p. 8). This was reflected in annual statements on the defence estimates and, less frequently, in defence reviews (see Secretary of State for Defence (1966), Secretary of State for Defence (1975), Secretary of State for Defence (1981), and Secretary of State for Defence (1991)). Moreover, the concept was so obvious and uncontested that it did not require any additional amplification. This does not imply the non-existence of other pressures on national security during the Cold War; environmental concerns like global warming were clearly an issue long before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (see, for example, Sawyer (1972)). It was simply that the perceived nature of the Soviet threat was so great that the majority of ‘security-related’

capability and resources were prioritised to counter it. Richards posits that the demise of the Soviet Union allowed the security focus to be re-directed, and other pressures could be considered and prioritised, with resources to mitigate them now accessible. This aligns with the conclusion drawn in the analysis of past defence reviews in chapter five concerning the fixed nature of 'ends' element of the 'ends' equals 'ways' plus 'means' equation during the Cold War, versus the variable nature of the 'ends' from the Early Expeditionary period onwards.

However, Richards also recognises that security is "a constructed concept for any given state at any given time" (2012, p. 14), and considerations such as political realities and media interest play a major part in determining which issues are securitised. Accordingly, he argues that it was as much these factors, as it was the removal of the priority to counter the existential Soviet threat, that led to the broadening of securitised issues beyond hard power concerns and into civil and environmental dimensions. This is reflected from the outset in the UK's inaugural NSS as, following the almost obligatory recognition of the government's Hobbesian responsibility to provide security for the nation and its citizens, the opening paragraphs confirm that the Cold War threats had been replaced by a "diverse but interconnected set of threats and risks" brought about by a "more complex and unpredictable set of [international] relationships" (Her Majesty's Government, 2008, p. 3).

In his study of 'the risk society at war', Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen (2006) posits that the standards by which we measure our security have changed since the end of the Cold War. In his view, a threat⁴¹ could be understood in a means-ends rational framework – it was measurable and finite – therefore, it could be defeated to achieve security. However, he argues that "today's strategic agenda is about 'risks' rather than threats"; and, furthermore, "from a risk perspective a danger is much less computable than from a threat perspective" (2006, p. 2). As a result, a risk scenario demands a policy proposal that details the prevention of the scenario's occurrence. Rasmussen

⁴¹ Which he defines as 'a specific danger which can be precisely identified and measured on the basis of the capabilities an enemy has to realise a hostile intent'.

concluded that such a policy proposal cannot achieve perfect security because, although good policy can treat, tolerate, transfer, terminate or take the opportunity of a risk (Permanent Secretary for Defence, 2017), new risks will always arise as an effect of defeating the original risk. There is no clear evidence as to whether or not Rasmussen's opinions influenced UK government thinking; Sandra Bell (2007), for example, suggested that the commencement of national risk management was a response to vulnerabilities brought about by our interconnected society, reinforced by the nationwide crisis triggered by the fuel price protests of 2000. However, it is known that the government had been developing a risk based approach to emergency management since 2005, when it undertook its first National Risk Assessment (NRA) – a classified assessment of the risks facing the UK (The Cabinet Office, 2008). Furthermore, NSS 08 was accompanied by another first – the National Risk Register (NRR) (The Cabinet Office, 2008). What is clear, therefore, is that the UK government opted for a risk management methodology to underpin its first NSS.

Risk Management Approach

The final chapter of NSS 08 explains its risk assessment process. In short, the NRA balanced historical and scientific data with the professional judgements of experts to analyse the risks to the UK. Analysis was carried out in three stages: identification of risks; assessment of the likelihood of the risks occurring and their impact if they do; and comparison of the risks. The NRR then summarised the risks into three categories: accidents; natural events (collectively known as hazards); and malicious attacks (known as threats). In this way, the NRR set out the government's assessment of "the likelihood and potential impact of a range of different risks that may directly affect the UK" (The Cabinet Office, 2008, p. 3). This allowed the authors of the NSS to attempt to determine how the government would "address and manage this diverse though interconnected set of security challenges and underlying drivers, both immediately and in the longer term, to safeguard the nation, its citizens, our prosperity and our way of life" (Her Majesty's Government, 2008, p. 3).

The basic risk management process used to underpin early NRAs and NRRs aligns reasonably well with both national and international direction on the subject

(see Institute of Risk Management (2010), and International Organisation for Standardisation (2018)). That said, the focus of the risks considered – in duration, location and type – all present problems when applied to a strategy that drives military capability decision making. Impacts and likelihoods of risks were assessed over a five-year period, which, given the planning capacity of the majority of the register’s target audience (for example, other government departments, local government and authorities, emergency services), is a logical timeframe. However, given that defence decision making is informed by analysis that projects significantly further into the future, for example the sixth edition of the MOD’s Global Strategic Trends publication describes a strategic concept for defence and security looking out to the middle of the century (Development Concepts & Doctrine Centre, 2018), a five-year risk analysis period is not complementary. Therefore, it cannot always be relied upon to provide sufficient detail to inform procurement decisions, especially for military capability that may remain in service for decades.

Furthermore, the 2008 NRR was “intended to capture the range of emergencies that might have a major impact on all, or significant parts of, the UK” (The Cabinet Office, 2008, p. 3) so overseas concerns were specifically excluded. This is in direct contrast to the government’s extant direction for defence at the time – Delivering Security in a Changing World – which included six assumptions around expeditionary operations, and only one concerning the safety and security of the UK (Secretary of State for Defence, 2004). As a result, the major risk groupings within the NRR (natural events, major incidents, and malicious attacks) covered only a small part of the military tasks against which defence planners were making capability-based decisions at the time.

Without knowing the actual output of the NRA that influenced the 2008 NRR, (the report remains classified), a complete assessment of the government’s first attempt at applying risk management principles to the formulation of national strategy cannot be made. That said, given the available information, it is clear that the output from this approach, as articulated in the 2008 NRR, did not provide sufficient detail to underpin a complete national strategy, due to its limited timeframe and internal focus.

Analysis of the 2008 and 2009 National Security Strategies

The very first sentence of NSS 08 re-affirmed the commitment that “providing security for the nation and for its citizens remains the most important responsibility of government” (Her Majesty's Government, 2008, p. 3). It went on to assert that, in the post-Cold War era, the UK faced a diverse but interconnected set of threats and risks, and confirmed the aim of the NSS was to address and manage them. The introductory chapter concluded with the acknowledgement of a single, overarching national security objective of “protecting the United Kingdom and its interests, enabling its people to go about their daily lives freely and with confidence, in a more secure, stable, just and prosperous world” (Her Majesty's Government, 2008, p. 5).

The executive summary of NSS 09 justified its existence by recognising that “the fast changing nature of the security challenges ... required an ongoing evaluation and adaption of our approach [to national security]” (Her Majesty's Government, 2009, p. 5). It also fulfilled a previous commitment to present regular updates of the strategy to Parliament and the public. It re-affirmed the single national security objective from NSS 08, but also re-prioritised the extant risks and introduced new ones: for example, maritime security and cyber security. In addition, it underpinned the government's approach to national security through a new ‘National Strategic Framework’, which focused UK actions on threat drivers (the ‘why?’), threat actors (the ‘who?’ and the ‘what?’) and threat domains (the ‘how?’)

The simplicity of a single objective for national security is appealing, although there is always the danger of constructing it in such a broad manner, that it becomes meaningless. The attempt in NSS 08 did provide a recognisable goal, albeit the subjective nature of the language used makes it a very wide goal that would be difficult to miss! In addition, the loose language around the aim of the strategy is unhelpful: simply addressing and managing the threats and risks facing a nation does not constitute a national strategy. However, as Gray (2010a) points out, strategy links ends, ways and means. Although not obviously signposted, the document did have an end (the objective) and, in its chapters on guiding principles and the UK's response, it

did attempt to articulate ways⁴² and means. In addition, through the medium of security challenges, i.e. the threats and risks, it attempted to join them all up. That said, it made no attempt to prioritise, even though the most cursory analysis of the risks identified would suggest a dearth of resources to deliver the means. It is difficult to align either the construct or the contents of the document with any of the definitions of strategy considered in the literature review, but that does not automatically make it unfit for purpose. NSS 08 explicitly stated that the government's view of national security had expanded beyond protection from attacks by other states; moreover, it saw the need to bring together objectives and plans from all departments, agencies and forces to protect it. Accordingly, the consequence of this new approach could only be less focus on the roles and responsibilities of the armed forces and their military capability.

NSS 09 did not benefit from an update of the NRR. It clearly recognised, however, that the world had changed in the fifteen months since its predecessor had been published. For example, it devoted two complete pages to its assessment of the implications for national security of the 2008 global economic downturn. This swift acknowledgement of change that affected national security justified, in part, the requirement to create and regularly update the strategy. Moreover, the focus of the strategy was expanded to consider a twenty-year horizon, and the new National Strategic Framework provided a mechanism for government thinking on national security to keep pace with the rapidly evolving global context. That said, it did not address the prioritisation concerns from the NSS 08 document and the need for an executive summary suggests that it was too large and unwieldy to be regularly referred to by either decision-makers or defence planners.

Sharon L Caudle and Stephan De Spiegeleire (2010, p. 19) considered the NSSs produced by the Labour government in 2008 and 2009 to be "a step in the right direction in addressing the strategic environment of contemporary times." As a first attempt at addressing national security through the medium of risk management, NSS

⁴² For example: 'Wherever possible, we will tackle security challenges early' and 'Overseas, we will favour a multilateral approach'.

08 was a reasonable attempt, despite its limited timeline, inward-looking focus and lack of prioritisation. NSS 09 resolved the limited timeline issue, and offered a greater global focus, although it too overlooked the necessity to prioritise. However, by expanding into accidents and natural events, both documents offered less direction on military matters than the MOD might have been expecting. Furthermore, evidence suggests that, as a result, it was not considered to be a significant influence on defence planning. Specifically, the MOD's unclassified defence plan for 2008-2012, completed in June 2008, did not contain a single reference to the NSS, published three months earlier. Instead, it drew upon requirements detailed in an internal, Defence Strategic Guidance document, and also included twenty references to the 2007 CSR (Secretary of State for Defence, 2008). The most significant influence on defence planners of the time charged with the creation and maintenance of military capability appears to have been their department's financial settlement, rather than a macro-level, broadly targeted, and cross-government strategy document.

6.2 The First Strategic Defence and Security Review

The 2010 general election was dominated by the economy, education and employment (The Telegraph, 2010), with debate around defence issues focused predominantly on operations in Afghanistan (Brown et al., 2010). Indeed, the relevant 'issues' link on the BBC News website was titled "Afghanistan – Defence" (BBC News, 2010b). Away from current operations, all of the main political parties promised to focus on the welfare of servicemen/women and their families, and to retain the nuclear deterrent (Dorman, 2010). In addition, even before party manifestos were promulgated, both the Conservatives and Labour were committed to a defence review immediately after the election (see The Conservative & Unionist Party (2010b), and Secretary of State for Defence (2010)). The outcome of the election was a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government, which, on its very first day in office, established a National Security Council (NSC) and appointed an NSA (Devanny and Harris, 2014). Thereafter, it commenced the Conservative's manifesto commitment to undertake a SDSR, and went on to publish a new NSS on 19 October 2010 (Gov.uk, 2010b) and an associated SDSR the following day (Gov.uk, 2010d).

The 2010 National Security Strategy

SDSR 10 was the first review to take place in conjunction with the development of an NSS. NSS 10 was constructed around a risk management methodology, in much the same manner as its 2008 and 2009 predecessors, although there were also some noticeable differences. The NSSs published under the Labour government were both aligned to the 2008 NRR and its underpinning NRA; however, the new government chose to undertake a separate National *Security* Risk Assessment (NSRA) to prioritise “all major disruptive risks to our national interest, which are of sufficient scale or impact so as to require action from government and/or which have an ideological, international or political dimension” (Her Majesty's Government, 2010b, p. 37). Cornish and Dorman (2012) believed that the 2010 NSS's risk management approach was a considerable improvement on what had gone before, in that it was able to identify and prioritise threats and challenges to the UK and its interests, and then use the outcome as the basis for government decision making and response. In the same vein, the JCNSS welcomed the development of the NSRA, but cautioned that it should be used as “a support for, and not substitute for, good judgement” (Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, 2012, p. 11). The Committee also reinforced the point that risk management would not always predict the next big problem so therefore, continual horizon-scanning remained essential, with resources available to deal with unpredicted risks as they emerge.

Commissioning the NSRA also allowed NSS 10 to be de-coupled from the NRR, which remained focused on short-term, i.e. within five years, risks internal to the UK. Moreover, the latest edition had been re-titled ‘The National Risk Register of Civil Emergencies’ (The Cabinet Office, 2010b). While this change may seem innocuous, it allowed the strategy to encompass all aspects of national security, and enabled a prioritisation system for the risks identified. Furthermore, by doing so, it also introduced a mechanism to allow choices to be made, which aligns with Strachan's assertion that “strategy is an exercise in choice and often an exercise in making hard choices” (2008b, p. 8).

NSS 10 was a considerably slimmer document than its immediate predecessor, running to thirty-seven pages against 112. It concentrated on the strategic context and risks to UK security. In its own words, it identified the 'ends' against which the SDSR would articulate the 'ways' and 'means'. It defined the UK's strategy for national security in a single sentence: "... to use all of our national capabilities to build Britain's prosperity, extend our nations influence in the world and strengthen our security" (Her Majesty's Government, 2010b, p. 9). This assertion was supported by two complementary strategic objectives: ensuring a secure and resilient UK; and shaping a stable world (Her Majesty's Government, 2010b, p. 22). NSS 10 also recognised that UK defence and security capability decision making should be driven by: a reappraisal of foreign policy; the identification of risks faced; and a judgement of the role the country should play in the world. This was followed-up with the assertion that the NSC had reached the clear conclusion that "Britain's national interest requires us to reject any notion of the shrinkage of our influence" (Her Majesty's Government, 2010b, p. 11). However, that statement was considered wholly unrealistic by both the JCNSS and the HCDC. The JCNSS suggested that the UK needed to plan for a changing and more partnership-dependent role in the world, particularly when considered with the NSS's recognition of "the rise of new global powers, shifts in the centres of economic activity, and reduced resources in the UK" (Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, 2012, p. 13). The HCDC simply did not agree that the UK could maintain its influence while reducing departmental budgets at the MOD and the FCO (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2011a, p. 33). This view from Westminster was strongly backed up by former Royal Marine general, Sir Robert Fry, (2014, p. 28) who observed that "The NSS ... observed a policy of no strategic shrinkage. The authors of the strategy may have kept a straight face when it was written in 2010, but the subsequent evisceration of the British military's capability now makes such assertions risible."

Overall, the document addressed its immediate predecessor's shortfalls around limited timeline, inward-looking focus and lack of prioritisation. Moreover, by linking itself to the SDSR through the 'ends', 'ways' and 'means' medium, it ensured its relevance to defence planners and, specifically for this thesis, to the decision making

around military capability. Finally, its commitment to review the NSRA (Her Majesty's Government, 2010b, p. 37) every two years, and produce a new NSS and SDSR every five years (Her Majesty's Government, 2010b, p. 11) went some way to addressing many of the recurring criticisms of the unstructured and inconsistent manner in which UK defence reviews have traditionally been carried out (see Clarke (2008); Dorman (2010); and (Cornish and Dorman, 2010)).

Although the analysis above suggests that NSS 10 was a considerable improvement on its predecessors and had a positive impact on the SDSR, it did not entirely escape criticism in the secondary literature. Mark Phillips (2012) believed that no real consideration was given to how non-traditional departments and agencies could have contributed to the strategy, specifically the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Education. Of more relevance, he also questioned the sequencing of the NSS, with regard to the SDSR, and posited that an NSS must be published in advance of an SDSR to provide the necessary guidance for the staff involved in drafting the latter. Furthermore, he suggested that the 'service tribalism' and rivalry seen during the development of the SDSR was caused because the service chiefs were waiting for the following, broad direction that an early NSS should have provided:

"[A NSS] clearly defines and prioritises the UK's non-discretionary national interests for security and prosperity, and the risks to them, clarifies non-discretionary tasks that are a political priority, and sets a doctrine or concept that breaks down barriers and integrates the defence and security departments, focusing on what the government wants to achieve and designing solutions for this."

(Phillips, 2012. p. 32)

The JCNSS also expressed a view over timings for the NSS, although it was more concerned with the relationship with the government's CSR. It considered the order in which the NSS, SDSR and CSR were undertaken not to be particularly significant; instead, what it believed crucial was that all three must be able to influence each other (Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, 2012, p. 8).

While NSS 10 was, in many ways, an improvement on the two previous iterations of a national security strategy, its authors could not resist using it as a

platform to score political points over the previous Labour administration. In the four pages of the Forward section alone, the new Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister included no fewer than six detrimental references to their political opponents. Phrases such as: “Nowhere has the legacy we inherited been more challenging than in the state of the defence budget our predecessors left behind” (Her Majesty’s Government, 2010b, p. 5), and “The Strategic Defence and Security Review will set out how we intend to sort out the mess we inherited” (2010b, p. 6) add nothing to the strategy, but do provide a clear touchstone to the political manoeuvring that regularly appears as a significant factor in the formulation of defence reviews.

Defence Tasks

The defence missions articulated in SDR 98 had been updated in the 2003 Defence White Paper (Secretary of State for Defence, 2003), following the Government’s re-commitment to its focus on capabilities and structures for expeditionary operations (see Boyce (2002) and Secretary of State for Defence (2002)). These eighteen missions were reduced in SDSR 10 to seven tasks, detailed in Table 6-1, although this was more of a streamlining exercise, which did not significantly alter the outputs expected of the armed forces.

Defence Review	Defence Tasks
Delivering Security in a Changing World 2003	In the 2003 White Paper, Geoff Hoon, (Secretary of State for Defence, 2003), updated the eight defence missions articulated in SDR 98 to a set of eighteen military tasks, grouped under four generic heading: • <i>Standing Strategic Tasks:</i> - MT1.1 – <i>Strategic Intelligence</i> - MT1.2 – <i>Nuclear Deterrence</i> - MT1.3 – <i>Hydrographic, Geographic and Meteorological Services</i> • <i>Standing Home Commitments:</i> - MT2.1 – <i>Military Aid to the Civil Authorities (MACA)</i> - MT2.2 – <i>Integrity of the UK</i> - MT2.3 – <i>Public Duties and VIP Transport</i> • <i>Standing Overseas Commitments</i> - MT3.1 – <i>Defence and Security of the Overseas Territories</i> - MT3.2 – <i>Defence and Security of the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas</i> - MT3.3 – <i>Security Cooperation: Support to Current and Future Contingent Operations</i>

	<i>MT3.4 – Security Cooperation: Strengthen International Peace and Stability and Support Wider British Interests</i> • <i>Contingent Operations Overseas</i> <i>MT4.1 – Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief</i> <i>MT4.2 – Evacuation of British Citizens Overseas</i> <i>MT4.3 – Peacekeeping</i> <i>MT4.4 – Peace Enforcement</i> <i>MT4.5 – Military Assistance to Stabilisation and Development</i> <i>MT4.6 – Power Projection</i> <i>MT4.7 – Focused Intervention</i> <i>MT4.8 – Deliberate Intervention</i>
Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty – SDSR 10	SDSR 10 was presented by the Prime Minister (Her Majesty's Government, 2010a) and reduced the number of military tasks to seven: • <i>Defending the UK and its Overseas Territories</i> • <i>Providing Strategic Intelligence</i> • <i>Providing Nuclear Deterrence</i> • <i>Supporting Civil Emergency Organisations in times of crisis</i> • <i>Defending our interests by projecting power strategically and through expeditionary interventions</i> • <i>Providing a defence contribution to UK influence</i> • <i>Providing security for stabilisation</i>

Table 6-1: Defence Tasks from Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010.

However, SDSR 10 did include a considerable change in policy concerning Defence Planning Assumptions (DPAs). SDR 98 introduced, for the first time, scales of effort to categorise the UK contribution to an operation. Three generic scales of effort were introduced, which were used by defence planners throughout the Labour administrations, and re-affirmed in the Green Paper Adaptability and Partnership: Issues for the Strategic Defence Review presented by Bob Ainsworth in 2010 (Secretary of State for Defence, 2010). An explanation of the scales: small; medium; and large, is provided in Table 6-2.

Scales of Effort	Description by Service
Small Scale (for example, Sierra Leone in 2000)	• RN: task group containing approximately one submarine and ten ships. • Army: one battlegroup • RAF: one expeditionary air group comprising approximately twenty-five fixed wing, and ten rotary wing aircraft
Medium Scale (for example, Kosovo in 1999)	• RN: task group containing approximately two submarines and twenty ships. • Army: one brigade

	RAF: one expeditionary air group comprising approximately seventy-five fixed wing, and twenty rotary wing aircraft
Large Scale (for example, Iraq in 2003)	- RN: task group containing approximately three submarines and forty ships. - Army: one division - RAF: up to three expeditionary air groups comprising approximately 130 fixed wing, and fifty rotary wing aircraft

Table 6-2: Defence Planning Assumptions – Scales of Effort prior to Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010.

The Green Paper also proposed the armed forces should to be prepared to undertake: one enduring and one limited medium scale operation and an enduring small-scale operation simultaneously; and, given time to prepare, a demanding one-off large-scale intervention operation. In contrast, SDSR 10 made no reference to scales of effort, but envisaged that the armed forces of the future would be sized and shaped to conduct:

- An enduring⁴³ stabilisation operation at around brigade level (up to 6,500 personnel) with maritime and air support as required, while also conducting:
- One non-enduring⁴⁴ complex⁴⁵ intervention (up to 2,000 personnel) and
- One non-enduring simple⁴⁶ operation (up to 1,000 personnel).

Or alternatively:

- Three non-enduring operations, if we were not already engaged in an enduring operation.

⁴³ An enduring operation is one that lasts for more than six months and normally requires units to carry out a tour of duty and then be replaced by other similar units (Secretary of State for Defence, 2010, p. 18).

⁴⁴ A non-enduring operation lasts less than six months, typically requiring a force to be deployed and then withdrawn without replacement (Secretary of State for Defence, 2010, p. 18).

⁴⁵ The term 'complex operation' is not defined in the 2010 SDSR nor the supporting factsheets; instead, it is included in the 'Operational Definitions' section of the 2013 Edition of Defence Strategic Direction, which is classified CONFIDENTIAL UK EYES ONLY. The complete definition attracts this security classification as it includes deployment timelines, and therefore cannot be reproduced in full in this thesis. However, an in-part and unclassified definition refers to a joint operation that is undertaken across more than one environment and therefore requires a contribution by at least two, and invariably all components, i.e. maritime, land, air, logistics, and special forces.

⁴⁶ As above, the term 'simple operation' is also not defined. However, an unclassified and in-part definition refers to an operation that is predominantly focused in a single environment and can generally be undertaken by a single component.

Or

- For a limited time, and with sufficient warning, committing all of our effort to a one-off intervention of up to three brigades, with maritime and air support (around 30,000 personnel).

Although the pre- and post-SDSR 10 commitments may appear similar at first glance, they did have significant differences. Firstly, the requirement to undertake concurrent medium scale operations was abandoned in SDSR 10, replaced by a single task, which was, in itself, limited to a stabilisation operation only at 'around brigade-level'. Furthermore, a non-enduring simple operation of up to 1,000 personnel proved to be far too unrealistic to plan against, in terms of both numbers involved and complexity. For example, the relatively 'simple' operation to evacuate British nationals from Libya in 2011 required input from the maritime, air, logistics and special forces components, as well as command and control from the joint force headquarters⁴⁷ (Sutherland, 2012). Moreover, at its height it involved the deployment of approximately 1,200⁴⁸ servicemen and women. Finally, the 'one-off intervention' commitment was less than two-thirds of the force deployed to Iraq in 2003 and, crucially, did not require UK forces to operate at divisional-level. With no supporting justification, and little scrutiny in the secondary literature, SDSR 10 directed a sizeable reduction in the UK's ambition to conduct expeditionary operations.

The Adaptable Posture and Future Force 2020

NSS 10 and SDSR 10 benefitted from a clear, hierarchical structure. It started at the top with the single sentence⁴⁹ that defined the strategic approach, flowed down to two complementary strategic objectives⁵⁰, supported by a strategic policy framework – the adaptable posture, which was populated from the output of the NSRA. The

⁴⁷ The UK's extremely high readiness contingency headquarters.

⁴⁸ This figure is taken from the Researcher's personal records; he served as the chief of staff of the Joint Task Force Headquarters for the duration of Operation DEFERENCE – the non-combatant evacuation operation of entitled personnel from Libya in 2011.

⁴⁹ The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom is to use all of our national capabilities to build Britain's prosperity, extend our nations influence in the world and strengthen our security.

⁵⁰ Ensuring a secure and resilient UK; and shaping a stable world.

adaptable posture was a simple construct designed to guide defence and security decision making. It had three principal elements (Her Majesty's Government, 2010a, p. 10):

- Respond to the highest priority risks⁵¹ over the next five years.
- Be prepared to respond to the low probability but very high impact risk of a large-scale military attack by another state.
- Pursue an over-arching approach to respond to growing uncertainty about longer-term risks and threats.

The MOD's interpretation of the adaptable posture was included in a PUS and CDS endorsed Strategy for Defence, as follows:

"We will remain ready to use armed force where necessary to protect our national interests, but we will be more selective in its use and focus our armed forces more on tackling risks before they escalate, and on exerting UK influence, as part of a better coordinated overall national security response."

(Permanent Under Secretary for Defence and Chief of the Defence Staff, 2011, p. 2)

Although the adaptable posture concept was supported by the HCDC (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2011a, p. 38), it received very little academic attention, and there is no evidence that its guidance was ever embedded within the MOD's decision-making processes. For example, it was not referenced anywhere in the two versions of the Defence Operating Model released between 2011 and 2015 (Director Corporate Strategy Ministry of Defence (2012), and Director Corporate Strategy Ministry of Defence (2015)), nor did it get a mention in the Department's Finance and Military Capability Operating Model, published in 2015 (Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Military Capability) and Director General Finance, 2015). However, it did set the requirements for the SDSR's outline force structure – Future Force 2020 (FF20) – which was designed to provide the requisite and affordable UK military

⁵¹ The Tier One risks identified in the 2010 NSS were: international terrorism affecting the UK and its interests; hostile attacks on UK cyber space; a major accident or natural hazard that requires a national response; and an international military crisis between states, drawing in the UK and its allies.

capability for the 2020s (see Her Majesty's Government (2010a, p. 19), and Permanent Under Secretary for Defence and Chief of the Defence Staff (2011, p. 3)).

As well as accepting its requirements from the adaptable posture, FF20 also drew on the military tasks and DPAs. It contained three broad elements:

- The Deployed Force – forces engaged on operations.
- The High Readiness Force – forces available to react rapidly to crises.
- The Lower Readiness Force – forces focused on recovery (having recently returned from operations) and those preparing to enter a period of high readiness.

This was the first time that a defence review had attempted to define a force structure as an aiming point for the armed forces, although it was extremely short on detail. For example, the relevant table in the report simply allocated “combat ready fast jets” to the air component of all three elements of FF20; enduring high readiness and all lower readiness forces of the land component were merely labelled “multi-role brigade”, and joint enablers, i.e. intelligence, logistics, medical, and communications, were completely excluded (Her Majesty's Government, 2010a, p. 20). Even accepting that certain information, for example numbers of platforms held at readiness, had to remain classified and should be made available only to those within the government and the MOD who needed to know, the high-level, broad-brush approach adopted by the report in all likelihood affected its credibility.

The adoption of a defined force structure also prompted questions around FF20's military capability, affordability, and the critical mass of the armed forces. When questioned a year after the SDSR, all three single service chiefs declined to confirm that the UK's national ambition out to 2015 could be defined as being a full spectrum capability. In contrast, Cameron was unequivocal in his assertion that the UK remained a “full spectrum defence power” (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2011a, p. 31). Although there is not a universally agreed definition of full spectrum capability, the Prime Minister defended his position by referring to the nation's £33 billion defence budget, and it being the fourth largest in the world. In a

different approach, Nick Harvey, who was Minister for the Armed Forces at the time, suggested that if having a full spectrum capability meant the UK was militarily capable of doing anything it wanted in any theatre in the world whilst being totally self-reliant, “it had been decades since we retained that sort of definition” (2011a, p. 33). Instead, he suggested that FF20 would have “a wide spectrum of capability”, which the then Vice Chief of the Defence Staff (VCDS) General Sir Nicholas Houghton confirmed would meet the “National Security Council’s adaptive posture in its considerations of the time” and, therefore, be “full spectrum within sensible bounds” (2011a, p. 62).

This debate flowed into concerns raised at the time regarding the critical mass⁵² of the armed forces. Significantly, the HCDC was not convinced that from 2015, well before the future force construct had been implemented, the armed forces would be able to “maintain the capability to undertake all that is being asked of them” (2011a, p. 63). It considered that the path to FF20 may not be realisable, given the anticipated commitment levels of the armed forces during the period, and the capability gaps that had been directed by the SDSR.

In addition to the nervousness over military capability and critical mass of the armed forces, the affordability of FF20 was also being seriously questioned. Without a real term increase in the defence budget after 2015, Air Chief Marshal Lord Stirrup concluded that “Future Force 2020 would be completely unaffordable and the Armed Forces would have to be substantially smaller than is currently planned” (2011a, p. 65). Although both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence had confirmed that the level of ambition set out in the SDSR would require year-on-year, real-terms growth in the defence budget in the years beyond 2015, there was no guarantee that this would be realised. Indeed, Oliver Letwin, Minister of State at the Cabinet Office, had confirmed that the government could not set expenditure decisions across that time period, and James Blitz, the Financial Times’ Whitehall Editor, agreed saying “I don’t see the Prime Minister’s commitment with the statement on the SDSR as a

⁵² In the view of General Houghton, defined as the critical mass of the combined armed forces – the combination of all the armed forces of the country – in meeting what is expected of them in terms of military tasks.

bankable commitment in any way” (2011a, p. 65). Even though, in July 2011, the government agreed to an uplift of one per cent above real terms on equipment and equipment support from FY 2015/16, and to commit to a ten-year equipment programme that the MOD could plan on (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2011b, p. 25), it is unclear that the force structure aspirations of FF20 were ever affordable.

Other Policy Considerations

Cornish and Dorman (2011) observed that, even though SDSR 10 confronted a vastly more complex strategic challenge than SDR 98, and with significantly reduced resources, it took less than half the time to complete. Furthermore, in a Chatham House report, published four days before SDSR 10, Cornish (2010) identified that the pace of the review largely precluded a meaningful input from research institutes or independent analysts. Although these observations may be better placed in the Process sub-section below, they are included here as the swiftness of the review reduced its comprehensiveness, which, in turn, had considerable policy implications. Cornish and Dorman (2012) recognised that the SDSR failed to deal with a whole range of difficulties confronting defence; instead, it commissioned a series of further studies⁵³, which delivered their findings piecemeal over the next twelve to eighteen months. Each of these studies had a considerable impact on the output of defence, yet this approach meant they were all considered in isolation, rather than in conjunction with the other major decisions that had been announced in October 2010. The most noteworthy changes included the disaggregation of capability management from MOD head office to the single services and the creation of JFC, following the DRP study (Lord Levene of Portsoken, 2011), as well as the outcome of the MOD’s ‘Three Month Exercise’ in July 2011, which resulted in reductions of a further 12,000 personnel to the regular British Army (see The Telegraph (2011a), and Secretary of State for Defence (2012)).

⁵³ These included a review of the defence acquisition process, a study of reserve forces, the Defence Reform Unit report, a report from the Military Covenant Task Force, and a white paper on science and technology.

Process

As research elsewhere in this thesis has identified, defence reviews normally follow a general election⁵⁴, with the newly elected government drawing on its manifesto commitments to provide initial direction for the review. However, in May 2010, the coalition government had two manifestos to consider, which were obviously not aligned on a number of key policy issues. The solution was the publication of the coalition's *Programme for Government*, which Cornish (2010) suggested could be seen as a *post-election* manifesto. The document was published on 20 May 2010, eight days after the coalition government formed. It confirmed the creation of an NSC, and the appointment of an NSA. It also confirmed that an SDSR had already commenced, together with the development of a new NSS. All review activity would be overseen by the NSC, "with strong Treasury involvement" (The Cabinet Office, 2010a, p. 24). In the section on defence, the coalition outlined only two strategic assertions: it would maintain Britain's nuclear deterrent (even though the Liberal Democrats would "continue to make the case for alternatives") and it would "aim to reduce the MOD's running costs by 25%" (The Cabinet Office, 2010a, p. 8). In Cornish's opinion, commencing the SDSR in the first week of taking power was "a bold undertaking" (2010, p. 5), but had to happen so as to be able to influence the government's CSR. As already recognised, from start to finish, the review took no more than five months, considerably less time than the previous review in 1998. However, as Chalmers (2010b) pointed out, although there may have been some complaints from within the defence community about the haste in which the SDSR was conducted, if it had not taken place simultaneously with the CSR, it would have been constrained by budgetary allocations already fixed by that spending review. Specifically, the full implications of different scenarios for defence cuts could be considered before financial allocations were made, which spared the MOD savings originally envisaged of between ten per cent and twenty per cent. The 'strong treasury involvement' in the SDSR, promised in the coalition's *Programme for Government* document, was an early warning of the prominence that finance would be given in the review. To that end,

⁵⁴ For example: Healey's reviews from 1966-68; the 1975 Mason review; and SDR 98.

curtailing input from research institutes and academia, through a foreshortening of the process, could be viewed as a price worth paying to be in a position to influence the decisions of the spending review.

SDSR 10 marked a significant change in scope over its predecessors being the first that included a specific examination of security issues alongside the traditional scrutiny of defence. As analysis above has recognised, the driver for this change was the previous government's decision to introduce an NSS in 2008. This decision positioned defence in a more over-arching 'security policy' context. Michael Clarke (2008) recognised that by commissioning an NSS, the government had taken a conceptually new approach to national security, setting defence within an even wider spectrum of governmental activity, covering all aspects of the physical, economic, social and psychological well-being of British society. In the view of Cornish and Dorman (2011, p. 339) this new approach provided the strategic framework within which defence policy would be considered, with "[the NSS] setting out the purpose of national strategy and ... [the SDSR] ... showing how these goals were to be achieved." Another by-product of the introduction of an NSS, and, in particular, the choice of its framework, was to move the SDSR away from being capability-led – a feature of reviews of the early expeditionary period – to a risk-based approach (see Dorman (2011), and Cornish and Dorman (2011)).

As well as encompassing security for the first time, SDSR 10 was also the first in a number of other areas: it was the first to be conducted under the oversight of the newly-created NSC (Devanny and Harris, 2014); it was the first quinquennial review process owned by the Cabinet Office and not the MOD (Dorman, 2011); and it was the first to be presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister, rather than the Secretary of State for Defence (Her Majesty's Government, 2010a). Cornish and Dorman (2011, p. 339) saw these firsts as the "beginnings of what might be described as a formal and transparent national strategic process in the United Kingdom", which they concluded as being the review's "most significant achievement." In contrast, Phillips (2012, p. 28) condemned the tactical delivery of the review suggesting that "preparations were hampered by a lack of consensus in how it [the review] should be conducted and a

poor conceptual understanding of the task.” Furthermore, he did not believe that the Cabinet Office provided direction to prepare for a possible cross-government review process. He concluded that, outside the MOD, most other government departments prepared poorly, perhaps on the assumption that defence would dominate. If this was the case, the usefulness of broadening the traditional defence review process, to encompass the totality of national security, and then handing it over to the Cabinet Office to manage, should be examined. This begged the question of whether a well-executed, defence-specific review was better than a poorly produced, cross-government one in providing the strategic direction necessary to make good choices concerning the procurement and maintenance of military capability?

Contemporary Events

A theme of previous defence reviews is that contemporary events have a clear impact on decision making, and this is supported by analysis of SDSR 10. Two contemporary events, in particular, stand out: the global economic crisis of 2008, which is considered in the next sub-section and the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan.

Although UK military operations in Afghanistan had begun in 2001, with British forces deploying as part of Operation VERITAS in support of the US Operation ENDURING FREEDOM, it was the deployment to Helmand Province in 2006, under Operation HERRICK, that saw activity increase to an enduring, medium scale effort (see Fairweather (2014), and Elliott (2015)). By 2010, the UK armed forces, and in particular the British Army, had adopted a campaign approach to Operation HERRICK (see Dannatt (2010), and Richards (2014)) and, when SDSR 10 was published, had in the region of 9,500 personnel in Afghanistan. Furthermore, it was recognised, by both the government and the UK media, as defence’s ‘main effort’⁵⁵ (see Her Majesty’s Government (2010a, p. 15), and Channel 4 News (2010)). Dorman (2011, p. 80) categorised this as the “elephant in the room”, and believed that, even though other reviews had had wars and conflicts “in the background”, the war in Afghanistan was

⁵⁵ In NATO, and UK operational-level planning doctrine, the concept of ‘main effort’ provides a focus for the activity that the Joint Force Commander considers crucial to success (Development Concepts & Doctrine Centre, 2013).

far more prominent and influential in determining the outcomes of this SDSR. For example, he suggested that it was the argument deployed by the British Army for excepting it from the majority of the cutbacks. Although many commentators believed the post-Afghanistan bar for committing UK forces to enduring interventions would be considerably higher than that considered during the Early Expeditionary period (see Cornish (2010), Chalmers (2011) and Dover and Phythian (2011)), a precedent may have been set. With all three services committed to significantly more operations in the post-campaigning era – albeit predominantly at a smaller scale than both Iraq and Afghanistan⁵⁶ – the influence of participation in extant operations may well be substantial in defence reviews of the future. This, in turn, could have a direct impact on decisions regarding future military capability.

Finance and the Economy

Although SDSR 10 may have embraced a number of firsts in some areas, in others it was seen as depressingly familiar. For example, Kirkpatrick (2010) identified a principal driver for the review was that the level of expenditure required to meet MOD aspirations was significantly higher than its extant budget allocation, even before the anticipated reductions to support the government's deficit reduction strategy, following the 2008 global economic crisis. This over commitment, primarily in the equipment programme, and generally accepted to be in the region of £35 to £38 billion over ten years (see Chalmers (2010b), Taylor (2010d), Chalmers (2011), Cornish and Dorman (2011), and Kirkpatrick (2011)), was seen by many as the most pressing factor for the review.

Specifically, Chalmers (2011, p. 20) recognised that the reduction in the MOD's core budget of seven and a half per cent, in real terms, in the four years following the 2010 SDSR had to result in a period of "radical retrenchment and reform" for UK defence policy. In his view "the elastic had snapped." Moreover, he believed that, to balance the books, the MOD would have to seek even greater cuts, possibly as high as

⁵⁶ That said, the RAF's Deputy Commander for Operations confirmed in 2017 that the "Royal Air Force is busier today than it has been for over years" (Royal Air Force Centre for Air Power Studies, 2017).

thirteen per cent. Mark Cavanagh (2011) suggested that savings of this magnitude would require reform rather than expenditure, i.e. not what the MOD spends its money on, but how it spends it. However, from an economics-based position, Hartley (2010, p. 4) argued that SDSR 10 was “the typical outcome of various interest groups in the military-industrial-political complex.” His view was that all defence policies are subject to budget constraints and uncertainty, cost and budgets are central to every nation’s defence policy. This approach accords with Greenwood’s argument in the 1970s and 1980s that ultimately this is a question of political choice rather than economic necessity (1976, 1986). Simply put “high and rising costs of modern defence equipment together with falling defence budgets mean that no nation can avoid difficult defence choices” (Hartley, 2010, p. 4). In this regard, the opposing positions in the secondary literature about the financial influence on defence reviews were as entrenched in 2010 as they were throughout the Cold War and Early Expeditionary period.

Notwithstanding the differing academic viewpoints, the government’s position regarding the significance of the economic situation was made abundantly clear during the review. Statements such as: “Our ability to meet current and future threats depends crucially on tackling the budget deficit”, and “Our most urgent task is to return the nation’s finances to a sustainable footing” (Her Majesty’s Government, 2010b, p. 4 and p. 14) are difficult to mis-interpret. Moreover, this urgency obviously flowed down to the MOD as the CDS – Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup – identified in evidence to the HCDC: “the strategy was to eliminate the deficit ... the requirement to reduce expenditure overrode just about everything else” (Cavanagh, 2011, p. 12 Endnote 7).

Other Factors that Impacted on the 2010 SDSR

Concomitant with the near unanimous recognition of the detrimental impact the government’s post-2008 economic crisis deficit reduction strategy had on SDSR 10, was the acknowledgement, in the secondary literature, of the self-serving behaviour it provoked amongst the single services (see Cornish and Dorman (2009b), Cornish and Dorman (2011), and Dover and Phythian (2012)). Cornish and Dorman (2009b) blamed

fiscal pressures for the heightening of inter-service rivalry to an extent not seen for many years. Furthermore, they recognised that “internecine fighting is historically characteristic of the military reaction to resource scarcity, and it was never likely that the particularly harsh economic circumstances of 2008-2010 would prove an exception” (2011, p. 338). Much of this unseemly wrangling, for example over the decision to withdraw the joint RN/RAF Harrier force from service (BBC News, 2010a), became very public, which only served to reinforce points made above. Much was made of the conduct of the services in the build up to, and during, SDSR 10, both in the media and in academia (see Rayment (2010)), and the lobbying activity of the services undoubtedly remains an important factor in the translation of strategic direction into military capability.

Other factors that impacted on SDSR 10 were also not new. Dorman (2010) confirmed that, prior to the general election, all of the main political parties’ manifestos had asserted that Britain’s ‘place in the world’ should be preserved; a point reinforced in NSS 10. (Her Majesty’s Government, 2010b, p. 10). In Chalmers’ view (2010b), the fact that the government did not commit to significant cuts in the budgets of the FCO, the Department for International Development or the intelligence services confirmed its lack of appetite for strategic shrinkage. Hartley (2010) studied the additional costs of the UK’s world military role, and came to the conclusion that, in 2009, it cost approximately one per cent of GDP, equivalent to an annual cost of roughly £15 billion. This was a cost that Cornish (2010, p. 26) believed could not be borne, asserting that: “The UK aspires to be an active participant in world affairs and has the political, strategic and operational commitments that flow from such an aspiration but without the economic strength, budget and resources to match.”

A further factor that should be recognised was the political situation that existed in the UK following the 2010 general election. In addition to the process aspects of the coalition government’s approach discussed previously, the politics within both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties also played their part. Dorman (2011, p. 79) recognised the dilemma facing Cameron over what to do with a close rival – in this instance, Dr Liam Fox – and how he chose to follow a “traditional

Tory leader policy” by giving him the “poison chalice of the defence portfolio.” This ‘keeping your enemy close’ approach meant that Fox would be fully occupied in a difficult role, which would also probably undermine his popularity within the Conservative Party as a result of the cuts to defence he would be forced to make. In addition, Fox would have to observe Cabinet collective responsibility. The leader of the Liberal Democrats – Nick Clegg – also faced internal, party political issues, primarily over the probable like-for-like replacement for the nuclear deterrent, which many of his party colleagues opposed. In addition, any defence review decisions that went against the RN were unlikely to be well received in the traditional liberal heartlands in the South and West of England. For Clegg, therefore, the SDSR centred on domestic politics, and, in particular, how its outcomes would affect his party in the next general election (Cameron, 2019).

6.3 Summary

The decision to consider, in a single strategy, the plans and objectives of all departments, agencies and forces involved in protecting national security caused the most significant change to defence reviews in the entire period considered by this thesis. Initiated by the Labour government with the publication of the first NSS in 2008, and built upon by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition through SDSR 10, it resulted in defence matters being considered in conjunction with all other security-related issues, led by the Cabinet Office and overseen by the newly-created NSC (Devanny, 2015, p. 20). As Clarke recognised, such a radical re-thinking of the government’s approach to managing national security challenged the departmental-silo mentality of Whitehall, would take time to implement, and was by no means guaranteed to succeed (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2011a, p. 18). For example, it was suggested that the NSC did not provide, at an early enough stage, the guidance and input that were necessary for formulating the SDSR (see House of Commons Defence Committee (2011a) and Phillips (2012)). In addition, the HCDC expressed concern over the risk that the defence contribution could potentially be sidelined by shorter term political or security imperatives (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2010). Finally, although an improvement on the risk methodology that

underpinned the first two NSSs, the NSRA remained a work in progress, and required more alignment with the strategy's newly introduced adaptable posture.

The clear and ordered structure of the NSS and SDSR was a definite positive, with an easy-to-follow flow from the single-sentence definition of the strategic approach, through the strategic objectives and down to the strategic policy framework, sourced from the NSRA. However, it was far from clear that all of the SDSR's major decisions affecting military capability had followed the same logical process. For example, it could be argued that continuing with the procurement of the Queen Elizabeth Class (QEC) aircraft carriers mitigated only one of the NSS's four Tier One risks. Furthermore, Andrew Brookes pointed out to the HCDC that, of a total of fifteen priority risks in the NSS, eight of them required the support of a maritime reconnaissance capability. Notwithstanding this, the SDSR announced the immediate cancellation of the Nimrod MRA4 programme (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2011a, p. 53). Although the new methodology was underpinned by a risk-based approach, it was clear that other factors were also impacting on the major military capability decisions.

While the change in approach to defence reviews in 2010 introduced a number of new factors that affected the SDSR, many of the associated factors that had a bearing on decision making were the same as those identified in defence reviews of the Cold War and Early Expeditionary periods. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the 2008 global economic crisis, finance and the economy were generally recognised as the most influential. Made worse by the inherited 'black hole' in the equipment programme, the ability of the government to fund even its considerably reduced DPAs was questioned by parliamentarians and academics alike. The identification of an outline force structure to focus defence planners and capability sponsors explicitly on the review's seven military tasks, could not hide the fact that the outcome of the SDSR was unaffordable, at least in the short term. This, in turn, led to a repeat of the unsavoury and often very public inter-service disputes that have accompanied all financially driven defence reviews. The other particularly influential factor in 2010 was the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. The resultant precedent, that short-term operational

demands should exempt a service from capability reductions necessary to achieve an agreed future force structure, is dangerous, especially given the increased operational tempo required to support the UK's current foreign policy.

At time of writing, SDSR 10 still attracts academic attention, possibly because it remains within the short-term memory of many of today's commentators, but probably because its methodology remains broadly in place as the government's default for national security decision making. Immediately after the review, as chapter two identified, although negative assessments were in the majority, there were a number of positive observations in the secondary literature, mainly process related. However, as time has passed, complimentary comments have become much harder to find.

Chapter 7: Development of Strategic Defence and Security Reviews

On 07 May 2015, to the surprise of some both nationally and internationally (see The Economist (2015b) and NBC News (2015)), the Conservative Party secured a twelve-seat working majority at the general election. Three weeks later, during the State Opening of Parliament, Queen Elizabeth II announced that her government would hold a full strategic defence and security review (Hansard House of Lords, 2015), thus confirming the previous Conservative/Liberal Democrat government's commitment to undertake an SDSR and produce a new NSS every five years (Her Majesty's Government, 2010a, p. 35). This news was not unexpected; indeed, before the election, Cornish and Dorman had suggested that "the machinery of government has once again entered the 'phoney war' stage of the defence cycle: preliminary work and positioning has begun prior to the formal start of the review process" (2015, p. 351). Moreover, in January 2014, Cameron had told the JCNSS that the scope, structure and timing of the next NSS would "span the period of the next election" and "We should be starting now" (Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, 2015, p. 9). It is impossible to confirm exactly how much preparatory work was undertaken by the Cabinet Office and relevant government departments prior to the formal announcement of SDSR 15, although one of the benefits of mandating a regular cycle of reviews should be the ability to identify long lead-time analysis necessary to support the anticipated decision making, and then schedule it appropriately. What is known is that SDSR 15 was published six months after the election, as opposed to the five months it took to complete SDSR 10, and the updated NSS and SDSR outcomes were distributed as a single command paper (Her Majesty's Government, 2015).

At the time research on this thesis commenced in September 2015, it was expected that SDSR 15 would be the most recent defence review to impact the research. With an initial target completion date for the thesis of Summer 2020, the third review in the quinquennial review process cycle – SDSR 20 – would have only just commenced following a May 2020 general election, as mandated by the Fixed-Term

Parliaments Act 2011 (legislation.gov.uk, 2011). However, recent history has not worked out that way. On 18 April 2017, 299 days after the UK voted to leave the EU⁵⁷ and 279 days after becoming Prime Minister⁵⁸, Theresa May called a snap general election, which was subsequently held on 08 June 2017 (BBC News, 2017b). Thereafter, as Curtis (2019, p. 57) identified: “for a 17-month period between July 2017 and December 2018, and completely outwith the quinquennial review process cycle, the UK government was in an almost constant state of review – initially through the Cabinet Office-led National Security Capability Review and, more recently, with the Ministry of Defence’s Modernising Defence Programme.” Although this thesis does not recognise the NSCR or the MDP as formal defence reviews, the effect that these post-EU referendum examinations of defence and security policy have had on the translation of strategic direction into military capability cannot simply be ignored.

Accordingly, this chapter investigates how the SDSR process has developed, primarily through an analysis of SDSR 15, but also through a consideration of the impact that both the NSCR and MDP have had on the thesis’ specific research questions. It keeps with the methodology of chapters five and six, using the thesis’ specific research questions to help unlock the general research question. In doing so, it attempts to expose the associated factors around both SDSR 15 and the post-EU referendum defence and security related activity and understand why they had the impact that they had.

7.1 The Second Strategic Defence and Security Review

The 2015 National Security Strategy

The decision to amalgamate the NSS 15 and SDSR 15 in a single command paper was logical in some respects, although it does make a comparison of NSS 15 with NSS 10 more difficult. As a positive, there was a degree of repetition in the NSS 10 and SDSR 10 command papers, particularly with regard to the high-level direction and

⁵⁷ The UK EU membership referendum was held on 23 June 2016.

⁵⁸ May was appointed Prime Minister by Queen Elizabeth II on 13 July 2016, two days after becoming leader of the Conservative party.

guidance, that was solved through merging. However, by consigning outcomes of the SDSR to one of three chapters that covered each of the national security objectives in turn, the document gave the impression that specific ways and means aligned with only one of the strategy's ends, whereas the reality in any strategy is that the linkage between ends, ways and means is a many-to-many relationship. Whilst giving evidence to the JCNSS in January 2014, Cameron conceded that the NSS needed a refresh but stopped short of advocating a complete overhaul. This view was not shared by the committee; it believed that "The rapidly changing world demonstrates the need for a thorough revisit of the NSS even if fundamental assumptions remain the same" (Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, 2015, pp 10-11). Cameron's view, unsurprisingly, prevailed, and the new NSS was comparatively similar to its predecessor.

At the highest-level, NSS 15 adopted a 'vision, values and approach' construct, which, although a departure from NSS 10, did borrow methodologies used in previous iterations. For example, NSS 09 had a vision (Her Majesty's Government, 2009, p. 9) and NSS 08 underpinned its approach in a set of core values (Her Majesty's Government, 2008, p. 6). A cynical commentator might suggest that, although episodically produced government documents need to have a fresh look and feel, there are only a finite number of frameworks that can be used, and what goes around inevitably comes around. The 2015 vision for a "secure and prosperous United Kingdom, with global reach and influence" (Her Majesty's Government, 2015, p. 9) was not a great departure from the NSS 10's single sentence strategy "to use all of our national capabilities to build Britain's prosperity, extend our nations influence in the world and strengthen our security" (Her Majesty's Government, 2010b, p. 9). Supporting the 2015 vision were three, high-level, enduring and mutually supporting national security objectives (Her Majesty's Government, 2015, pp 11-12.):

- National security objective one was to **protect our people** – at home, in our Overseas Territories and abroad, and to protect our territory, economic security, infrastructure and way of life.

- National security objective two was to **project our global influence** – reducing the likelihood of threats materializing and affecting the UK, our interests, and those of our allies and partners.
- National security objectives three was to **promote our prosperity** – seizing opportunities, working innovatively and supporting UK industry.

The first two objectives aligned very closely with the two security objectives from NSS 10 (Her Majesty's Government, 2010b, p. 22), whereas the third recognized the government's more overt policy of supporting UK industry and the defence sector in particular, which was further reinforced two years later in a refresh of its defence industrial policy (Secretary of State for Defence, 2017b) and the publication of an international defence engagement strategy (Secretary of State for Defence and Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 2017).

NSS 15 retained the same risk-based approach as its predecessor, underpinned by an updated NSRA, which followed the original assessment in 2010 and a refresh in 2012 (Her Majesty's Government, 2015, p. 85). Predictably there were many overlaps between the 2010 and 2015 risks, although the number of tier one and two risks had both increased in 2015. Finally, as part of a single document, NSS 15 was definitely leaner than the 2010 version. As Jon Lunn and Eleanor Scarnell (2015, p. 13) noted, it contained less explanation of the methodology used and omitted completely the detail of the eight cross-cutting national security tasks and their associated detailed planning guidelines.

A consequence of the publication of a single report in 2015 was a dearth of academic scrutiny of the NSS element of the review. Lunn and Scarnell (2015, p. 13) suggested that, despite better integration between the overarching strategy and specific policy- and capability-related actions than there was in 2010, "discussion of the 2015 document ... has been conducted almost entirely in terms of policies and capabilities (the SDSR element)." One exception was the input to the HCDC's evidence session on SDSR 15 held in November 2015 (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2015c), which was generally negative. For example, Roberts was disappointed that the review was focused on a grand *economic* strategy and, therefore, defence and security were

“firmly subservient to ... economic ends” (2015c, p. 2). Moreover, Blagden was critical of the scope of the risk tiers in the NSRA, suggesting that “the NSRA ... creates very broad categories so it is hard to think what might not actually fall within these [tier one] categories if we defined it in the right way” (2015c, p. 3). If almost any eventuality could reasonably find a home in any of the six tier one risks in the NSS⁵⁹, they offer defence planners very little guidance on how to prioritise military capability. This prompted Porter to observe: “I would like to see a clear articulation of what we think we should be able to do, but also an acknowledgement of things we will not be capable of, and to then place that in the template of the risk table” (2015c, p. 11). However, he also recognised the obvious limitations of articulating potentially classified strategic guidance in a publicly declared national security strategy, and that the generalisation of some of the content was inevitable. When asked about the problem of having to tackle sensitive issues in a document with such a wide audience, he responded:

“I would say there is a difficulty. If the architects of this kind of document believe that the document suffices to create a national security strategy, there does have to be something off-camera where people are having much more precise conversations about what really does count as a ranked threat and a ranked priority ... I hope that these conversations are happening. There almost has to be a two-level process here. It is important to articulate something to the people who pay for these things. There has to be some consideration of the democratic context. But not all of it can be open and explicit.”

(House of Commons Defence Committee, 2015c, p. 4)

An examination of the secondary literature confirms that the amalgamation of NSS 15 and SDSR 15 resulted in a noticeable reduction in the scrutiny of the review’s underpinning strategy when compared with the aftermath of the review process in 2010. This may be partly because of the similarities between the new strategy and its predecessor so little new commentary was considered necessary. It may also be that, the EU referendum, the general election and subsequent NSCR and MDP, simply diverted attention elsewhere. Lunn and Scarnell (2015, p. 13) consider the “2015 document is more convincingly a ‘whole-of-government’ document than were its two

⁵⁹ The NSS 15 tier one risks were: terrorism; international military conflict; cyber; public health; major natural hazards; and instability overseas.

2010 predecessors”; however, the single document approach certainly did not solve Phillip’s sequencing problem highlighted in the previous chapter. Furthermore, the JCNSS questioned whether the merger was the product of a joined-up process where strategy was combined with decisions on investments and capabilities. More significantly, in the committee’s view, NSS 15 did not meet its primary goal of setting out what the UK wants to achieve, and how it intends to achieve it (Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, 2016b, p. 11).

Defence Missions and Joint Force 2025

SDSR 15 amended the SDSR 10 terminology, referring to armed forces missions instead of military tasks. It also increased the total number of missions to eight (from seven in 2010), listed in Table 7-1, and divided them into ‘routine’ and ‘be prepared to’ activity. That said, apart from being slightly more specific in its potential kinetic contributions to the government’s response to crises, these changes were superficial.

Defence Review	Armed Forces Missions
A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom – SDSR 15	Cameron presented SDSR 15 (Her Majesty's Government, 2015), which included eight missions for the armed forces, divided into routine and be prepared to activity: <i>Routine Missions:</i> • <i>Defend and contribute to the security and resilience of the UK and Overseas Territories</i> • <i>Provide the nuclear deterrent</i> • <i>Contribute to improved understanding of the world through strategic intelligence and the global defence network</i> • <i>Reinforce international security and the collective capacity of our allies, partners and multinational institutions</i> <i>Be Prepared To Missions:</i> • <i>Support humanitarian assistance and disaster response, and conduct rescue missions</i> • <i>Conduct strike operations</i> • <i>Conduct operations to restore peace and stability</i> • <i>Conduct major combat operations if required, including under NATO Article 5</i>

Table 7-1: Armed Forces Missions from Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015.

However, in a stark change from both SDSR 10 and the Labour government’s SDR and follow-on white papers, the SDSR 15 report included considerably less detail

on DPAs. Apart from confirming that the maximum size of a single expeditionary force would be 50,000 (compared with around 30,000 planned in FF20), it offered little insight into the type, quantity and duration of operations the armed forces would be sized and shaped to conduct. Instead it simply identified that when not deployed at the maximum number above, the armed forces would be able to “undertake a large number of smaller operations simultaneously” (Her Majesty's Government, 2015, p. 29), which might include:

- A medium-scale operation, often drawing mostly on just one Service, such as the counter-Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) mission in Iraq.
- Multiple additional operations, ranging from specialist missions, such as counter-terrorism or counter-piracy, through to broader, more complex operations, such as the military support to tackle Ebola in Sierra Leone.
- A wide range of defence engagement activities, such as training teams and mentoring.

These broad-brush examples clearly did not contain sufficient direction for defence planners to make informed decisions on the procurement and sustainment of military capability, nor were they intended to. As identified in chapter four, and expanded in chapter six, much of the DPA information concerning operational definitions, frequency and concurrency of operations and recuperation periods is classified and is included in a Defence Strategic Direction (DSD) document. This is in accordance with the DOM that states:

*“Each SDSR generates a **Defence Strategic Direction** document, which translates the outcome [of the SDSR] into long-term planning direction for us. In rare circumstances, this document can be reviewed between SDSRs. The interpretation of this direction for the next five years, particularly in terms of allocating resources, is set out in the annual **Defence Plan**. This in turn provides the direction for each TLB’s yearly **Command Plan**, which is the delivery agreement between PUS and the TLB holder.”*

(Director Corporate Strategy Ministry of Defence, 2015, p. 14)

Providing generalities in the SDSR command paper and, at the same time, consigning the detail to MOD internal and classified documents like DSD and the Defence Plan is a rational approach to the promulgation of DPAs. Although not directly related to the NSS element of the report, it meets Porter's suggestion of a two-level process, allowing the precise conversations to take place in private, whilst offering some detail to both the domestic and international audience.

The eye-catching increase in numbers of SDSR 15's 'best-effort' combined force received the most positive academic attention in the months after the review (see (Chapman, 2016), Keohane (2016), and Molinelli (2016)), even though this extra commitment was to be achieved with no increase in the size of the British Army and only an extremely modest uplift to the RN and RAF (400 and 300 personnel respectively) (Secretary of State for Defence, 2015, p. 6). However, the single-most significant change within this new commitment was the return to divisional warfighting, an aspiration the British Army had coveted since its abandonment in SDSR 10 (see Carter (2013)). Indeed, as Anthony King (2019) noted in his book *Command – The Twenty-First Century General*, the ability for the British Army to operate at the divisional level was vital to ensure both its standing and its interoperability with its closest battlefield partner, the US Army. This point was also recognised by the HCDC when it agreed that a "fully-manned and fully equipped warfighting division is central to the credibility of the Army" (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2017, p. 4).

In alignment with the revised DPAs, and in accordance with the guidelines⁶⁰ contained in the DOM (Director Corporate Strategy Ministry of Defence, 2015, p. 14), SDSR 15 introduced a new 'future force' – Joint Force 2025 (JF25) – building on SDSR 10's FF20, as outlined in Figure 7-1.

⁶⁰ Each SDSR should outline the main parts of an affordable force structure to be delivered in 10 years' time based on defence planning assumptions. This is known as the 'Future Force'. The Future Force is reviewed every five years with each SDSR.

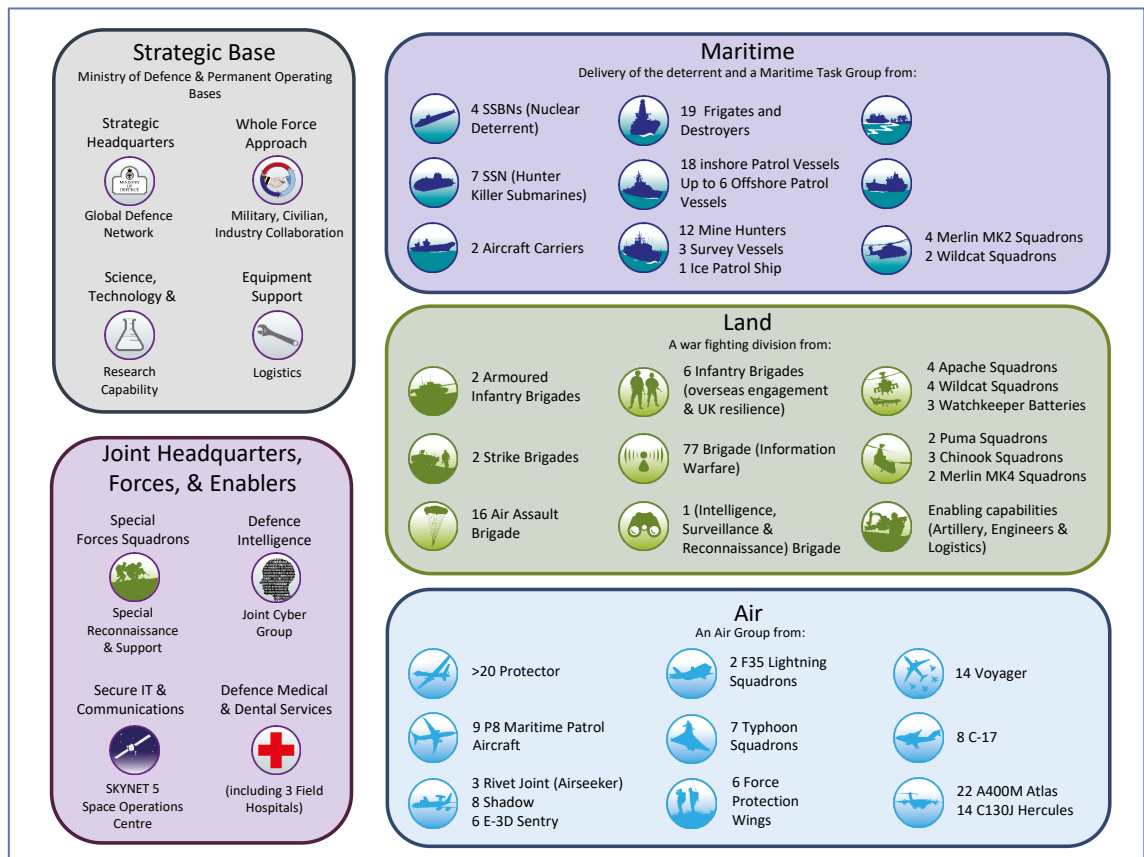


Figure 7-1: Components of Joint Force 2025

Following the same approach as it had taken with DPAs, the report was short on detail regarding JF25, although the information it did include was an improvement on the FF20 detail in the SDSR 10 report. The Adaptable Posture, which had been introduced in 2010 but not gained any traction within the MOD, was quietly dropped. A MOD-produced, SDSR 15 Defence Key Facts document (Secretary of State for Defence, 2015, p. 6) did provide slightly more substance on the planned capabilities of JF25:

- By 2025, the armed forces will be able to deploy a force of around 50,000 drawn from:
 - Maritime Task Group of around ten to twenty-five ships and 4,000 to 10,000 personnel.
 - Army division of three brigades and supporting functions of around 30,000 to 40,000 personnel.
 - Air Group of around four to nine combat aircraft squadrons, six to twenty surveillance platforms and five to fifteen transport aircraft, and around 4,000 to 10,000 personnel.

- Joint Forces, including enablers and headquarters, of around 2,000 to 6,000 personnel.
- The composition and balance of the force would be dependent on a number of variables, including:
 - The adversary and their capabilities;
 - The region of the world into which UK armed forces were deploying;
 - The extent to which allies and/or multinational organisation such as NATO, as engaged;
 - The amount of logistic support, basing and access offered by a host nation.

Process

SDSR 10 included a number of original features, which were reported in the previous chapter and widely commented on in the post-review secondary literature. SDSR 15 replicated all of these ‘firsts’ and, perhaps, as a result, attracted only limited academic commentary regarding its process. That said, there were still disagreements over its efficacy. Louth (2016, p. 1), for example, observed that “as an exercise in engagement management it appears almost peerless”, whilst Tim Street (2016, p. 3) was critical, suggesting that the review had simply repeated mistakes of the past and thus “continued with business as usual.” Chalmers was clear in his view that the SDSR 15 process was significantly more integrated than in 2010; he was also clear as to the reasons why:

“At the heart of this [more integrated] approach was strong central leadership from an experienced prime minister and chancellor, with a close political relationship, who were determined to lead the SDSR from the centre, using the combined power of the National Security Secretariat and the treasury to ensure that departments worked together to achieve centrally set objectives.”

(Chalmers, 2016c, p. 10)

Prior to SDSR 15, the HCDC published two reports – Towards the Next Defence and Security Review: Part One (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2013) and Part Three (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2015e) in which it made a number

of process-related recommendations regarding the next review. However, perhaps the two most meaningful – undertaking wide consultation and establishing constructive challenge – were not implemented by the government. In Street’s view (2016, p. 3), the review lacked any “serious consultation or engagement with civil society and alternative viewpoints”, an opinion that was also shared by elements of the national press (see Mail Online (2015), and The Telegraph (2015a)). In addition, there is no evidence of the establishment of independent groups to provide a shadow process or ‘red team’ challenge of the review’s outcomes. To that end, it would appear the review process, which had undergone a fundamental change in 2010, did not benefit from any substantial additional development in the build up to, and execution of, SDSR 15.

Finance and the Economy

Analysis of every defence review since the end of World War II has exposed the substantial impact that finance and the economy have had on defence decision making. In the build-up to SDSR 15, it appeared that this trend would be continued. Even though the UK government had been a strong supporter of efforts to encourage all NATO member states to meet the alliance’s target of spending at least two per cent of GDP on defence, reiterated in the Wales Summit Declaration in 2014 (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2014), Chalmers (2015b, p. 10) identified that the UK was projected to spend only one point nine-five per cent of its GDP on defence in 2015/16⁶¹. Furthermore, he estimated that by FY 2019/20, meeting the NATO target would require the MOD to be provided with an additional £5.9 billion in annual spending, compared with 2015 assumptions. In his view, in the context of wider austerity in public spending, such an increase was not plausible and his pessimistic analysis of all three major political parties’ spending plans prior to the 2015 general election suggested the MOD could face a ten per cent real-terms budget cut over the next four years.

The reality was somewhat different. As identified in the literature review, the July 2015 summer budget committed the government to provide the MOD with real terms increases of zero point five per cent per annum through to FY 2020/21 (Hansard

⁶¹ A total of £37.3 billion.

House of Commons, 2015). Moreover, in an examination of defence and security budgets after the 2015 spending review (SR15), Chalmers (2016b) identified that, when the MOD's allocation from the Joint Security Fund⁶² (JSF) was taken into account, core spending on defence would increase by three point one per cent in real terms over the four years from FYs 2015/16 to 2019/20. In addition, he also suggested that, with the MOD basing its forward plans beyond 2020/21 on the assumption that the total core budget would continue to grow at zero point five per cent per annum in real terms, and allocations from the JSF would be maintained broadly equivalent to pre-FY 2020/21 levels, and the department could continue to make savings broadly comparable to those identified up to FY 2010/21, the overall defence budget would have been successfully stabilised. This, in turn, would allow the government to make the commitments for spending beyond FY 2020/21 on which its £178 billion equipment, and equipment support plan (Her Majesty's Government, 2015, p. 27) was based.

Prior to the July 2015 summer budget, the general view amongst defence analysts was that the MOD would have to accommodate further cuts as an outcome of SR15 (see, for example, Cornish and Dorman (2013), De Waal (2014), and Reeve (2015)). Indeed, Chalmers (2014) suggested that further cuts in SR15 could see defence spending falling to between one point five and one point six per cent of GDP in FY 2020/21. Dorman et al. (2016, p. 48) summed up the situation well when they wrote: "To many commentators, the government's overall deficit reduction pledges appeared to presage inevitable and significant UK defence budget cuts."

The government decision in July 2015 to meet the NATO two per cent target was, in the view of Dorman et al, "one of the more curious episodes in recent British defence policy" (2016, p. 46). In their view, four different factors came together to encourage this U-turn. First, it was unprecedented for a US administration to have been quite so outspoken about the UK's budget plans, especially at the outset of an SDSR. Specifically, General Raymond Odierno, the US Army Chief of Staff, voiced

⁶² The creation of a Joint Security Fund was announced in SDSR 15. It was a new additional fund for the armed forces and the security and intelligence agencies, which would grow to £1.5 billion by 2019/20 (Her Majesty's Government, 2015, p. 11).

concerns about the impact that defence spending cuts could have on US-UK divisional-level interoperability (see BBC News (2015) and The Telegraph (2015c)). Second, after being such a strong advocate of NATO's two per cent spending target at the 2014 Wales Summit, Cameron would have risked both domestic and international accusations of hypocrisy if the UK then failed to meet it. Third, the severe reductions in military capability made in SDSR 10 were beginning to have an observable detrimental effect on UK defence output⁶³. Finally, prime ministerial legacy and successions also played their part in Cameron's decision making. This thesis has already presented evidence that finance and the economy have been enormously influential, and, in some instances, decisive, in all of the defence reviews from the end of World War II up to and including SDSR 10. However, in 2015, Greenwood's argument that the government of the day always has a choice regarding its resource allocation for defence predominated. Cameron and George Osborne considered the necessity of applying further austerity measures to the defence budget against the factors identified by Dorman, Uttley and Benedict Wilkinson, and, in the view of the academics the "cuts were less appealing and the volte-face more attractive" (2016, pp. 49-50).

Other Factors that Impacted on the 2015 SDSR

In its 2015 report 'Rethinking defence to meet new threats', the HCDC asserted that "The world is more dangerous and unstable than at any time since the end of the Cold War", and asked the question "Is the UK ready to respond?" (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2015b, p. 3). In support of this assertion, the committee cited Russian aggression in Eastern Ukraine, ISIL territorial gains in Syria and Iraq, and the expansion of Boko Haram's control in North Africa. In addition, in the second of three reports specifically focused on SDSR 15, it also concluded that the most likely threats to NATO member states would come from ambiguous or asymmetric warfare – cyber-war, propaganda, subversion and deniable special forces (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2014). While the review was ongoing, these potential threat areas were

⁶³ For example, the need regularly to call on allies to track Russian submarines off the UK coast (see The Telegraph (2015) and The Independent (2016)).

reinforced by the committee in its SDSR checklist report (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2015a). In response, SDSR 15 confirmed that the 2015 NSRA had concluded that “the threats faced by the UK, including our Overseas Territories and our overseas interests, have increased in scale diversity and complexity since 2010 (Her Majesty's Government, 2015, p. 15). Louisa Brooke-Holland and Claire Mills recognised a shift in language from SDSR 10 regarding the resurgence of state-based threats. The 2010 belief that “no state currently has both the intent and the capacity to threaten the independence or integrity of the UK” had been superseded by “there is currently no immediate direct military threat to the UK mainland” (Brooke-Holland and Mills, 2016, p. 11). Moreover, SDSR 15’s analysis of Russian behaviour confirmed that “although highly unlikely, we cannot rule out the possibility that it may feel tempted to act aggressively against NATO allies” (Her Majesty's Government, 2015, p. 18). A number of NSRA priority risks, across all three tiers, confirmed a greater possibility of military crises drawing in the UK, including through the UK’s treaty obligations⁶⁴.

SDSR 15 discussed allies and partners as part of its second national security objective – protect our global influence. It stated that strong alliances and partnerships worldwide were more important than ever (2015, p. 50) and reaffirmed the expectation that UK armed forces would normally deploy with allies such as the US and France, through NATO, or as part of a broader coalition (2015, p. 29). However, it also recognised that “we must work with others, not because we cannot work alone, but because the threats and opportunities are global” (2015, p. 50). Unsurprisingly, the report reinforced the importance of NATO, the special relationship with the US, the close defence and security relationship with France⁶⁵, collaborating with the European partners⁶⁶ of the Joint Expeditionary Group, and cooperation with the five-eyes community⁶⁷. It also specifically recognised the need to strengthen the interoperability

⁶⁴ Tier One risks: international military conflict and instability overseas; Tier Two risks: attacks and pressure on allies and hostile foreign action; and the Tier Three risk: military attack on the UK.

⁶⁵ Through the Lancaster House Treaty of 2010.

⁶⁶ Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and Norway.

⁶⁷ Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK and US.

of UK armed forces with the US through regularly planning and training together. None of this was new or unexpected; indeed, the only real change to the SDSR 10 approach was the confirmation that defence engagement⁶⁸ would be a funded, core-MOD task for the first time, and, therefore, would be prioritised alongside other core tasks (2015, p. 49).

One outcome of the review, recognised by many, was the improved global message it sent regarding the UK's ability and intention to influence world events. The Economist (2015a) and Dan Keohane (2016) both believed Britain was reasserting itself as a serious military power. Similarly, Chalmers (2015c) recognised the review should help to reverse the growing US and European perception that the UK was a power in retreat, and restore the UK's reputation as a reliable security partner (Chalmers, 2015d). These conclusions were drawn primarily as a result of increases in capability announced in the review across all of the armed forces (see Quentin (2015), Quintana (2015), Roberts (2015), and Molinelli (2016)). The positive impact of the capability increases may also account for another observation from an analysis of SDSR 15 secondary literature – there was not a single mention of inter-service rivalry or dissention amongst the service chiefs. With the exception of SDR 98, this is the only defence review that has not featured significant overt lobbying by individual services, or bickering between them (see Baylis and Macmillan (1993), Chichester and Wilkinson (1982), Jackson and Bramall (1992), Jackson (1990), Dodd (1994), and Dorman (2001b)). Notwithstanding, it is perhaps unsurprising that it is the defence reviews considered to have been Treasury-led – i.e. all of them except SDR 98 and SDSR 15 – which have attracted reports of self-serving behaviour from all three services.

7.2 Post-EU Referendum Examination of Defence and Security Policy

In evidence to the JCNSS, Sir Mark Lyall Grant stated that it would be taken as a sign of success if NSS 15 and SDSR 15 did not have to be updated before 2020 (Joint

⁶⁸ Defence engagement is defined in SDSR 15 as MOD and armed forces non-combat activities with international partners, which contribute to stability, security and prosperity.

Committee on the National Security Strategy, 2016a). He also confirmed that reviewing both was an option if “something absolutely fundamental changes” (Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, 2016b, p. 8). This view accords with the conclusion drawn in chapter six regarding the impact of contemporary events and strategic shocks on defence policy. On 20 February 2016, Cameron confirmed that a referendum on membership of the EU would be held in the UK on 23 June 2016 (BBC News, 2016). Depending on the outcome, the EU referendum certainly had the potential to be the strategic shock to generate the NSA’s fundamental change.

At the EU referendum, with a turnout of seventy-two point two per cent and by a majority of fifty-one point nine per cent to forty-eight point one per cent⁶⁹, the UK electorate voted to leave the EU (The Electoral Commission, 2016). To quote Zhou Enlai’s apocryphal observation on the impact of the French Revolution, it is probably ‘too early to say’ how the UK’s decision to leave the EU will fully impact this thesis’ general research question. Relevant academic commentary in the immediate aftermath of the referendum, however, was pessimistic (see, for example, Street and Reeve (2016), and Young (2016)). The two most significant factors initially identified were the potential long-term financial consequences and the effect on the ‘UK’s place in the world’.

The day after the EU referendum, sterling fell to its lowest level against the dollar in more than thirty years, at one point its value had reduced by thirteen per cent (Financial Times, 2016). This was followed by a prediction from the Economist’s Economic Intelligence Unit that UK GDP would contract by one per cent in 2017 (Street and Reeve, 2016, p. 2), which was reinforced by Financial Times research that showed by the end of the first quarter of 2018, the UK economy was between one and one point five per cent smaller than it would have been without the EU referendum vote (Financial Times, 2018). The financial impact can be summed up thus:

“The implications of this currency depreciation and the likely economic contraction will be felt in British defence and security policy in terms of the affordability of the

⁶⁹ Of a total electorate of 46,500,001, 17,410,072 voted leave and 16,141,241 voted remain.

overall defence budget, currently pegged at 2.0% of GDP [and] the price of planned equipment purchases from abroad.”

(Street and Reeve, 2016, p. 3)

Although the government’s hedging on sterling provided an insulation from the drop of the pound, it only lasts two years and was no more than a short-term fix (Financial Times, 2017a). At time of writing, the sterling/dollar exchange rate was within four cents of the immediate post-EU referendum figure (Bloomberg, 2019). As a consequence, the cost for new equipment acquired from US contractors will have risen sharply in the last twelve months. Although no official figures have been provided, Taylor initially predicted that the increase could be as much as eleven per cent, on an estimated annual outlay of \$10 billion (Taylor, 2016a), although his follow-on calculations suggested the increased cost of Britain’s defence imports could be lower, at £700 million per annum from FY 2018–19:

“With a defence budget of slightly more than £35 billion, the £700-million shortfall amounts to a 2 per cent cut in the purchasing power of Britain’s defence budget, and a much larger cut in the purchasing power of the equipment and support budgets. This must be a substantial challenge for defence planners and programmers.”

(Taylor, 2016b)

The impact of the EU referendum result on UK’s international standing may continue to be felt long after this thesis has been completed. After the result was announced, the government moved quickly to confirm the UK would not be withdrawing from the world stage (Gov.uk, 2016b). However, although the initial academic consensus was that leaving the EU would have no direct effect on the UK’s permanent membership of the UN Security Council (see Lang (2016)), concerns have been raised more recently that its influence is waning (see Gifkins et al. (2018)). In addition, Chalmers suggests that exit from the EU would “diminish UK influence in NATO as one of the things it has brought to NATO is its ability to bring along other European member states” (The Guardian, 2016).

In a pre-EU referendum briefing paper, Chalmers also posited that a UK decision to leave the EU would be as significant a shift in national strategy as the

country's decision to withdraw from bases East of Suez in the late 1960s. He believed that, in these circumstances, current plans for defence spending over the next decade might have to be revisited. Furthermore, it would be appropriate for the government to conduct another SDSR, notwithstanding the fact that SDSR 15 had only been completed eight months previously (Chalmers, 2016c). Although not advocating the same, Taylor conceded that the referendum result had placed SDSR 15 in disarray (Taylor, 2016a). By contrast, in its first annual report on NSS 15 and SDSR 15 (Her Majesty's Government, 2016), the government, while recognising that "the world can appear more uncertain and challenging than it has for many years", confirmed that "the principal threats to our national security remain the same" (2016, p. 3). Accordingly, it made no reference to the need for a refresh of the NSS or a new SDSR.

Less than six months after the NSS 15 and SDSR 15 annual report was published, the UK underwent another general election (The Electoral Commission, 2017). Although no party won a majority in Parliament, Mrs May was able to form a Conservative government with the support of the Democratic Unionist Party through a confidence and supply agreement (Gov.uk, 2017b). Of the three main political parties, only Labour included a commitment in its manifesto to undertake a complete SDSR if elected (see The Conservative & Unionist Party (2017), The Labour Party (2017), and The Liberal Democrat Party (2017)). The Conservative manifesto made no mention of any additional investigation into UK defence and security policy; however, one month after the election, the government announced that it had begun work on a review of national security capabilities – the NSCR (Gov.uk, 2017c).

The National Security Capability Review

The government intended the NSCR to be carried out alongside the ongoing implementation and monitoring of the eighty-nine principal commitments set out in NSS 15 and SDSR 15. The review was planned as an "examination of the policy and plans which support implementation of the national security strategy, and help to ensure that the UK's investment in national security capabilities is as joined-up, effective and efficient as possible, to address current national security challenges" (Gov.uk, 2017c). That said, Chalmers was convinced the defence element of the review

would be “the most consequential, substantively and politically” (Chalmers, 2018, p. 3). He also questioned the decision of aiming for a cost-neutral outcome, based on budgets agreed during SR15, given the government’s intention to hold a further spending review in 2019 (Chalmers, 2018), as well as his observation about the need to re-visit defence spending post the UK’s EU exit (Chalmers, 2016c).

The review consisted of twelve separate work strands⁷⁰, which were progressed by cross-department government teams, overseen by the NSA. The process lasted eight months and concluded with the publication of a report in March 2018, which was endorsed by the Prime Minister and included the government’s second annual report of NSS15 and SDSR 15 (parliament.uk, 2018). It is not surprising that, in the first instance, the NSCR report re-visited the national security context. In recognition of the growing uncertainty over the UK’s departure from the EU, it is also not surprising that the NSCR’s first assertion was that “While the UK has chosen to leave the EU, we are unconditionally committed to European security and defence and want to work closely with our European partners to keep all of our citizens safe and our continent secure” (Her Majesty’s Government, 2018, p. 5). As we have seen, reports of this nature are, first and foremost, political documents. The report also confirmed that the challenges likely to influence UK security priorities for the coming decade, expressed in SDSR 15, had become “more complex, intertwined and dangerous as the world has become more uncertain and volatile” (2018, p. 5).

The review also added to the initial four NSS challenges⁷¹: “The ongoing growth in serious and organised crime and its impact” and “Diseases and natural hazards affecting the UK” (2018, p. 5). Neither of these additions should come as a

⁷⁰ The NSCR work strands were: national security doctrine; defence; counter-terrorism; cyber; serious, organised and economic crime; ports and borders; national resilience; global Britain; national security strategic communications; economic security, prosperity and trade; development; and cross-government funds.

⁷¹ 1 - The increased threat posed by terrorism, extremism and instability. 2 - The resurgence of state-based threats; and intensifying wider state competition. 3 - The impact of technology, especially cyber threats and wide technological developments. 4 - The erosion of the rules-based international order, making it harder to build consensus and tackle global threats.

surprise, as public health and major natural hazards were both Tier One risks in the 2015 NSRA, and serious and organised crime sat just one level below at Tier Two.

The report stepped through each of the twelve work strands, but none included any attention-grabbing new developments. Instead, the narrative mainly re-emphasised the government's existing approach, for example, "We will continue to implement the National Security Cyber Security Strategy and ensure it keeps pace with the threat ..." (2018, p. 21); or made bland and non-contentious statements, such as: "We will take a whole-of-government approach to serious and organised crime ..." (2018, p. 23). The section on defence was limited to a mix of re-stating elements of SDSR 15, for example listing the JF25 force structure and highlighting recent achievements in the equipment programme. With the final, four-page annex simply listing in tabular format those of the eighty-nine principal commitments from SDSR 15 that were complete or in progress, there was a real possibility that the NSCR would introduce no significant initiatives at all.

Nonetheless, it did announce one: a new national security doctrine – the Fusion Doctrine. The NSCR stated that Fusion Doctrine will be used "to improve our collective approach to national security" (2018, p. 3) and stated its principle as "to deploy security, economic and influence capabilities to protect, promote and protect our national security economic and influence goals" (2018, p. 11). It also confirmed the NSC would take decisions about strategic prioritisation to inform departmental business plans. The key explanatory paragraph is reproduced in full below:

"For each of its priorities, the NSC will consider UK interests and objectives, the situation we face and the outlook, and then the wider national or international strategy to decide how to make a catalytic contribution, considering our full range of capabilities. The NSC's ambition must match the resources committed so that we pursue realistic objectives and prioritize scarce resources where they can make the most difference as part of our collective approach. Rigorous implementation is also essential."

(Her Majesty's Government, 2018, p. 11)

This explanatory detail regarding Fusion Doctrine has more than a passing similarity to grand strategy. For example, the encompassing, agile, ordered and precipitant aspirations of the Fusion Doctrine are equally applicable to grand strategy. So why not simply use the term that already exists? In its 2010 investigation into UK national strategy, the Public Administration Select Committee began its work by examining whether the concept of ‘grand strategy’ was still of value. It concluded that “the historical connotations of ‘grand strategy’ could prove to be a hindrance because the term is associated with Empire and in some quarters is seen as hubristic” (House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee, 2010, p. 9). In a similar vein, Lucas Milevski (2016, p. 98) suggested that, “despite its return to academic popularity, [grand strategy] may simply no longer be politically correct.” Perhaps the authors of the NSCR recognised the need to re-invigorate the UK’s approach to grand strategy, but sought to provide it with a new face, to align better with modern thinking.

The Modernising Defence Programme

On 01 November 2017, Michael Fallon resigned as Secretary of State for Defence to be replaced the following day by Gavin Williamson. In January 2108, even though the NSCR was still running, Williamson persuaded the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer to support a concurrent, defence-focused study – the MDP. The aim of the MDP was to “deliver better military capability and value for money on a sustainable and affordable way.” Williamson justified it by stating that “we must do more to ensure that we use our resources effectively and deliver the efficiencies that the Department has committed to, so that they can be reinvested in the capabilities we require for our Armed Forces” (Hansard House of Commons, 2018a). The target completion date for the MDP was July 2018; however, it was December 2018 before Williamson was able to provide a final update to Parliament (Hansard House of Commons, 2018c) and the report was published (Secretary of State for Defence, 2018b).

The MDP was divided into four work strands: organisational development and reform; efficiency management; commercial and financial management; and capability development. It was the final work strand – capability development – that the HCDC’s preliminary report on the MDP identified as the most significant (House of Commons

Defence Committee, 2018b). However, apart from not announcing any cuts to specific capabilities, the report failed to tackle capability development issues at all. Indeed, the four work strands were completely absent in the final report, which instead coalesced around three new aims: mobilise, modernise, and transform. Under these themes, the MDP broadly described what would be prioritised:

“We will mobilise, making more of what we already have to ensure our Armed Forces are best placed to protect our security. We will modernize, embracing new technologies and assuring our competitive edge over our adversaries. We will transform, radically changing the way we do business and staying ahead of emerging threats.”

(Secretary of State for Defence, 2018b, pp. 15-16)

It also included a section on key defence policies that would be updated to contribute to the latest whole-of-government approach that was articulated in the NSCR. This was, however, extremely short on detail. It expanded the eight armed forces missions from SDSR 15 into a framework of twenty-five tasks that represented the totality of the defence contribution to the Fusion Doctrine, and introduced a Defence Transformation Fund of up to £500 million, although it was not clear if the new fund was part of, or in addition to, the £800 million Defence Innovation Fund that had been announced in SDSR 15 (see Her Majesty's Government (2015, pp. 73-74), and (Gov.uk, 2017a)).

In a House of Commons library briefing for parliamentarians, Brooke-Holland (2018) described the MDP report as “a relatively short document that firstly recounts developments in defence since 2015 and assesses current and future threats before identifying three broad areas it will now prioritise.” In general, however, the lack of detail in the report attracted widespread criticism (see, for example, Makin-Isherwood (2018), and Allport (2019)). Howard Wheeldon said it had “hardly a specific detail of anything that really matters” (DefenceNews, 2018). Taylor’s observation was equally blunt:

“The formal MDP document was conspicuously spread over less than 30 pages, many of which were taken up by photographs, blank pages and material summarising

current and past activities of the armed forces. Material about the future was addressed in just around seven pages of generously sized and spaced text."

(Taylor, 2019)

Cornish (2018, p. 15) suggested that one of the new Secretary of State's first tasks should be to "challenge the notion that national security and defence can be achieved 'on the cheap' and to argue that the defence budget cannot take any further reductions without accepting the strategic risk that must, inevitably, be associated with reduced capability." However, the MDP ducked this issue as well, choosing instead to defer to the government's CSR, planned for 2019. Indeed, the report made no fewer than five separate references to the forthcoming spending review (Brooke-Holland, 2018, p. 5), with Williamson confirming "it is going to be very important for the Department to make sure that we get the right investment going forward" (Hansard House of Commons, 2018b). This led Curtis (2019, p. 62) to suggest it was "hard to conclude that the MDP report was anything more than an exercise in 'kicking the can down the road'."

7.3 Summary

NSS 15 was the fourth attempt by a UK government to articulate a strategy for the nation's security, and the second to be produced using the extant NSS/SDSR methodology, first seen in 2010. At the macro level, this new methodology saw the SDSR identifying the 'means' (resources) and 'ways' (courses of action) across government, needed to deliver the 'ends' described in the NSS (Director Corporate Strategy Ministry of Defence, 2015, p. 14). The more detailed approaches taken to articulate the 2010 and 2015 strategies were reasonably similar, with both NSS 10 and NSS 15 identifying a simple vision, or goal, supported by a small number (two or three) of complementary objectives, within which the key policy and capability decisions were described. These narratives were then supported by an analysis of the national security context, drawing out likely challenges to drive future security priorities. The analysis was risk-based with tiered ranking generated through a judgement of likelihood and impact.

Curtis (2019, pp. 57-58) argued that this methodology provided a stable and consistent process and improved the manner in which defence reviews are now undertaken. The decision to retain, and also develop, the risk management process, across all four strategy documents, rather than the Cold War threat-led or Early Expeditionary capability-led approach, supports this view. In the opinion of Cornish and Dorman (2013, p. 339), this was the “only rational response to the confluence of austerity in national defence spending with the diversity, complexity and urgency of the international security environment.” Layton (2015), however, offered a different view. Comparing grand strategy, risk management, and opportunism approaches to NSS 15, he considered a risk management solution may appear simplest as being a straightforward extension of NSS 2010 approach. Nonetheless, he reflected that a grand strategy approach would provide more flexibility and be more likely to result in the UK ending up “where the nation wishes to be” (2015, p. 44), albeit, it would be a complex endeavour that would make substantial, ongoing intellectual demands. In Leyton’s view, it amounted to a choice between trying to shape international affairs to be more favourable to the UK (a grand strategic approach) or planning to respond meaningfully to events that arise (risk management). The nation’s decision makers have clearly opted for the latter.

In his review of NSS 10, Clarke (2010) was positive in his assessment that it was “bedding down in the structure of government thinking” and “represents a whole of government approach to everything that can be deemed a security threat.” Analysis of the amalgamation of NSS 15 and SDSR 15 into a single document suggests that is still the case. However, Clarke goes on to assert:

“The problem with it [NSS 2010], as it presently stands, is that it is not really a strategy as such, but a methodology for a strategy. It does not make hard choices between real things – which is what strategists have to do. It creates all the right boxes and describes how we should fit them together – who should lead in this or that area, who else would be involved, and so on – but it doesn’t put anything specific into the boxes.”

(Clarke, 2010)

This assessment is equally valid for NSS 15 and confirms the government's preference for adaptability and flexibility in its decision making regarding the allocation of finite military capability. The UK's NSS has become a strategic framework, based on a judgement of extant risk, from which a decision can be generated, when required, in response to a specific situation. This has been recognised at the highest level, both politically and militarily. From within government, it was confirmed by Letwin who, when asked by a member of the JCNSS if the NSS could be summed up by saying "we will do what we can that looks sensible at the time, with rather limited resources", responded "That is not a bad description" (Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, 2012, p. 15). Furthermore, speaking as CDS, Houghton said:

"I do worry that some people will aspire for an SDSR of falsely assumed perfection, one which delivers a single strategic outcome in which Ends, Ways and Means are locked in perfect harmony and which does not need to be worried about for another five years. I do not believe that the contemporary world allows for such an approach. Strategy, to me, like helicopter flight, is inherently unstable and often very noisy. Our approach must be adaptive, constantly revisiting ends, ways and means to ensure that coherence is maintained; accepting risk when it is manageable, constantly seeking optimum ways of doing things and only ever compromising ambition when absolutely necessary."

(chathamhouse.org, 2015)

From the outset, there was a positive and optimistic air about the review process in 2015. This was mainly as a result of the preceding budget settlement for defence, which Houghton (chathamhouse.org, 2015) observed "has given us the opportunity to make choices in this SDSR which are about betterment rather than decline; about reviewing the scale and nature of the security risks to the country and reducing them. This is hugely welcome." Moreover, it was in stark contrast to the traditional approach to the process, identified by Hampshire as:

"Defence reviews have the reputation of being focused on cutting capabilities and commitments, of cancelling defence projects, of reducing numbers of troops, and then being accompanied by the wailing and gnashing of teeth by retired generals, think-tankers and Conservative back-benchers as Britain's international power and

influence is seen to be shrinking and the UK is accused of withdrawing from its world role."

(Hampshire, 2015, p. 1)

Confirmation that the UK would continue to meet the NATO target to invest two per cent of GDP on defence, and a commitment to spend £178 billion over the next decade on equipment and equipment support (Her Majesty's Government, 2015, p. 27) generated positive, if not entirely wholehearted, support in the secondary literature. For example De Waal (2015, p. 2) wrote that the SDSR had largely succeeded in providing Britain with the tools necessary to deal with domestic and international threats to its security, and Chalmers (2016a, p. 8) suggested that "after five years characterised by reductions and retreat ... the UK's reputation as a credible military power has, in broad terms, been restored." More significantly, SDSR 15 was greeted favourably within the armed forces, as it offered capability enhancements and/or increases for all three services. As Molinelli (2016, p. 84) recognised, it put an end to the speculation about the future of HMS PRINCE OF WALES by confirming the RN would put both QEC aircraft carriers into service. In addition, the HCDC affirmed that the creation of a warfighting division, optimised for high-intensity combat operations, was at the heart of SDSR 15 and a considerable advance on the Army 2020 strategy (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2017, p. 9). Finally, the additional Typhoon squadrons, new remotely piloted aircraft systems, and reestablishment of a maritime patrol capability, all announced in SDSR 15, led Chief of the Air Staff Sir Stephen Hillier to announce that "for the first time in generations, we are growing ..." (Royal Air Force, 2017). The lack of overt inter-service rivalry and less-than-usual interjections from retired senior officers both support Chalmers' (2016b, p. 6) observation that SDSR 15 was "widely welcomed in senior military circles as a considerable improvement over previous expectations of further decline."

Louth (2016, p. 3) believed that, "on a first reading, the SDSR is a credible and well-thought-out attempt to help the UK to address defence and security issues and risks from now into the 2030s and beyond." However, he followed that assertion up with "yet, on closer inspection, issues emerge around affordability and dependency."

Concerns over the longevity of the reviews outcomes were shared by other commentators (see Hampshire (2015), Keohane (2016), Street (2016)), and these concerns appear to be legitimate. MOD's 2016 Equipment Plan provided more detail around SDSR 15's commitment of £178 billion for equipment and equipment support, in the form of a ten-year spending plan (Minister for Defence Procurement, 2017). However, in its subsequent report, the NAO highlighted that SDSR 15 had added £24.4 billion of new commitments, all of which had to be funded from within the existing plan. Furthermore, it confirmed that the MOD had allocated all of the headroom previously set aside, removing its flexibility to accommodate additional capability requirements, and also needed to generate £5.8 billion of new savings from projects within the plan to meet its new commitments (Comptroller & Auditor General, 2017). Added to this, Brooke-Holland (2017) pointed out that the Equipment Plan was vulnerable to foreign exchange rates, noting that approximately £18.6 billion would have to be paid in US dollars. On the same subject, the Public Accounts Committee stated it was "very concerned that the Ministry of Defence's Equipment Plan is at greater risk of becoming unaffordable than at any time since its inception in 2012" (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 2017, p. 3).

One year later, in its report on the MOD's 2017 Equipment Plan (Minister for Defence Procurement, 2018), the NAO confirmed that the plan was now unaffordable, with a minimum affordability gap of £4.9 billion and a potential affordability gap of £20.8 billion (Comptroller & Auditor General, 2018a, p. 6). Apprehensions in academia that SDSR 15's financial vulnerabilities were reminiscent of SDR 98, and would generate the same affordability pressures for military capability (see Dorman et al. (2016), and Hampshire (2015)), had been realised.

In addition to changes in the financial landscape, the period immediately following SDSR 15 also saw an intensifying of the principal threats to the UK's national security. In its first annual report on NSS 15 and SDSR 15, the government confirmed:

"We are witnessing the resurgence of state-based threats – as displayed most obviously by Russia's actions in Syria and Ukraine; terrorism and extremism threaten our security; cyber-attacks are on the increase from both state and non-state actors,

and we face renewed challenges to the rules-based international order that provides the bedrock of our security”

(Her Majesty's Government, 2016, p. 3)

This intensification was recognised by the JCNSS who confirmed there had been “major changes to the wider security environment” (Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, 2018, p. 19) between the publication of SDSR 15, in November 2015, and the commissioning of the NSCR, in July 2017. The other significant occurrence to impact UK national security was the outcome of the EU referendum.

In oral evidence to the JCNSS, the NSA characterised the NSCR as a “quick refresh of the 2015 strategy and SDSR, partly to deal with the evolving threat picture but partly also to deal with the question of whether it was still right in all respects, given that it was written before the decision to leave the European Union” (Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, 2017, p. 3). This explanation was supported by Chalmers who believed the NSCR “started as a sensible attempt to refresh national security capabilities in the light of recent developments” (Chalmers, 2018p. 16). Accordingly, Curtis (2019, p. 59) concluded that there were good reasons for the NSCR to revisit the 2015 NSS and SDSR, even though it disrupted the quinquennial review process.

However, Curtis also suggested the same was not true for the MDP. In his view, the MDP created uncertainty about the scope and timing of the next SDSR, and issues regarding its extant methodology. For example, at time of writing, it was not clear if there would be an SDSR in 2020 (Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, 2018, p. 2), and pursuing a defence-only agenda jeopardised the widely-endorsed, whole-of-government approach. The decision to undertake the MDP, in addition to the NSCR, lends weight to this thesis’ earlier conclusion that defence reviews are always politically motivated, and the pre-eminence of the political over the military will always have the potential to introduce uncertainty, in both the timing and process of future reviews. That is to say, even a methodology that is in the vanguard

of interdepartmental working on national security is vulnerable to the machinations of an ambitious politician.

Chapter 8: Factors that shape the Translation of Strategic Direction into Military Capability

All of the data generation undertaken to this point in the thesis has relied on the method of qualitative content analysis of relevant government policy documents and associated policy analysis from the commentariat. The following two chapters introduce data drawn from the semi-structured elite interviews. In accordance with the thesis' methodology, analysis of the interview transcripts was undertaken using constructivist grounded theory methodology. The rationale for selecting GTM, how the data were selected and analysed, and tools used in the research was explained in chapter three so there is no requirement to repeat it in its entirety here. That said, a small degree of repetition is necessary to provide a framework for the next two chapters.

GTM begins with open coding (Urquhart, 2012). To that end, the first stage of analysing the data from the thirty-two elite interviews undertaken was the line-by-line open coding of the interview transcripts. This action resulted in the identification of 487 separate open codes, which, borrowing the coding construct for elite interviews devised by Aberbach and Rockman (2002), were divided into manifest, latent and global coding items⁷². Selective coding was then carried out to scale up the open codes into categories important to the research problem. Due to the large number of open codes, subcategories were identified where appropriate⁷³. Associated subcategories and open codes were aggregated into the following categories to enable theoretical coding to be undertaken:

- Strategic context.
- Politics and politicians.
- Affordability of defence.

⁷² Definitions are included in the methodology chapter.

⁷³ Examples of subcategories are detailed in the methodology chapter.

- Single services' conduct.
- Internal defence processes.

The first four categories consisted of factors that defence decision makers are, for the most part, unable directly to affect; hence they were labelled as 'shaping' categories. However, the factors in the final category, internal defence processes, are all subject to the oversight and amendment by defence decision makers; as a result, this category was considered to be a 'determining' category. This chapter details the outcome of the selective coding analysis for the shaping categories; chapter nine contains the same for the determining category.

8.1 Strategic Context

The first category to emerge from the selective coding process focused mainly on the relationships between strategic direction and military capability. Many of the interviewees concentrated on the contextual aspects of the strategy within which capability planning was being undertaken. Furthermore, although not directly answering the thesis' specific research questions, a number also expressed particular views about strategy in the round. With the use of follow-up, open-ended questions, many of these views were developed into more focused observations around how politicians give strategic direction, which were more usefully consigned to the 'political and politicians' category, considered in the next section. However, during selective coding, several other avenues of analysis that explored associations between strategy and capability also became apparent. Although some of the capability-related open codes were better suited to a more process focused category, others were more appropriately considered alongside strategy-related data. To that end, this category was labelled 'strategic context'.

The 'strategic context' category encompassed 140 open codes that, in turn, incorporated 590 data points. The majority of the open codes were considered as standalone codes, although some could be aggregated into subcategories concentrating on contemporary approaches to strategy, both in terms of process and organisations. Moreover, the abundance of data around the connecting of strategy and capability

contributed significantly to the understanding of the following specific research questions:

- How does the government decide upon, and then articulate, strategic direction?
- How do defence decision makers translate strategic direction into military capability?
- Does the evidence suggest that UK military capabilities are aligned to strategic direction?

UK's Present-day approach to Strategy

Probably the single subject that generated the most debate during this thesis' elite interviews was the UK's present-day approach to strategy. All thirty-two interviewees expressed a view. As a start point, a number of interviewees considered that developing strategy was considerably more challenging today than had been in the past (see Interviewee 06 (2016), Interviewee 07 (2017), and Interviewee 30 (2018)). A retired senior civil servant suggested:

"It's so much easier ... to develop a grand strategy when the threat is clear and unitary. But at the moment, the risks and threats are seen to be so multifaceted, whether it's resurgent Russia, whether it's 'so called' ISIS, whether it's migration, whether it's climate change. It's quite difficult."

(Interviewee 06, 2016)

Another consistent theme was the often-considerable difference between the strategic direction that senior military officers considered the government should be providing, and what they believed they were actually receiving. In the main, the expectation was for "a high-level position, which frames and guides the activities that we partake in" (Interviewee 22, 2017), but with a reality that was considered closer to "it doesn't feel like it's knitted into a coherent whole. We are too focused on attending 'events dear boy events', rather than setting out a broad framework" (Interviewee 30, 2018). Some sought a strategic plan around where UK defence should be at specific points in the future (see Interviewee 10 (2017), Interviewee 16 (2017), and Interviewee 18 (2017)), while others believed that an ill-considered approach to prioritisation was a key problem. This manifested itself in two specific ways. In the first instance, too

many risks articulated in NSSs made “everything seem like a priority” (Interviewee 22, 2017), and the need for defence to be able to respond to any eventuality “means no guidance, [just] the illusion of prioritisation” (Interviewee 31, 2017). Secondly, and as a result of over-prioritisation, was the inability to disinvest in capability, or cancel programmes. As a former civil servant, now in a senior defence industry role, offered “... what the MOD really should be doing is stopping some stuff.” He went on to confirm “[In industry] I can do it without fear, in fact actually it’s applauded. I sometimes talk of strategy being the art of deciding what not to do” (Interviewee 07, 2017). In the resource-constrained environment occupied by defence decision makers, the idea of strategy being as much about deciding what not to do, as it is about deciding what to do makes eminent sense, and is also supported in the substantial strategy-related secondary literature (see, for example, Crawford (2011) and Freedman (2013)).

Some interviewees theorised about the disconnect between the positions of the political givers and military receivers of strategic direction. One four-star officer believed that the demands placed on the government to deliver defence and security policy would always outstrip the resource it was prepared to allocate to the relevant departments. He suggested “It fundamentally is about the drivers of politics generating a situation in which we cannot afford to do all we want to do, and that’s true of every government under the sun. It’s a fact of life” (Interviewee 04, 2016). Moreover, he considered that governments were all too aware of the problem, but aimed for the unachievable nevertheless:

“it [the government] prefers to set a level of ambition that it sort of knows is undeliverable, and then send everybody charging off trying to deliver that level of ambition, and fail in certain parts of the machine. That is a preferable thing to actually accepting failure at the start”

(Interviewee 04, 2016)

A more conciliatory view of recent governments’ approach to strategy was advanced by those interviewees who had experience outwith the MOD. A three-star officer, who had worked in the Cabinet Office, posited that today’s politicians’ view of

strategy and grand strategy was basically not the same as that learned by generations of military officers. In his opinion, politicians advocated a far simpler approach. For example, in the early stages of SDSR 15, he suggested that Cameron's strategy could be explained as 'making Britain prosperous', arguing "What more do you need? The key way of doing that is economic and defence security. [They] are two sides of the same coin. That's the grand strategy" (Interviewee 21, 2017). Although using just three words to articulate the nation's strategy may seem meagre, on becoming Prime Minister in 1940, Churchill's grand strategy for winning the war with Hitler's Germany – argued by both Eliot Cohen (2003) and Freedman (2013) as to 'drag the United States in' – is only two words more!

A former senior civil servant, with a diplomatic rather than defence background, also offered an alternative view. To him, strategy was "a slippery word" (Interviewee 23, 2017) that generated difficult discussions across the defence and security community. He suggested the military's request for strategic direction normally meant "give me some clarity on what my objectives are, so I can get on with it"; unfortunately, in his view "it's never as simple as that." Furthermore, he considered grand strategic choices to be generally of a former time and, although he conceded that "post Brexit, there will be grand strategic choices to be made about Britain's role in the world", he also believed "that's a very occasional moment."

The potential misalignment of politicians and the military influenced the interviewees when discussing the UK's present-day approach to strategy. Although the "people tend to be motivated by tomorrow's headlines" (Interviewee 02, 2016) view was prevalent, many interviewees also recognised that both sides needed to up their game. For example, a two-star British Army officer accepted that "we need to be able to adapt and be much more agile in our strategic planning" (Interviewee 30, 2018). Another, in recognising the complexity of the situation, perhaps more pragmatically offered "I can't remember the words, but I think it was Michael Howard who talked about 'the idea is not to be so wrong that you can't adapt.'" That's the key. That's one of the wisest things anyone has ever said" (Interviewee 31, 2017).

Aligning Capability to Strategic Direction

As part of an investigation into the factors relating to the translation of strategic direction into military capability, an obvious data collection question was ‘is current and planned capability aligned to strategic direction?’ Approximately one third of the elite interviews included a discussion based around this question, and, not unexpectedly, views were mixed. In broad terms, those responsible for the procurement of capability, either the deciders within the single services or the providers in defence’s delivery agents⁷⁴ were generally positive, with those elsewhere less so. The RN view was typical of the deciders: “There is a gap [in the alignment of capability to strategic direction]. It’s not perfect [but] I don’t think the gap is any bigger at the moment than it’s been” (Interviewee 01, 2016). By contrast, a four-star officer, working in MOD head office at the time of his interview was unequivocal: “Do we actually have our current and planned capability aligned to the strategic direction that’s coming down? The answer to that is no” (Interviewee 26, 2018). He went on to confirm that in many respects UK military capability was world-beating but within quite narrowly defined parameters. Moreover, in pursuing ground-breaking capabilities across the traditional domains of maritime, land and air, he argued that defence was not investing sufficiently in novel technologies in the new domains of space and cyber, where he considered the UK was strategically vulnerable.

Accepted capability gaps, unrealistic political ambition, finite resources and the limited opportunity to veer and haul within the department’s budget were all reasons given for the disparity between strategic direction and the current force structure (see Interviewee 01 (2016), Interviewee 02 (2016), Interviewee 03 (2016), and Interviewee 20 (2017)). One four-star officer suggested that the reality of actual operations drives capability usage, which is regularly at odds with the original strategic direction for what kind of armed forces a government thought it wanted (Interviewee 01, 2016). Furthermore, he considered that, in the current international environment, the pace of these revised requirements would invariably outstrip the reaction time of the

⁷⁴ DE&S, Information Systems and Services and the Submarine Delivery Agency.

procurement pipeline, against which the new capability was being delivered. Furthermore, defence simply did not have the almost limitless funding and programming headroom required regularly to change multi-billion and multi-year procurement programmes. In this interviewee's opinion, the solution was an ability constantly to adjust existing and near-future capability to map onto changed strategic environments and concepts for the use of military power, whilst, at the same time, trying to draw the lessons from that for future capability. This could be achieved by creating the capacity rapidly to reset capability in all future procurement programmes; however, that is not easily achieved. In some instances, the ability of UK defence to influence capability development is limited, for example in a multi-national programme like F-35. In others, national industrial capacity may simply be unable to react in the timescales required.

All of the views stated above were from military officers or MOD civil servants. However, one former civil servant, who's forty-year career was spent entirely as a member of the diplomatic service, had a different opinion. He questioned the fundamental proposition that strategy drives capability, arguing instead that capability was the result of ad hoc decisions taken over twenty or thirty years, accreted together, and which are continuing to be taken. His example to support this assertion was carrier strike:

"It [carrier strike] was a capability 'dans tous les azimuts' as the French would say – you know, capable of going in any direction – rather than a response to a strategic need. I guess it's always been thus and will always be thus. In war time, you have operational requirements and so on. In peace time, it's incremental adjustments to your stock of capability – not strategy. So, it's muddle through."

(Interviewee 24, 2017)

Aligning Capability to Threats

The final significant grouping of open codes within this category coalesced around threats. Given its acceptance of the UN principle "to refrain ... from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state" (United Nations, 1945), focusing on external threats and aligning military capability to

them is a logical, macro-level approach for the UK to take to defence planning. To that end, a number of interview guide's data collection questions related to the recognition of current and future threats and the matching of capability choices to them.

Most of the interviewees that expressed an opinion about the UK's ability to recognise current and future threats were positive, whilst accepting that the present-day threat environment was both complex and subject to rapid change (see, for example, Interviewee 03 (2016), Interviewee 05 (2016), Interviewee 07 (2017), and Interviewee 31 (2017)). One two-star officer offered a different view, suggesting "we've probably not articulated well enough the threat the nation faces" (Interviewee 31, 2017). However, for various reasons, none of the interviewees were comfortable with how adequately UK military capability was aligned to those recognised current and future threats.

At one end of the scale was the view that aligning capability to threats was "about getting it as least wrong as possible" (Interviewee 05, 2016) or, even more pessimistically "We're trying to do an impossible task, to predict the future and structure ourselves against [it]" (Interviewee 14, 2017). A three-star officer with considerable procurement experience offered a pragmatic view:

"... because of the fluidity of the business that we're in, the potentially unforeseen nature of threats changing and expanding, we're never going to get to the point where our capability is fully aligned [to the current and future threats we face]. It's a case of getting it to an acceptable level and veering and hauling from there."

(Interviewee 17, 2017)

Another concern raised was the inconsistent application of threat-related assumptions when making capability choices. One three-star officer applauded the decision to procure F-35, suggesting it was based on a recognition that every future environment would be contested and that necessitated the best survivability defence could afford. However, he went on to point out that the same approach to survivability had not influenced other procurement decisions, questioning "... the assumptions around that contested environment have not played out across the rest of defence, how can that be?" (Interviewee 16, 2017).

The flexibility to adjust existing and near-future capability, explored in the previous sub-section, was seen by a number of the more operationally experienced interviewees as the best way to counter the fluidity of the contemporary threat-based environment. Although that was often recognised as a difficult ask, especially in collaborative programmes where the UK was not the dominant partner, several success stories were highlighted, for example, Tornado:

"The Tornado force [has been] continuously committed to operations for 27 years now. Has done those operations against the massed Iraqi forces of 1991. Done it in a more limited way in support of UN resolutions through the '90s, in almost a rerun in 2003. Then counter insurgency there and in Afghanistan. Then in Libya something different again. Kosovo something different again. Now, in Iraq and Syria something different again. This is essentially a capability in a force structure, which was designed in the '70s, implemented in the '80s and has delivered for 27 years from 1990/1991 onwards. It's done all right. There's something [that] must be not too bad about in our processes. It is absolutely the case that the Tornado, if you use that as an example, was designed for something different but it had the flexibility in the platform, in the people and the conceptual thinking to evolve."

(Interviewee 09, 2017)

Summary

Almost seventy per cent of interviewees' views coded within this category were critical of both the UK's current approach to strategy and the linkages between strategic direction and military capability. Fewer open codes contained data focused on the reasons why this criticism might be valid, and fewer still on potential improvements. Furthermore, data coded to this category exhibited instances where similar opinions were clustered around similar experience. For example, those interviewees with strong traditional programming backgrounds shared more commonly held views about the mismatch between strategic direction and capability, whilst those officers currently in decider and provider appointments across the single services and delivery agents were generally more positive about the suitability of current and planned capability to meet the higher-level intent. Finally, although all interviewees were comfortable discussing issues around military capability, a disappointing number were basing their opinions predominantly around equipment,

offering little or no consideration of the other DLODs, a concern raised explicitly by one British Army two-star officer (Interviewee 30, 2018). For example, a sizable proportion of discussion related to this category centred solely on the equipment programme, and responses about countering current and future threats were invariably equipment orientated. Observations such as “[The] biggest risk across all of the defence domain at the moment is people, and that’s retention and recruitment” (Interviewee 03, 2016) were the exception.

8.2 Politics and Politicians

In tackling the question ‘why does the UK have the military capability that is has?’, this thesis concentrates on decisions below the political level. However, that does not mean the actions of politicians, or politics in general, is irrelevant. Indeed, as the start point for the translation of strategic direction into military capability, the government of the day clearly had an influence on defence reviews of the Cold War and Early Expeditionary period. Analysis of both SDSRs also demonstrates that political influences still play a considerable part in shaping the outcomes of the extant quinquennial review process. Moreover, a significant number of elite interview participants shared views on how politics in general, and, in some cases, politicians in particular, influenced military capability decision making within the MOD.

During the initial open coding process, sixty-two open codes with 504 separate data points were identified that had a political focus. Of these, a number could be scaled up into subcategories of political influence, the provision of strategic direction, and knowledge and experience of politicians in defence matters. Analysis of these subcategories and the remaining, standalone politically focused open codes confirmed the need for a ‘politics and politicians’ category to be considered during the theoretical coding process. This section explores the data within this category, to recognise both how they contribute to answering the thesis’ specific research questions and to building theory during the theoretical coding process.

Political Direction

The most relevant data collection question to the ‘politics and politicians’ category, included in the interview guide for the elite interviews, was ‘how good are politicians at giving strategic direction?’ From the thirty-four per cent of interviewees who offered a direct answer, the response was generally lukewarm. Responses ranged from “we received very little” (Interviewee 05, 2016) and “they are not” (Interviewee 07, 2017) to “quite good and getting better” (Interviewee 22, 2017). The middle ground was occupied with statements like “pretty poor, although I don’t think it’s for the want of trying” (Interviewee 18, 2017), “not as bad as one might imagine” (Interviewee 02, 2016), and “as far as it goes, not bad” (Interviewee 03, 2016). In exploring why so few positive responses were received, one interviewee suggested that “pressures relating to the media, international events, allies, [and] party politics, which can all make it difficult to give clear policy direction” (Interviewee 31, 2017). Surprisingly, few interviewees considered the question from the politicians’ perspective. One four-star officer suggested that “the responsibility is incumbent on us [the military] to more clearly articulate the trade-offs and the choices that a range of potential options represent, and also be clearer as to the risks and the resources that are necessary to either implement or otherwise any of their [the politicians’] decisions” (Interviewee 26, 2018). This was supported by another three-star British Army officer who considered “what we’re very bad at from within defence is understanding how politicians perceive defence” (Interviewee 15, 2017). He went on to observe that “to understand why we behave as we do, you’ve almost got to walk in their shoes, and I think that’s quite hard for us.” Aside from these particular comments, there was little recognition across the elite interviews that both the givers and receivers of strategic direction have a role to play in improving the process.

One four-star officer suggested that “one of the reasons strategic direction has been absent is ... [a] lack of education and training, the particular experience of recent events, and a simple judgement [by the government] that it wasn’t helpful to them” (Interviewee 08, 2017). The potential national strategy implications were covered in the previous section; however, the remark also highlights evident concern about just

how qualified and well-prepared today's politicians actually are to give strategic direction. Although the number of military veterans in UK politics is on the increase (see Financial Times (2015)), none achieved one star rank before entering Westminster⁷⁵; indeed, most left their respective service at a rank no higher than junior field officer or equivalent⁷⁶. As one interviewee noted "you've got people in Parliament who have commanded companies in Afghanistan, but I don't think they would claim to be experts on the higher management of defence" (Interviewee 31, 2017). One senior airman interviewed also pointed out that government ministers are regularly trained in the tactical decision-making process potentially to shoot down a hijacked civilian airliner, in a 9/11-type scenario (see The Telegraph (2017)); however, there is no equivalent war-gaming, requested or offered, for decision making at the strategic level. He asked:

"Why would you not want to walk yourself through the sorts of process, the sorts of thinking, the sorts of risk assessments of what it would mean to put ... two squadrons of Tornados at Minhad? Well, I know what would have happened. We'd have been schwacked within five minutes if Iran was playing nasty. Now, if you put that to a minister, who must insist on 'Something must be done, and my Abu Dhabi friends need my help'. OK, well these are the threats then, these are the risks. You now know, a) what the risks are and b) what you need to do to fix them. We've never done that. We've never taken them to that level of understanding, of what it means in terms of politics, in terms of military risks and ultimately casualties, as to what those decisions ultimately translate into. We do it at the tactical level."

(Interviewee 18, 2017)

Political and Military Misalignment

There was a widely held view among the elite interview participants that politicians and the military occupy very dissimilar worlds, often with different priorities, different aims and objectives, and different ways of doing business. As a result, although there are occasions when they are aligned, there are also times when they are not, and then the gearing between the two becomes severely strained. An

⁷⁵ The most senior ex-military MP in Parliament at time of writing is Bob Stewart, who was left the British Army as a colonel Late Cheshire Regiment in 1996.

⁷⁶ i.e. lieutenant commander (RN), major (British Army), squadron leader (RAF).

example of positive alignment, cited by one four-star officer, was the decision in SDSR 15 to purchase nine Boeing P-8A Poseidon aircraft to alleviate the RAF's maritime patrol capability shortfall. In his view, this was a "good military decision based within the logic of the overall [SDSR] package, and it was also a good political decision" (Interviewee 03, 2016). However, others suggested that the reason there was a maritime patrol capability shortfall in the first place was politically driven, and an example of misalignment between politicians and the military. One senior civil servant, who had been closely involved with SDSR 10, believed that Fox brought politically motivated, pre-conceived ideas into the review, suggesting "he had his axe out for Nimrod when he came in ... he wanted to set an example to industry because he'd come in with a prejudice that the defence industry in this country was taking us for a ride" (Interviewee 06, 2016). This view was supported by a three-star officer who undertook a review of maritime patrol capability during the latter stages of SDSR 10, after the initial decision to cancel the Nimrod MR4 programme had already been made. He reported that "you can't afford to cancel the MPA [maritime patrol aircraft] but with four weeks to go it's too late – you can't put a £9 billion slug back into the programme, because its already constructed." His conclusion was "What it [an SDSR] has to accept is politically driven inserts and therefore it completely skews the outcome" (Interviewee 16, 2017).

Although many of those interviewed were quick to blame politicians for misalignment problems – more than one commented that "politicians confuse the urgent with the important" (see Interviewee 16 (2017), and Interviewee 31 (2017)) – there were also some pragmatic observations about the relationship between politicians and the military. For example, a former senior civil servant recognised that "for the politician, there's no good news in defence and security" (Interviewee 07, 2017). It was regularly agreed that ultimately the decisions made in an SDSR are political and politicians will be held to account for those decisions; to that end, the SDSR is their document (see Interviewee 07 (2017), and Interviewee 13 (2017)). One RAF three-star concluded "It's not our place to make decisions. Politicians make decisions. Ministers make decisions" (Interviewee 17, 2017). It was also recognised that planning horizons for politicians and the military are often unaligned. A number

of interviewees noted the pressures between defence's longer-term focus and the government's attention on the shorter-term electoral cycle. The prevailing view was summed up by a four-star officer who noted "in that debate between the two, generally the political thing will win out for obvious reasons" (Interviewee 09, 2017).

Small and Large 'P' Politics

Another tension identified by a three-star officer with considerable programming experience was the influence of "small and large 'P' politics" (Interviewee 32, 2017). He suggested that defence was regularly restricted in its force structure decision making, as a result of lobbying at the political level; the example he gave was the debate during the NSCR about the value of amphibious forces. A high-profile media campaign in defence of the Royal Marines was initiated during the period of the NSCR, as soon as it became clear that reductions to the UK's amphibious capability were being considered (see BBC News (2018), and The Telegraph (2018)). That prompted a report by the HCDC (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2018a), which, in the interviewee's opinion, undoubtedly influenced future amphibious capability programming decisions:

"You can make a perfectly rational, reasonable case that you shouldn't spend the money on landing craft that move at four knots and are sitting targets in a modern world with guided weapons. Therefore, you should spend it on something else. But the small and large 'P' politics have played a part in that, and has got us to a position where actually, it's become untenable to even talk about any kind of reduction in amphibious capability. I'm not saying it is, but even if that were the logical lower priority for us to go at."

(Interviewee 32, 2017)

The same interviewee recognised that opinions in Parliament could have a similar effect on capability choices that decision makers in defence may wish to make:

"the problem is that you have got a Tory backbench principally, but there are others, who see any adjustments in an anachronistic, archaic structures and capabilities as an assault on British manhood. Therefore, [they] will fight in the Commons, and fight dirty, to prevent us from doing things that are quite obvious or would be quite reasonable or sensible to do. That's going to make life bloody difficult. The danger is you end up not taking out things you want, which are some of the photogenic

capabilities, in order to invest in the glue and the enablers, because of the politics of the situation. I think that's a real threat to us"

(Interviewee 32, 2017)

The difficulties of convincing politicians to support capability decisions that favour enablers over heavy metal was highlighted by a two-star officer from JFC. In his view "you have to really convince people they want to [procure enabling capability], because no parliamentarian is going to be photographed in front of a server" (Interviewee 31, 2017). Although frustrating to the military practitioner, this approach by politicians reinforces the point about dissimilar worlds and should not be a surprise. Political influence in defence decision making has a long history. For example, as McInnes (1998, p. 831) pointed out, even though ministers emphasized that no options should be ruled out of SDR 98, a number of programmes, including Eurofighter Typhoon, were effectively ring-fenced. More recently, a former three-star civil servant highlighted during his interview that, at the outset of SDSR 10, "Number 10 had decreed that this [reducing the British Army to 80,000] was politically off the table" (Interviewee 06, 2016).

Personalities

The majority of data coded to the 'politics and politicians' category concerned the political element of SDSRs, both specific detail about occurrences in SDSR 10 and SDSR 15, and wide-ranging feedback about reviews in general. For example, an exploration of political influences during SDSR 15 elicited a fascinating cross-section of responses. One four-star officer, when asked if he could talk about the political influence on SDSR 15, responded "No, I don't think so. I mean, there was a lot, but I'm not going to talk about anything" (Interviewee 02, 2016). In contrast, another four-star officer suggested there was undue influence from "two people in particular, one the Prime Minister and two the Chancellor" (Interviewee 03, 2016). A third four-star officer believed that the biggest influence on the whole shape of the SDSR outcome was "what Number 10 and Number 11 wanted" (Interviewee 09, 2017). Moreover, he also suggested that there was a significant trade-off game being played:

“It is the case that right up until a few days before the outcome [of SDSR 15] that many of the things that defence wanted, Number 10 and 11 would not agree to unless we gave them more of what they wanted, which were different to what defence wanted. That was the trick in the final stages.”

(Interviewee 09, 2017)

Cameron’s hands-on approach was confirmed by a three-star officer, who was in a key SDSR appointment outwith the MOD at the time of the review. In his view, the Prime Minister was heavily involved in the detailed decision making (Interviewee 21, 2017), an opinion supported at four-star level by this anecdote: “There was also a savings option against annual pay increments for military personnel, which was removed at the last minute by the Prime Minister himself” (Interviewee 03, 2016). A final observation on the roles of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer in SDSR 15 reinforces the significance of both contemporary events and personalities as factors in the translation of strategic direction into military capability; an observation that has already been frequently highlighted throughout this thesis:

“The political guidance was interesting, because at the time Mr Cameron was the Prime Minister, Mr Osborne was the Chancellor, and the working assumption, I think, was that Osborne would take over from Cameron in due course. So that had an influence on their view of what defence’s priorities were. The Chancellor’s letter of direction to the Secretary of State – so that’s the first thing, the PM and Chancellor [were] both giving direction – was pointing in a different direction. It was more about prosperity and capabilities for the long term ... [it] felt a bit like ‘I want to make sure defence is in good order when I ascend to the throne’ as it were. There was definitely a divergence. In terms of unity of direction, I didn’t see it. In fact, I saw the opposite.”

(Interviewee 31, 2017)

Politics in SDSRs

More general feedback over the political nature of SDSRs reinforces the deduction that a ‘politics and politicians’ category shapes the translation of strategic direction into military capability. A commonly held view among the elite interview participants was that an SDSR will always be more about politics than strategy; indeed, a former senior civil servant suggested of an SDSR report that “wherever you get rough edges in it, the political sandpaper comes out to make it not look so rough-

edged” (Interviewee 07, 2017). A number of interviewees also recognised the significance of a new government’s manifesto promises, another regular influence on defence reviews already identified in this thesis. In particular, one interviewee posited that defence reviews would always be underpinned by manifesto tangible requirements, regardless of any imperative considered by defence planners at the time. He believed that “It’s always going to be an outcome, which is shaped by manifesto commitments, which may or may not bear a contact with reality” (Interviewee 09, 2017). Other interviewees also acknowledged that politicians would always want their manifesto commitments delivered (see Interviewee 06 (2016), and Interviewee 19 (2017)); however, a two-star officer cautioned about reading too much into a manifesto commitment. Having studied the defence and security aspects of successful party’s manifestos throughout his considerable time in service, he concluded that:

“A commitment to the deterrent is only a commitment to ‘x’ number of boats of a certain type, if that’s what it says [in the manifesto]. If it’s just a commitment to a deterrent, that could be just one bomb in a bunker somewhere. So, there is a bit of a tendency for people to read too much into a commitment. It’s very definitely the words on the card.”

(Interviewee 31, 2017)

Summary

The theme that was prevalent within the data pertaining to this category, in interview after interview, was the dissimilar worlds occupied by politicians and the military. Defence reviews have subtly different audiences in the different worlds and aspire to achieve subtly different outcomes. What the military is looking for is explored further in chapter nine; what the politician is seeking may be more akin to this thought offered by a former senior civil servant: “I think that what politicians are trying to do is to come up with something crafty, that spills the least amount of political blood, whilst trying to keep the most number of people [as] broadly happy as possible” (Interviewee 07, 2017).

8.3 Affordability of Defence

Of all the different type of events and influences from the strategic direction into military capability model, identified in chapters five through seven, the one that probably has had the most pronounced effect is finance and the economy. From the Labour government's decision in the mid- to late-1960s to maintain the annual defence budget at £2 billion at constant prices, to the Conservative's pursuit of the peace dividend in the early-1990s, to the Conservative/Liberal Democratic coalition's austerity measures in 2010, the affordability of defence has been at the heart of defence decision making for as long as all those who participated in this thesis' elite interviews could remember. Whether one accords with Mason's view that the imperatives of economics significantly affect the level of resource that governments can devote to defence, or supports Greenwood's assertion that the state of the economy does not force governments to make defence cuts – it merely defines the limits of policy choice, it is difficult to conclude that money has not been a significant factor in defence reviews.

Although none of the thesis' research questions explicitly mention money, discussions concerning finance featured in all of the elite interviews, with most of the interviewees focusing on the affordability of defence within the quite narrow window of their own experience in senior MOD and/or single service appointments. Analysis during open coding generated ninety-one open codes related to the affordability of defence, with 379 separate data points. The open codes contained a wide variety of finance-related data, from within which a number of discreet themes emerged. The rules and regulations concerning the management of public money and the behaviours within the MOD that resulted from them, received a high degree of critical scrutiny. In addition, reaction to a specific 'Greenwoodery'-related data collection question drew significant comment. Finally, the increased department-wide focus on identifying, accepting and securing efficiencies attracted strong views. All of these three themes generated sufficient data to be considered as separate subcategories. The remainder of this chapter's final section concentrates on these subcategories of financial planning, 'Greenwoodery' today, and efficiencies, in order to ascertain how they contribute to

answering the thesis' specific research questions and to building theory during the theoretical coding process.

Financial Planning

Opinions regarding the MOD's budgetary system were expressed both at the macro level and to a fine degree of detail. However, overall, few were positive. A number of interviewees recognized a problem with the balancing of ambition with resource (see Interviewee 04 (2016), Interviewee 30 (2018), and Interviewee 31 (2017)). One three-star officer went as far as saying "the budgetary system is fundamentally flawed because we are failing to match ambition with finance every time" (Interviewee 14, 2017). Although not completely supporting this view, a four-star officer believed there were too many pressures in government to allow resource and ambition ever to be matched. As a specific example he offered:

"... one of the things we could have said in the SDSR is that warfighting at scale is beyond the nation. We're never going to do that [undertake warfighting at scale], because truthfully, we're very unlikely ever to find the resource ... Instead of saying that and accepting that at the policy level, with all the howls of political angst that would have generated, the government would rather set warfighting at scale as our ambition, and then find later in a much less obvious way that actually, we couldn't do it."

(Interviewee 04, 2016)

The same interviewee went on to assert that the ambition in all government departments always exceeded the level of resource available. Moreover, in his view, departmental levels of ambition were never regularised within strategy, so what eventually had to happen was a failure to deliver the government's strategy through lack of resource. A fellow four-star officer came to a similar conclusion when he considered that the comprehensive analysis of the strategic context, undertaken during an SDSR, was never followed through when it came to designing and prioritising appropriate capabilities, because of the need for defence to fit inside a pre-prescribed financial envelope. He described this situation as "the financial tail wag [-ging] the strategic dog" (Interviewee 26, 2018).

A similar degree of concern was expressed at the more detailed financial planning level. One three-star officer, with considerable experience in acquisition and support, suggested that the UK should adopt the legal obligation placed by the US government on SROs to confirm their programmes are fully funded, through life, prior to approval. He insisted that, in the absence of this remit, optimism bias was inevitable, which drove unaffordability into the Equipment Plan (Interviewee 11, 2017). Another three-star officer suggested that, although the rigid annualization approach to financial accounting worked well in the business as usual space, it regularly over complicated and reduced flexibility in the management of protracted capital programmes (Interviewee 12, 2017).

The most serious failing in the MOD's financial planning process was, in the opinion of a four-star civil servant recruited from industry, a lack of accountability. He questioned when, if ever, an SRO had been sacked or publicly held to account for approving a programme plan where it was knowingly undeliverable. In his opinion, the MOD's financial planning was not nearly as rigorous as would be found in a commercial environment, and suggested that, if forced into honesty "a large proportion of our very senior colleagues would openly 'fess up' to the fact that they know they are part of a plan that is seriously underfunded" (Interviewee 10, 2017). He supported his concerns with the following:

" ... if I hired a top-notch, very senior and experienced chief financial officer from a FTSE20 company, and put them in charge of this financial planning exercise, and it was clear that if we end up delivering the wrong numbers, you will be publicly sacked [and] it will be all over the front pages of the Financial Times. I can guarantee to you it would be a totally different process that it would be running to. The primary reason is ... accountability."

(Interviewee 10, 2017)

'Greenwoodery' Today

An early strand of research, initially uncovered during the literature review and developed during analysis of the latter defence reviews of the Cold War and Early Expeditionary period, was the contemporary relevance of 'Greenwoodery'. It could be contended that Greenwood's 'funding gap' in the late 1980s, brought about by an

unwillingness of the Conservative government to underwrite the necessary military capability necessary to achieve its stated policy goals, had been replicated by the Labour government during its final years in office in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Moreover, evidence suggests that the underfunding of the 1980s was exacerbated by government decisions, in the latter part of that decade, to relax some of the more severe cuts in capability made during the 1981 defence review (see Dorman (2001d), and Byrd (1991)). This approach was arguably replicated by the Conservative government following SDSR 10 with, for example, its decisions to return to divisional warfighting and regenerate a maritime patrol capability in SDSR 15. As Asteris (1994) confirmed, the 1980s' funding cliff edge was only avoided because the government was fortuitously able significantly to reduce the UK's force structure at the end of the Cold War. However, the post-SDSR 15 affordability challenges, uncovered during the tranche one interviews and concurrent content analysis, prompted the hypothesis that defence was heading towards a similar funding cliff edge, but this time with no serendipitous strategic shock to come to its rescue. This premise was explored through the addition of an associated data collection question during the tranche two and three interviews.

Half of the tranche two and three interviewees discussed the relevance of 'Greenwoodery' as part of the debate around the affordability of defence today and into the future. Of these, the majority agreed there was the danger of an impending financial cliff edge (see Interviewee 08 (2017), Interviewee 13 (2017), Interviewee 15 (2017), Interviewee 19 (2017), Interviewee 18 (2017), and Interviewee 28 (2017)). Significantly, this view was held by senior officers and civil servants in appointments across defence. Others recognised the hypothesis but cautioned against overstating the extant financial position. For example, a senior civil servant with over thirty years' acquisition experience confirmed "there's a cliff there to go over", but suggested "there are [still] various things that could be done to avoid it" (Interviewee 19, 2017). A more detailed view was offered by a three-star officer serving in MOD centre:

"... in the longer term, it's not as bad a situation. I don't think we are heading for a cliff. I definitely don't think we are stood on a precipice. To put that into some kind of context, if you believe what's in the papers, that we have a £20 billion black hole,

which isn't the right number, but if you were to believe that, our budget over ten years is £415 billion. We are talking about less than five per cent of our shortfall over ten years."

(Interviewee 32, 2017)

Of the interviewees who acknowledged that 'Greenwoodery' remained an issue in defence expenditure planning, few had an answer to its underlying causes, suggesting that over-optimistic assumptions were still widespread, and defence inflation was an ever-present factor. One of the more pessimist views confirmed "the gap is so huge between money available and ambition that there is no way we're ever going to close that" (Interviewee 28, 2017). That said, two interviewees did suggest that the UK's departure from the EU had the potential to provide a strategic reset (see Interviewee 13 (2017), and Interviewee 15 (2017)), with the latter commenting "... we haven't got a Berlin Wall, but we do have a Brexit!"

Efficiencies

Although the search for efficiencies had begun in the early 1980s during the Thatcher government (Dorman, 2002), the first defence review to include the specific goal of reducing costs and increasing efficiency was the 1994 Defence Costs Study (Rifkind, 1994). Since then, all defence reviews have had an efficiency agenda. SDR 98 confirmed that "the continuing push for greater efficiency is an integral part of our plans to drive down costs to pay for the modernisation of our forces" (Secretary of State for Defence, 1998a, p. 6). In the Labour government's 2004 budget, the MOD was committed to a target of efficiency improvements amounting to at least two and a half per cent of the total defence budget for each of the three years of the spending review⁷⁷ (Secretary of State for Defence, 2004). By 2015, the MOD, together with security and intelligence agencies and cross-government counterterrorism, had been given responsibility for delivering more than £11 billion of savings (Her Majesty's Government, 2015). Against this demanding backdrop, it is unsurprising that the final

⁷⁷ A target of £2.8 billion by FY 2007/08.

affordability subcategory was efficiencies, with 91 separate data points identified during open coding.

Scrutiny of command papers suggests that little care is taken in high-level government policy documents to differentiate between cost savings and efficiencies; however, as one TLB holder was quick to point out, they are not the same.

Efficiency is what is says. It's not a saving. The notion here is that we can do the same amount for less. So, we can somehow, for example, crew additional F-35 squadrons or P8 squadrons, without any extra manpower, because elsewhere in the RAF, we will find ways of not needing the existing manpower. That will generate the manpower cover to do these additional force elements ... efficiency assumptions aren't related to the abandonment of certain types of capability, as it stands at the moment. They are pure efficiencies, i.e. they're not do less for less. The assumption is do the same for less. That's the notion of the efficiency space.

(Interviewee 04, 2016)

This is significant, as all those interviewed who actually had efficiency targets to meet, were almost entirely focused on delivering within the 'same for less' envelope. The same interviewee did recognize the 'less for less' option and was also of the opinion that ceasing low priority activity might be viable. The elite interviews, however, generated no evidence of any senior officers approving reductions in output to reduce capability.

Opinions over defence's ability to deliver the efficiencies outlined in SDSR 15 were unmistakably divided: those senior officers and civil servants in acquisition and support roles considered the targets to be attainable (see Interviewee 11 (2017), Interviewee 15 (2017), Interviewee 17 (2017), Interviewee 27 (2017), and Interviewee 28 (2017)); everyone else who expressed a view, did not (see, for example, Interviewee 04 (2016), Interviewee 08 (2017), Interviewee 15 (2017) Interviewee 18 (2017), and Interviewee 25 (2017)). The attitude from the procurement experts was that innovative approaches to managing the defence enterprise, for example changing behaviours or accepting different risk profiles, could unlock considerable new benefits. However, a regularly held view away from the delivery agents was that heroic assumptions had been made to underpin efficiencies without a credible supporting evidence base. To

that end, many believed the existing portfolio of efficiency measures was simply beyond reach.

The default 'salami-slicing' approach taken by the department to achieve efficiencies attracted considerable criticism (see Interviewee 04 (2016), and Interviewee 18 (2017)), as did the perception that political interference often resulted in some defence outputs being considered "off limits" (Interviewee 19, 2017). One two-star civil servant suggested that traditional tactics, like cutting activity, needed to be eschewed for a more productive methodology:

"... you have a very expensive machine, and you're de-tuning the carburettors, as it were, to make it go slower to save yourself five shillings and sixpence of fuel, but you're running a Rolls Royce ... Think about the value-additive efficiency that you can get through, for example, international aggregation, whereby you are able to produce more capability through collaboration."

(Interviewee 23, 2017)

One change to the rules around efficiencies that many of the interviewees commented on was the decision in SDSR 15 "to allow the MOD to invest efficiency savings into the Armed Forces" (Her Majesty's Government, 2015, p. 27). At first glance, this appeared to be an extremely positive change. As one three-star officer pointed out, "The reason why efficiencies have never worked [in the past] is that there was no incentivisation in the individuals in the Army, Navy and Air Force to do anything about it" (Interviewee 15, 2017). However, it was soon recognised that the most significant factor in the affordability of SDSR 15 was the delivery of efficiencies to pay for the already announced capability enhancements. As one four-star officer put it:

"...in order to pay for more equipment, what the SDSR did was say, 'All of you TLBs, you're going to make these vast efficiencies.' Much higher than ever before, and so that's allowed us to persuade ourselves that there is the money to buy this new equipment, but of course if those efficiencies are not delivered then we have a new 'black hole' emerging."

(Interviewee 04, 2016)

Moreover, since 2015, it has become more and more obvious to most at the top of defence, that the total efficiencies identified in SDSR 15, plus others committed to in subsequent annual budget cycles were unlikely to be delivered. One four-star civil servant confirmed that “the efficiency assumptions that were made to provide the additional headroom turned out to be fundamentally flawed” (Interviewee 28, 2017). This was supported by a three-star officer from one of the MOD delivery agents, who said “We have a hugely imbalanced programme today because of wildly optimistic efficiency prognosis made in SDSR 15” (Interviewee 11, 2017). By contrast, one two-star officer argued that this was a problem of defence’s own making, because all of the service chiefs had agreed as part of SDSR 15 that they could deliver all of the enhancements necessary to build JF25, and accepted the challenge that the delivery of those enhancements would require the provision of efficiencies within their TLB to a known amount of money (Interviewee 20, 2017).

Summary

Across the elite interview participants, the chief area of concern around financial planning centred on the perceived mismatch between ambition and resource at the political level. There was little distress over the regulatory construct within which defence has to operate, except from the interviewee with the least experience of working in the public sector. He was aghast at the lack of accountability within the department, as well as a lack of clarity of the numbers used to build detailed financial plans. Furthermore, he struggled to comprehend, and operate with, certain processes exclusive to the department, for example constructing ten-year budget forecasts that contained mandated cash reductions – or ‘wedges’ – with no idea as to how to realise them.

The long-term affordability of defence, when considered with influencing factors such as the ‘Greenwoodery’ funding gap and hard-to-reach efficiency commitments was considered, by varying degrees, to be a challenge by all interviewees. The recent rule change allowing the reinvestment of efficiencies was seen as a double-edged sword. In the rush to introduce more capability enhancements, the temptation for the single services to over-reach efficiency estimates, together with

those mandated in SDSR 15, had made it all too easy to re-excavate the 'black hole' in defence's finances. This problem was highlighted by the NAO in its two most recent reports into equipment plans (Comptroller & Auditor General (2018a) and Comptroller & Auditor General (2018b)). Notwithstanding this, the impression given by most of the elite interview participants was that responsibility for creating defence's ongoing affordability problems lay firmly at the political level, and the military's role was strictly in the space of managing an inadequate allocation of resource, to deliver the capability required to underwrite the global ambitions of the government.

8.4 Single Services' Conduct

It could be argued that the authority of the single services has been steadily eroded throughout the period covered by this research. From the formation of the MOD in 1946 (His Majesty's Government, 1946), to the establishment of the CDS role and the Defence Board eleven years later (Her Majesty's Government, 1958), the unification of the MOD under a single Secretary of State in 1964 (Minister of Defence, 1963), and, finally, the creation of a unified defence staff (Secretary of State for Defence, 1984), the evolution of the central organisation of defence has progressively moved authority away from the single services. The most recent changes, following the post-SDSR 10 Defence Reform Programme, removed the service chiefs from the Defence Board, but, in return, extended their responsibility for capability planning and financial management (Lord Levene of Portsoken, 2011). The most common shorthand across defence for this disaggregation of responsibility from MOD head office to the single services and JFC is the 'delegated model'⁷⁸.

The role of the single services in the translation of strategic direction into military capability did not feature in any specific research questions; however, the majority of interviewees considered the single service input to be fundamental to the thesis' general research question. Furthermore, 114 open codes with 531 associated data points that could be associated with a single service-related category were identified during selective coding, and many of the open codes analysed under other

⁷⁸ A more detailed explanation of this latest reorganisation is included in chapter four.

categories also had a single service association to some degree. Two obvious subcategories emerged from the selective coding process. The first was particularly wide ranging in its consideration of how the single services are aligned to the current organisational structure of defence. The second focused on the service chiefs and how their roles and responsibilities had evolved following the introduction of the delegated model. This final section analyses the data within a 'single services' conduct' category, with the aim of uncovering suitable supporting evidence for the theoretical coding process.

The Individual Nature and Separate Interests of the Single Services Consequences of the Defence Reform Programme

Prior to the introduction of the DRP, capability management within defence still operated under the principles of smart acquisition amended by Through Life Capability Management fundamentals, as outlined in chapter four. A number of interviewees had held senior appointments within that construct and were quick to highlight both its advantages and its shortcomings. The clear strength of the pre-DRP methodology was its ability to consider capability management through a joint prism; its obvious weakness was that the single services had no responsibility, accountability or authority and simply acted as "pressure groups" in the process (Interviewee 13, 2017). The result was frequently 'requirement-creep' with capabilities over-specified to a point where their performance, time and cost envelope became unmanageable. The view from the single service was "it's all being done to us", with the critical decisions being taken by the Equipment Capability Customer and the DE&S project team followed by "the capability [being] thrown over the wall for us to manage in service" (Interviewee 01, 2016). That said, the assessment from the delivery agent was little better, evidenced by this opinion shared by a former three-star civil servant, who had worked in DE&S:

"Having lived that period of time where, very vividly in my memory, each of the three services ... was betting the ranch on being able to steal money from the other two. And the entire game was around making sure that, one way or another, your ships were paid for out of the Army's tanks. Because there was no other way on God's earth

you were going to get them. Which I thought was a hugely destructive and nugatory way of expending energy."

(Interviewee 07, 2017)

The views of the elite interviewees on the impact of the DRP on defence in general are detailed in chapter nine. However, a number of more detailed observations on how the delegated model has played to the individual nature and separate interests of the single services were also expressed, which are analysed within this section. In the main, interviewees considered that the delegated model tackled most of negatives for the single services, expressed in the previous paragraph. For example, the alignment of responsibility accountability and authority for capability management to the single services was widely commended (see Interviewee 01 (2016), Interviewee 02 (2016), Interviewee 03 (2016), and Interviewee 14 (2017)). In addition, removal of the conditions that led to inter-services disputes over resources was considered a real positive:

"[Under the delegated model] your money will be doled out at the beginning of term, and there's only one rule, you can only spend what you've got. And don't think for one millisecond that you're going to lay your hands on anybody else's ... I liked the ... accountability that came in the principle that came with that."

(Interviewee 07, 2017)

However, even though the delegation of responsibility, accountability and authority down to the single services had created an environment where, in the view of one RAF three-star capability planner, "the incentives are better aligned to deliver the output for the minimum input" (Interviewee 32, 2017), there were a number of interviewees who were extremely concerned at the second and third order effects that the change had generated. In their collective opinion, the delegated model promoted single service advocacy to the detriment of jointery in general, and JF25 in particular (see Interviewee 07 (2017), Interviewee 08 (2017), Interviewee 11 (2017), Interviewee 16 (2017), Interviewee 26 (2018), and Interviewee 30 (2018)). One British Army four-star was extremely forthright in expressing "I think ... a joint cultural approach has been diminished by Levine ... [it] has institutionalised single service parochialism. I think it

has diminished the capacity and authority of the centre to both set strategic direction and then arbitrate between the single services” (Interviewee 26, 2018). This view was supported by a colleague of the same rank and service, who believed:

“The flaw in the Levene outcome is that for the services ... this is a declaration of independence where every five years [they] gets some loose instructions through a defence review. Then they go away and do what they think they should be doing and report back success or failure, or whatever. That was clearly never the intention. That’s not delegation, that’s abrogation.”

(Interviewee 08, 2017)

Whilst recognizing the benefits that delegation had brought, there was a definite view that capability should be planned on the basis of jointery by design (Interviewee 08, 2017), and the way to achieve that was to “swing the Levene pendulum back to a more centrist position” (Interviewee 26, 2018). One British Army two-star officer observed that defence “should be designing a joint force, not environmental forces that [may] stack up to a joint force” (Interviewee 30, 2018). An RAF three-star officer suggested that there was a view held by some very senior people in MOD head office that the single services made decisions that were in their own interests, rather than the interests of wider-defence (Interviewee 32, 2017). This opinion had some support across the elite interviews, although one interviewee did point out that the delegated model had been designed that way (Interviewee 30, 2018). To avoid this, a British Army general suggested that the single services should adopt an approach of altruistic intelligent jointery to their capability planning (Interviewee 08, 2017). The balance between the potential for significant improvement in capability management, while, at the same time, increasing single service insularity, was seen by some interviewees as the key issue. This conundrum was summarised by a British Army three-star as follows:

“What you have done ... is you’ve just given a whole series of robber barons all the money. What’s the outcome of that? Their behaviour, in protecting their own resource – regardless of whether they’re making internal efficiencies or not – has become more stark, because you’ve given them more power to be more protective. It’s a balance. The balance is, ‘Is that less collegiate behaviour worth paying the price for a more efficient outcome at TLB level?’ ... I think the answer is, ‘The jury is still out.’”

One of the data collection questions that prompted discussion in a number of interviews concerned whether the delegated model was aligned to defence's command principles. One RAF two-star officer believed that, by passing responsibility, accountability and authority for capability management down to the single services, the DRP had acknowledged the direction provided by UK doctrine concerning mission command, which promotes decentralised command, freedom and speed of action, and initiative (Development Concepts & Doctrine Centre, 2014b). In his view, that was a positive step, as it enabled the single services to achieve the macro end without being micromanaged (Interviewee 22, 2017). However, a three-star officer working in MOD head office suggested the corollary was four different capability management systems that the delivery agents had to dock into, and the centre had to orient reports and returns from. This "wild west" approach was not, in his opinion, the way business should be done (Interviewee 16, 2017). A British Army four-star general also had strong views about defence's approach to making plans in the business space versus giving orders in the military operations space (Interviewee 04, 2016). He believed that, historically, defence had seen capability management plans as a set of unquestionable military orders, rather than a contract between two parties, i.e. MOD head office that issued the plan and the service chief or Commander JFC who accepted responsibility for delivery of part of it. Agreeing business objectives should be a conversation to ensure what is expected is specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and time-bound, i.e. it is a 'SMART' objective. Interestingly, he too saw this approach aligning with the principles of mission command, as military missions should also be suitably resourced, notwithstanding the operational imperative that may occasionally dictate otherwise. However, he did not consider that to be a view generally held across defence; instead, he suggested:

"We have taken a notion of orders, which is an unsophisticated view of what happens on operations and applied it to business planning orders. I'm saying a sophisticated view of what it's like to conduct operations would be very similar to a sophisticated view of what it's like to do planning in the business space. It's allocation of resource commensurate to task."

Service Culture, Ethos and Professions

The single services are different. The environments within which they operate, the traditions they have assimilated over time to develop the culture and ethos they have today, and their visions for the future, are all distinct. The simple adage that the RN and the RAF man the equipment while the British Army equips the man is a powerful pointer to the contrasting approaches to capability planning (see Interviewee 15 (2017) and Interviewee 17 (2017)). A number of interviewees recognised the dangers of combining the naturally individualistic approach of the single services with a delegated model that, at the very least, provided latitude for nonconformist agendas to be pursued. Having spent the formative part of his career in an actively encouraged joint milieu, one three-star officer expressed concern that the delegated model would lead to the three services “veer[ing] away from each other over time” (Interviewee 13, 2017). Another interviewee posited that the delegated model was not strong enough to counter the single services predisposition to pursue their own goals, to the potential detriment of the joint force:

“... if you look at the history of British military capability, what you start with is originally two and eventually three powerful independent services where the idea of joint effect, if they recognise it at all – and they didn’t for a very long time – is built bottom up on the basis of the stomach of the individual services to consent to collaboration.”

(Interviewee 08, 2017)

The tribal and often adversarial nature of the single services was regarded by some interviewees as a significant contributor to the manner in which capability was being developed and delivered within the delegated model. One senior civil servant described some uniformed capability managers as “evangelical” (Interviewee 29, 2017), whilst a four-star officer confirmed the longevity of inter-service confrontation with this anecdote: “When PJHQ was created [in 1996], the four-star leader of the army headquarters in Wilton [Commander-in-Chief Land Forces], reputedly said to his staff when PJHQ was coming down to explain [its role] to them, ‘They’re coming to take

away our manhood. Make sure they fail.'" (Interviewee 08, 2017). The close-minded attitude of the single services was unsurprisingly highlighted as having a detrimental effect on the defence-wide management of military capability. One two-star officer working in JFC confirmed that, even though much of JFC's capability was generated to enable others, he had experienced remarkably little coordination and cross-boundary work with the single services in developing those capabilities (Interviewee 31, 2017). Furthermore, at the highest levels of the single services, serious concerns were expressed over capability management interdependencies brought about by the lead command model⁷⁹ (see Interviewee 01 (2016), Interviewee 02 (2016), and Interviewee 03 (2016)).

Understanding the deep-rooted nature of the differing single service positions was a line of discussion explored by a number of interviewees (see, for example, Interviewee 08 (2017), Interviewee 07 (2017), Interviewee 26 (2018), Interviewee 30 (2018), and Interviewee 31 (2017)). Two extremely relevant explanations were offered by one British Army four-star officer:

"The RAF was formed as an endeavour to make use of the third dimension in a way that we hadn't previously in warfare. At its absolute core, at its inception, were pilots. Manned flight. ... we didn't develop unmanned aerial vehicles in 1917 or whatever. We had a machine, and we had a pilot, and in due course we had navigators and engineers, but at the core of the existence of that service is the notion of the pilot. So, the notion that you might go to unmanned air vehicles, for example, which would be one really substantial way of cutting the cost of the Air Force, really cuts to the essence of the service. So, it's really hard to do."

(Interviewee 04, 2016)

"If you look at the Army over time, it is vested in the infantry and the armoured corps. The infantry predates the armoured corps, and still dominates the Army. Both in volume terms and in status terms, but the armoured corps was the thing that created success in the Second World War, as far as land is concerned. ... and then throughout the Cold War, what was the thing that was at the core of the Army in the

⁷⁹ Where a capability is employed in more than one environment and/or by more than one single service, it is assigned a 'lead command', by MOD head office that is responsible for all acquisition of that capability. The lead command should take into account the requirements and aspirations of the other users during capability planning.

Cold War? It was tank divisions, to fight Soviet tank divisions. So, our history's been based on that for a really long time. Just as in the same way as the Air Force, consciously getting out of that game is really counterculture."

(Interviewee 04, 2016)

Although most of the debate on service culture, ethos and professions was concentrated on the single service side, some consideration was given to the issues from a broader, defence perspective. Two interviewees observed that traditionally the balance of the defence budget had altered only very little since the Sandys review in 1957 (Interviewee 13 (2017) and Interviewee 32 (2017)). Although it is difficult accurately to quantify this assertion across the period examined in this thesis, there is some evidence to support it, as Table 8-1 details:

Figures in £ million and (% of total budget or outturn)	RN	British Army	RAF	JFC
Equipment Plan funding allocated to FY 2027/28 (Notes 1 and 2)	32500 (17.4%)	30200 (16.2%)	34000 (18.2%)	30200 (16.2%)
Equipment Plan outturn for FY 2017/18 (Notes 1 and 2)	3000 (19.8%)	2000 (13.2%)	3500 (23.2%)	2300 (15.2%)
Main divisions of the procurement programme for FY 1994/95 (Notes 3 and 4)	2488 (26.6%)	1875 (20%)	3033 (32.4%)	N/A
Estimated cost of the defence programme for FY 1965/66 (Note 5)	544 (25.7%)	555 (26.2%)	561 (26.5%)	N/A

Table 8-1: Comparison of Budget Allocations to the Single Services

Table Notes:

1. Figures quoted from The Defence Equipment Plan 2018 Financial Summary version 3.
2. Equipment Plan also includes allocation for the Defence Nuclear Organisation, Strategic Programmes, MOD head office funding, and Other.
3. Figures quoted from Cm 2550: Statement on the Defence Estimates 1994.
4. Procurement programme also includes allocation for general support.
5. Figures quoted from Cm 2592: Statement on the Defence Estimates 1965.

In 2019, there was less than £4 billion, or just two per cent difference, in the total allocation of funding for the single services over the entire period covered by the Equipment Plan (a total of £186.4 billion over 10 years). In FY 1994/95, even with a considerable element of the procurement programme committed to the Eurofighter programme, there was only a twelve point four per cent difference between the highest spend on the RAF and the lowest spend on the British Army. Finally, the method for

presenting costs in the defence estimates of the 1960s does not allow a direct comparison to be made to contemporary equipment plans; however, an examination of the entire estimated defence costs for FY 1965/66 show an even closer alignment between the three services, with less than one per cent between the highest and lowest estimates. This situation was accurately, if rather pessimistically, summed up by Mr Brynmor John, the Labour shadow defence minister at the time of the Nott review, who said: “The whole history of defence planning has been equality of misery – every Service has taken its proportionate share of cuts” (Hansard House of Commons, 1981).

A final aspect of the individual nature and separate interests of the single services is how they consider and subsequently manage themselves as professional bodies. Although most of the limited secondary literature in this area is concentrated on the Samuel P Huntington (1957) and Morris Janowitz (1960) views of the military as a profession (see, for example Downes (1985) and Harries-Jenkins (1990)), and in particular, whether all military personnel are professionals or just the warfighters (Finney and Mayfield, 2018), the broader view of how the individual single services invoke system of profession principles in their own organisation structures and management process may uncover new influencing factors in the translation of strategic direction into military capability. Using the following definition from Andrew Abbott (1988), a specific data collection question was introduced into the tranche two and tranche three interviews, to prompt interviewees opinions. “Professions are organized bodies of experts who apply esoteric knowledge to particular cases. They have elaborate systems of instruction and training, together with entry examinations and other formal prerequisites. They normally possess and enforce a code of ethics or behaviour” (1988, p. 4).

Although few interviewees were familiar with Abbott’s system of professions theory, most identified elements of his definition in all three services’ ways of working. One two star civil servant recognised that “professionals exist not only to be professional but to exclude other people” (Interviewee 29, 2017). This helps to explain why the single services see SDSRs in terms of “winners and losers” (Interviewee 23, 2017), and why, therefore, they work so hard to present their own environmental case

at every defence review (Interviewee 09 (2017), Interviewee 18 (2017), and Interviewee 32 (2017)). Another relevant trait was discussed by a former three-star civil servant, who believed the single services deliberately employed a policy of trying to defeat politicians in detail during defence reviews (Interviewee 06, 2016). The examples he gave were the British Army's debates about square versus triangular brigades, and the RAF's reliance on detailed formulae to calculate aircraft sortie rates on operations, during SDR 98. In his view, this insistence of injecting specialist knowledge into the debate introduced a complication that took the discussion to a level above where even a politician experienced in defence matters would be comfortable. The single services' desired result was obviously that the owner of the esoteric knowledge would prevail.

The Changing Role of the Service Chiefs

The role of a service chief has generally been seen as a role with influence. For example, no history of the Falklands Conflict would be complete without a stirring account of the then 1SL Admiral Sir Henry Leach's late night meeting in the Palace of Westminster with Thatcher and Nott the day after the Argentinean invasion, where he sought, and received, the Prime Minister's permission to form a task force to re-take the islands ((Woodward and Robinson, 1992). Leach's role in initiating the UK's response to the Argentine invasion was the high point of his career (see The Telegraph (2011b) and The Times (2011)), and a description of his meeting with Thatcher was even considered significant enough to be included in the book *Vulcan 607 – the RAF-centric account of the long-range bombing raids on Stanley airfield* (White, 2012).

However, if it is a truism that the authority of the single services has been steadily eroded over the last seventy years, the same is likely to be the case for the service chiefs. Indeed, Garden (1999, p. 50) is in no doubt that "compared with the heady days of the global strategy review when the single service Chiefs could produce government and NATO policy", the role of the service chiefs has been much reduced through successive measures to centralise defence, up to and including SDR 98. This view was supported by an RN four-star officer who confirmed that, during the period when each service had its own department of state, service chiefs had "very significant control" over their service's strategy. In his view, each service chief was "a 'CDS' in his

own right in those days” (Interviewee 01, 2016). That said, evidence from the elite interviews suggests that the service chiefs still wield considerable influence when it comes to the translation of strategic direction into military capability. Moreover, of the thirty-two interviewees, eleven had either first-hand experience as a service chief, or deputy, or were still on a career trajectory that could see them assume that role in the near future. As a result, the contribution from the elite interviews on the impact of changing roles of the service chiefs was particularly appurtenant.

Capability Development Responsibilities

A four-star officer, who was part of the sub-set identified above, referred to a quotation from General Omar Bradley, the first chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, when discussing the current roles of the service chiefs: “American armed strength is only as strong as the combat capabilities of its weakest service. Over emphasis on one or the other will obscure our compelling need – not for air power, not for sea power – but for American military power commensurate with our tasks in the world” (Interviewee 02, 2016). His point was that today’s service chiefs had to work together to generate military capability and be prepared to compromise to ensure the right capability to meet the requirements of JF25 was procured and maintained, regardless of the aspirations of the single services. However, one British Army two-star officer suggested that this was not the default for service chiefs. Referring to the Institute of Directors’ direction on the role of a company’s board, he pointed out that all board members individually should behave in the long-term interests of the health of the company (Institute of Directors, 2018). In his opinion, service chiefs did not do that; instead, he suggested they “... feel the weight of history, tradition and precedent, and, as a result, are quite likely to be more narrowly focused: (Interviewee 31, 2017). Although the officer who had quoted Bradley was non-committal on this point, he did confirm that:

“... if you have a single service Chief of Staff who fights his own corner with his service’s self-interest at the forefront of what he does, agnostic of the potential displacement of his behaviour on other people’s positions, then you will end up with, as Omar Bradley put it, British military power not being what it should be.”

(Interviewee 02, 2016)

The direction in the DOM is not overly conducive to the collegiate approach espoused above by the more senior officer, but not recognized in practise by the more junior officer. Instead, it confirms that the service chiefs have specific responsibility for identifying the most effective and affordable force structure and capabilities needed to realise defence requirements, and then developing their service to deliver them⁸⁰. Although the DOM recognises almost grudgingly that, “as guardians of their service” the chiefs have access to the Prime Minister “as a last resort” (Director Corporate Strategy Ministry of Defence, 2015, p. 30), it also confirms that they have no main responsibility for defence strategy, allocating resources or managing defence at a business level (2015, p. 28). Therefore, the extant defence ways of working encourage the service chiefs to perpetuate the system of professions approach for their own service, whilst absolving them of any formal, collective responsibility to do the same for defence as a whole.

Even though the DOM is explicit about service chiefs’ responsibility with regard to delivering capability, one former service chief, who served after the introduction of the delegated model, was pragmatic about amount of influence he had been able to exercise during his tenure, specifically as a result of the legacy programme:

The influence is [limited], because of course you are a victim of the legacy programming that’s delivered what I’ve got now. You’re also, to a certain degree, guided and being led down a path on those future programmes, which are also from legacy thinking. So, I don’t have the ability to start steering this bloody super tanker through 90 degrees and reversing it. I am limited, it’s a bit like the bridge watch keeper, when the captain of a ship goes to sleep. You’re allowed plus or minus one degree off heading, otherwise give me a call. I think we’re still in the situation where I’ve got sort of one, two degrees. Just given the scale of the investment already made and the plans that have been put in place.

(Interviewee 03, 2016)

⁸⁰ Development to include: recruiting; educating; training; equipping; preparing; and sustaining.

Moreover, given the considerable development period and subsequent prolonged in-service period of platforms within his service, he did not anticipate that influence increasing markedly for his successors in the short to medium term.

[Influence on the Management of Defence](#)

The limitations on the service chiefs in the higher management of defence are clearly articulated in the DOM and most of the interviewees from the service chiefs sub-set had a view on the efficacy of that model. Although responsible for providing advice on the operational use of their service, some complained about not being part of the operational decision-making process. It was also suggested that being dependent on CDS or VCDS to represent their issues at the Defence Board was sub-optimal and resulted in one former service chief not always feeling “as empowered as I would wish.” In a similar vein, a view was also offered that the service chiefs should have a greater input into the generation of defence’s output requirements, as they had been officially ordained as the defence-wide expert for their domain. That said, a counter view was offered by a three-star officer serving in MOD head office that such a position would be as good as allowing them to set their own homework. This groundswell of negative thinking was summed up by one four-star officer who suggested “I have been likened by many external colleagues to the executive chairman of a FTSE 100 company. It doesn’t feel like that” (see Interviewee 01 (2016), Interviewee 02 (2016), Interviewee 03 (2016), Interviewee 05 (2016), and Interviewee 09 (2017)).

Recognising the limitations on service chiefs to influence the higher management of defence, some interviewees highlighted pro-active activity that could be brought to bear to improve the situation. One four-star officer confirmed that service chiefs must work very hard “to make sure ministers know where [they are] coming from and what the potential capability of [maritime/land/air power] is, and the risks associated with [their] use” (Interviewee 02, 2016). Moreover, he also stated that timely and targeted interaction with MOD head office was just as important, so that the individual service chief’s views and direction on his service’s capabilities were

being adequately represented to the operations staff and the finance and military capability staff to inform their day-to-day decision making.

The data collection questions that sought evidence around the role and influence of the single chiefs and their services did not specifically question the macro-level structure of defence. Nevertheless, the subject did surface in several of the elite interviews. The default view is well summed up by this quotation from an RAF four-star officer:

"We have regularly challenged ourselves with that question [is the single service structure within defence still fit for purpose?]. Each time we challenge ourselves, the requirement for expertise in the three environments to be the custodian of air power, as a professional airman, to be the custodian of British maritime power as a professional military maritime admiral, and the same in the land domain, remains valid."

(Interviewee 03, 2016)

However, an alternative point of view was offered by a four-star officer in a MOD head office appointment. He was in favour of rebalancing delegated authorities in favour of MOD head office, thus curbing the extant authorities and responsibilities of the service chiefs. He also questioned whether defence still required four-star heads of service and suggested that three-stars under command of CDS may be a better alternative. Given a number of the issues discussed above, he argued:

"I think they could usefully re-examine the locus of the chiefs, writ large. What is the role and purpose of a service chief beyond his specific tribal responsibilities to his service? Are the chiefs able to act in an agnostic, non-partisan manner in a formal collective as the Chief of Staff's Committee, as it were, responsible for the holistic health of military capability? I'm not sure that we can be confident in any given generation that that has proven to be the case, where actually, when confronted with a set of unenviable choices, the chiefs have inevitably defaulted to their own service setting."

(Interviewee 26, 2018)

Exploring alternatives to the existing structure at the highest decision-making levels of MOD head office and the single services goes well beyond the scope of this

thesis. That said, evidence from the elite interviews suggests that a number of the emerging categories from the selective coding process were shaped by the attitudes, perceptions, expertise, and experience of the senior officers and civil servants who occupy those appointments at the very top of defence.

Summary

Even though the service chiefs have seen a gradual reduction in their defence-wide position and authority over this thesis' research period, the appointments still maintain considerable influence over the translation of strategic direction into military capability. However, although their influence has certainly been strengthened by the introduction of the delegated model, there remained a view among the service chief interviewee sub-set that expectations of them from other senior decision makers in defence was greater than their revised authorities permitted them to deliver.

Furthermore, some changes to the service chiefs' roles and responsibilities, introduced as part of the DRP, have the potential to discourage them from always acting in the best interest of defence as a whole. For example, removing their formal role in the higher departmental management process increased their ability to abrogate responsibility to be a team player for defence, if they so choose. In all likelihood, considering the needs of a single service before the needs of defence would only make the task of delivering JF25 more difficult, or, as one four-star officer put it "in my experience, when chiefs of staff take positions that mean they are not prepared to compromise, then you are going to be in a really difficult position" (Interviewee 02, 2016).

Chapter 9: Factors that determine the Translation of Strategic Direction into Military Capability

Process and procedures were the dominant area of discussion in all of the elite interviews. Selective coding revealed 308 open codes with 1,292 associated data points that could be aligned to a process- and procedures-related category. In addition, there was a noteworthy crossover of open codes from all of the shaping categories analysed in chapter eight. This depth of evidence uncovered during selective coding strongly supported the recognition of a category that encompasses the development and deployment of internal defence process to be considered during the theoretical coding process. Furthermore, a number of obvious subcategories emerged during open coding; for example, how the post-DRP construct has affected the translation of strategic direction into military capability, how defence has interacted with the quinquennial review process, and how capability management is being undertaken today. Chapter nine explores the data within an 'internal defence process' category, to recognise how they support the thesis' research questions and what they may contribute during the theoretical coding process.

9.1 Impact of the Defence Reform Programme

The Delegated Model

Of the fourteen key recommendations in the post-SDSR 10 Defence Reform Report, the one that had the greatest influence on extant military capability planning and delivery was Key Recommendation Six – Financial Management. The most relevant sub-paragraph within that recommendation is detailed, in full, below:

"The Service Chiefs should take responsibility (and ultimately own the budget) for detailed capability planning and propose (through a Command Plan) how best to deliver the strategic direction set by the Defence Board across all lines of development. Once the Plan is agreed by Head Office, Chiefs should be given greater freedom to flex within their budgets, provided they continue to deliver the agreed objectives within their delegated resources. The Plan should be refreshed annually, including to enable

cross TLB adjustments where necessary, but the department should aim to make major changes only at SDSRs.”

(Lord Levene of Portsoken, 2011, p. 69)

During the initial open coding process, observations related to the Levene reforms generated fifteen open codes and 139 separate data points. Accepting that almost half of the data points were generated in response to two explicit data collection questions⁸¹, the delegated model was frequently observed to be a major factor in the views of interviewees when specifically discussing why the UK has the military that it has. Moreover, the unanimous view of interviewees in single service or JFC appointments was that the delegated model was an improvement on what had gone before. Typical of the positive comments was the following, from a single service chief of staff: “I think [the delegated model] has improved it [the delivery of military capability] markedly, because someone like me now feels responsible, accountable and with authority for that bit of military capability which I own” (Interviewee 02, 2016). Another observation from a senior officer within Air Command recognised that the delegated model had aligned the responsibilities needed to deliver military capability. In his view, defence should set the output requirement for – in his example – airpower, and then the single service should have the maximum ability to decide and develop the capabilities best to meet that output standard. That maximum ability had been made possible by the delegated model, through the single services’ control of money (including the power to flex between programmes), manpower, equipment and its associated support, and infrastructure (Interviewee 09, 2017). Similarly, the RN sentiment was summed up thus: “Owning the whole capability management process has made us a better, sharper, more focused command” (Interviewee 01, 2016).

Away from the single services, however, opinions on the delegated model were not universally positive, with wide-ranging concerns over issues such as poor implementation, differing interpretations of the new levels of responsibility, a lack of suitably qualified and experienced personnel, and an over emphasis on environmental-

⁸¹ ‘Has the delegated model improved or worsened the generation of military capability?’ And ‘Is further change to the delegated model required?’

specific capability over cross-cutting capability. More than one interviewee believed that the delegated model had not been fully implemented, with a former three-star civil servant suggesting the single services had “cherry picked” those elements of the DRP’s key recommendations that suited them (Interviewee 19, 2017). One former four-star officer commented that “Levene is the right answer, poorly executed” (Interviewee 08, 2017). Given the lack of detail included within the Defence Reform Report, that is hardly surprising. For example, the section on capability planning and financial management is no more than six and a half pages of high-level detail. This lack of comprehensive direction has also given rise to some very different views over who is now responsible for what, as a three-star officer in a key MOD head office capability management appointment observed:

“The difficulty is people’s view of the word ‘delegation’ is mixed. For some people, this means that they should decide everything. If you were a big corporate enterprise in the commercial sector, let’s say Shell, head office still directs its operating divisions. So, the defence plan and the output map that is part of it are orders down to the TLBs.”

(Interviewee 05, 2016)

A major flaw identified in the introduction of the delegated model was the failure to recruit suitably qualified personnel, or provide the necessary training for defence’s capability planners and financial managers to operate the revised processes and procedures (see Interviewee 05 (2016), Interviewee 12 (2017), and Interviewee 16 (2017)). One three-star acquisition specialist suggested that this was because defence’s staff training was focused on war fighting and not running a business. In his view, more emphasis was required on delivering an integrated programme of complex capabilities (Interviewee 11, 2017). This perspective was supported by a former three-star RAF officer who believed:

“Just because you’ve been a programmer in the MOD does not turn you into a programme manager overnight, in term of, you know, [the] hard graft of running a business. You can move numbers up and down spreadsheets – do it all day long. But can you genuinely deliver an outcome?”

(Interviewee 18, 2017)

A final concern that received multi-interviewee attention was the tendency for the delegated model to over focus defence planners on environmental specific capability. One three-star RAF officer, with considerable capability management experience, believed that the disaggregation balance for traditional military capability was correct, but the delegated model had made it more difficult to manage cross-cutting capabilities. The single service concentration was, unsurprisingly, predominantly on 'ships, tanks, and fast jets', at the expense of joint enablers, such as communications and logistics, which led one two-star British Army officer to observe that "the delegation of money to the environments has made it more difficult to produce a joint force than before" (Interviewee 30, 2018).

The data collection question that examined the need for further change to the delegated model generated considerable discussion and a wide range of opinions. Everyone who expressed a view believed further change was required, with most suggesting that was only to be expected (see Interviewee 03 (2016), Interviewee 05 (2016), Interviewee 19 (2017), and Interviewee 27 (2017)). One three-star officer suggested that "we've gone from a highly centralised model to a highly disaggregated model and it shouldn't surprise us to find that the truth is probably somewhere in the middle" (Interviewee 16, 2017). A commonly held assessment was that better governance was needed, which required an adjustment to MOD head office's role in the process (see Interviewee 08 (2017), Interviewee 20 (2017), Interviewee 26 (2018), and Interviewee 28 (2017)). Changes to the financial aspects of the delegated model were also recommended, but with contrary views expressed on single services living within their financial control framework and not continually seeking additional resource (Interviewee 13, 2017), versus reintroducing some centrally-held flexible resource to cope with the unexpected (Interviewee 08, 2017). There was also support for more robust financial management, with one four-star acquisition specialist advocating that the delegated model needed "to be enumerated with a far more forensic precision" (Interviewee 10, 2017).

A final aspect of the delegated model that drew debate during elite interviews was its potential longevity. A number of interviewees were in agreement that

delegation would not last forever and that the cyclical nature of organisational change would prompt a more centralised reset in due course (see Interviewee 14 (2017), Interviewee 22 (2017), and Interviewee 28 (2017)). As an example, prior to advocating disaggregation in the Defence Reform Report, Levene had regularly argued for increasing the authority of CDP during his tenure in the 1980s (Levene, 2018). One enthusiastic supporter of the delegated model offered the following, pragmatic view:

“Delegation won’t last forever. Banks do this thing where they basically empower their outstations and then ten years later, they recentralize again. Delegation will last for a bit. I’m sure in about five-, seven- or ten-years’ time, or maybe earlier, we will reimpose some form of centralist approach ... It’s inevitable because that’s the way businesses operate. Don’t expect delegation to be a panacea forever, I just quite like it while it’s here!”

(Interviewee 13, 2017)

The changing role of MOD Head Office

As interviewees discussed the delegated model, the significance of MOD head office’s contribution became more and more obvious. In addition to that body’s perceived role in the need for better high-level governance, outlined in the previous sub-section, its internal ways of working and its touchpoints with the single services and delivery agents were recognised as being a key element in the translation of strategic direction into military capability.

Internally, the interfaces between the staffs of the relevant floors⁸² within the building were regularly identified as vital to MOD head office’s successful contribution to the operation of the delegated model. However, in the opinion of a recently retired four-star, the necessary system of aligning the programme from the third floor, with operations from the fourth floor, to be led by the fifth floor was simply not in place. In his view “because of all sorts of personal institution reasons, you have a third floor universe and a fourth floor universe dealing with different bits of the fifth floor on

⁸² The finance and capability management staff occupy the third floor of MOD Main Building in Whitehall, the military strategic operations staff work on the fourth floor, and ministers, CDS, PUS, and the remaining single service staffs are located on the fifth floor.

different days” (Interviewee 08, 2017). The consequences of the internally siloed approach were highlighted by a three-star British Army officer working in MOD head office, who explained how an arbitrary financial decision taken in isolation by a non-specialist programmer had effectively set the timeline to reduce the size of the British Army post-SDSR 10. He explained that “ you had a[n] ... apparatchik who had no concept of the consequences of what they’re doing, directing – in this case – the Army to a trajectory of [manpower] reduction which the Army would not have wished if it’d had any choice” (Interviewee 14, 2017).

The interaction between the staff in MOD head office and other elements of the department – in the main, the single service’s and JFC’s command headquarters but also, to a lesser extent, the delivery agents – was regularly cited during the elite interviews when considering the success or otherwise of the delegated model. Probably the most consistently recognised failing was the lack of both expertise and capacity within MOD head office, with the result that it was regularly overmatched by its subordinate organisations (see Interviewee 19 (2017), and Interviewee 28 (2017)). One three-star went as far as to suggest that MOD head office had “lost control over the TLBs” (Interviewee 14, 2017). The reason for the failing was, in the words of one single service four-star, that “most of the capability and resource to be able to do joined up thinking was given back to the services” (Interviewee 02, 2016). There was support across the interviewees to realign staff within MOD head office to make it more strategic and stronger (see Interviewee 01 (2016), Interviewee 13 (2017), and Interviewee 30 (2018)). Thus, realising the Defence Reform Report recommendation “The Head Office should ... set strategic direction and provide a strong corporate and financial management framework for the Department” (Lord Levene of Portsoken, 2011, p. 36). Ultimately, the consensus was that this issue was MOD head office’s to solve, as summarised by an RAF three-star with considerable programming experience: “the centre has not matured its approach to properly enforce, deliver, manage, whatever verb you want to use, the delegated model” (Interviewee 32, 2017).

A final area of tension that regularly surfaced during discussions around the contribution of MOD head office to the delegated model concerned spans of

responsibility. The view from outwith MOD head office was both consistent and robust – the single services and JFC were now the decision makers for all capability management within their environmental portfolio (see Interviewee 01 (2016), Interviewee 02 (2016), Interviewee 03 (2016), Interviewee 04 (2016), and Interviewee 09 (2017)). Whilst this was not directly challenged by interviewees from within MOD head office, the extent of the responsibility that the single services and JFC believed they exercised was. In particular, it was argued that the central military capability staff were obliged to scrutinise and confirm the requirements raised by the single services and JFC met the needs of policy within an affordable envelope. In short, it was a MOD head office responsibility to ensure defence policy was serviced within the available budget (Interviewee 05, 2016). How the choice and application of process impacts this thesis' general research question is considered in the next section; however, it was clear from analysing relevant open codes that the introduction of the delegated model had created new boundaries and seams, which presented different problems to what went before, and, therefore, needed to be managed accordingly (Interviewee 32, 2017).

9.2 Defence and the Quinquennial Review Process

Since 2010, defence has contributed to two SDSRs, the NSCR, and the MDP. However, the NSCR and MDP, which commenced in July 2017 and January 2018 respectively, occurred towards the end of the study's elite interview window⁸³ and, as a result, neither was considered in any detail by any of the interviewees. Accordingly, this section focuses only on the defence contribution to SDSR 10 and SDSR 15.

Although the reviews of 2010 and 2015 were both strategic defence and security reviews and, therefore, sought similar goals, there were considerable differences between both the context and the manner in which they were conducted. For most interviewees, SDSR 10 was dominated by finance, and the need for the defence and security community to contribute to the coalition government's plans to bring the budget deficit under control (see Interviewee 13 (2017), Interviewee 18 (2017), and

⁸³ Tranche One of the elite interviews occurred between May and November 2016; Tranche Two between March and September 2017; and Tranche Three between November 2017 and March 2018.

Interviewee 28 (2017)). One four-star officer described the driving function of SDSR 10 as a “withdrawal in contact with austerity” (Interviewee 08, 2017). As an RAF three-star officer, who was closely involved with his service’s contribution to SDSR 15, observed:

“2010 was very clearly arguing about who got a slice of a smaller pie. That created a lot of angst and difficulty ... ‘10 and ‘15 were very, very different in context terms, and clearly in outcome terms. It’s hard to draw too many parallels between one and the other.”

(Interviewee 32, 2017)

Unsurprisingly, a simple interpretation of the feedback from the elite interviews was ‘SDSR 10 – bad, SDSR 15 – good’. A typical summary of the SDSR 10 experience was: “it just felt like a train wreck. It felt like you went in in chaos, and you came out in just a different flavour of chaos” (Interviewee 07, 2017). In comparison, reaction from senior officers close to the SDSR 15 process, from all three services, was far more upbeat: “It worked really well from a Navy Command Headquarters perspective” (Interviewee 01, 2016); “I think absolutely one would see it [SDSR 15] as a positive ... [it] broadly got the Army to where it wanted to be” (Interviewee 02, 2016); “overall, as an airman, I don’t think we could have come out of ‘15 any better” (Interviewee 18, 2017). However, when considering how the quinquennial review process affected the translation of strategic direction into military capability, many of those interviewed believed there was considerable scope for improvement. To that end, the remainder of this section considers the relationship that defence, in general, and the single services, in particular, have had with SDSRs. It then examines the freedoms and constraints that the interviewees believed had impacted defence’s interaction with the quinquennial review process, before concluding with an exploration of potential changes for the future.

MOD Head Office’s approach to Strategic Defence and Security Reviews

Analysis from research previously discussed has already led to the conclusion that there has never been a standard process for a defence review. This was reinforced

by a number of interviewees (see, for example, Interviewee 02 (2016) and Interviewee 23 (2017)), suggests. Furthermore, as Curtis (2019) posits, that is unlikely to change, because it is not in the interests of politicians to reduce their own freedom of manoeuvre. This aligns with the view, explored in chapter eight, that the SDSR process and its outcomes are inherently political. One retired RAF three-star officer believed that reviews become political footballs, and that “They are very much of their time, and if elections or situations within government are at a certain point in time, the SDSR has to just take its place as part of that argument or process” (Interviewee 18, 2017). A similar view was offered by one of his four-star colleagues:

“... what tends always to happen in defence reviews is something which matches political required outcomes, which is focused on force structure. In other words, what the government will announce out of the defence reviews is not some conceptual thing. It will be, ‘We’re going to buy more ships, tanks, aircraft’, or something like that.”

(Interviewee 09, 2017)

This is at odds with an understanding expressed by a number of the elite interviewees that an SDSR is about “balancing the books” (Interviewee 14, 2017), or is “a once-in-a-five-year opportunity to reset the programme” (Interviewee 16, 2017) or even “an opportunity for the government of the day to restate what its strategic defence and security policy is ... to either revalidate what they’ve already said, or to tune it” (Interviewee 07, 2017). These views accord with the MOD’s own official definition, which confirmed the SDSR’s remit as identifying the ‘means’ (resources) and ‘ways’ (courses of action) across government, needed to deliver the ‘ends’ described in the NSS (Director Corporate Strategy Ministry of Defence, 2015, p. 14).

However, whilst these views, and the DOM definition, may well represent a reasonable expectation from defence of the outcomes of an SDSR, one RAF four-star officer, who was very closely involved with the defence input to SDSR 15, took time during his interview to explain what he considered the reality of the review process to be, from a MOD head office perspective. He argued that it was exceptionally rare for a defence review to result in a radical change to defence policy, pointing out that Healey’s reviews of the late 1960s and the Options for Change exercise in 1991 were the

only two occasions during the period covered by this study where this may have occurred. In his view, there was seldom an appetite within government to undertake a radical redefinition of defence policy as that would require a radical redefinition of foreign policy, which would mean re-visiting the 'Britain's place in the world' question. He went on to suggest that "Governments generally aren't up for that and, by and large, the world doesn't need it either" (Interviewee 09, 2017). This view was supported by a fellow four-star from the British Army who suggested that the only time real change in defence policy would be countenanced is when the government is facing a "massive money crisis" or the military has had "a major thrashing" (Interviewee 08, 2017). The conclusion drawn by the first four-star officer was that doing the conceptual thinking was not wrong, but defence should always be focusing its efforts on the decisions that the government wanted to make, i.e. what was the political appetite and what did the politicians actually want to do? This approach was needed because, ultimately, what happened in the decision making of the defence review process was a fusion of what defence thought it needed to do for the future and what the government wanted to do for the future.

One of the obvious advantages of working to a pre-agreed cycle for defence reviews was the opportunity for prior preparation. In the words of a two-star, 'SDSR-expert', civil servant "... you need to give yourself enough time to get on top of the context, to ensure that you have cleared the ground and you know what you're doing for an SDSR" (Interviewee 23, 2017). However, if the reality of the situation argued in the previous paragraph is accepted, then there is a real danger of defence undertaking considerable amounts of nugatory work in the build-up to an SDSR. For example, the logical preparations for defence to invest effort in would be to focus on the future operating environment and strategic trends. This, of course, it does – the Development Concepts and Doctrine Centre's (DCDC) global strategic trends analysis being the most obvious example (see Development Concepts & Doctrine Centre (2010), Development Concepts & Doctrine Centre (2014c), and Development Concepts & Doctrine Centre (2018)). Nevertheless, the outcome from this activity may be completely irrelevant in the context of an SDSR, because, if the preparatory work leads to the conclusion that a radical redefinition of defence policy is required, the analysis above has confirmed that

the government 'isn't up for that'. As the same RAF four-star officer cited above observed: "In the preparations [for an SDSR], there needs to be a degree of purity in the thought process but we should not confuse that purity of doing ... the intellectual process, with what's actually going to happen in the actual reality of the decision making" (Interviewee 09, 2017).

The line of analysis followed above led to a number of discussions during the elite interviews about how the most senior decision makers in defence view SDSRs. One RAF three-star officer, in an influential MOD head office appointment, believed an SDSR was a negotiation (Interviewee 32, 2017); a view that supports deductions reached in the politics and politicians section in chapter eight. Moreover, this view was reinforced by a number of interviewees who were closely involved in MOD head office's initial preparations for SDSR 15 (see Interviewee 19 (2017), Interviewee 23 (2017), and Interviewee 32 (2017)); in particular, the defensive position adopted by the department prior to the government's two per cent (of GDP) defence spending commitment in the July 2015 budget (Hansard House of Commons, 2015). All three interviewees discussed the extreme concern felt as a result of the expectation that defence was going to have to accept a reduction in its budget and confirmed the pre-budget focus was predominantly on making a case to counter that. One two-star civil servant stated that "Had we been told that the best [financial settlement] we could have hoped for was flat-real, or even a reduction, then we would have spent a considerable part of the SDSR working up arguments to try and move that decision" (Interviewee 23, 2017). On a broader front, a retired four-star officer suggested that SDSR 15 was "a battle from the start" and that "we were shying away from the true state of defence across the piece" (Interviewee 08, 2017). This almost adversarial, 'us-and-them' evidence suggests that the defence view of the SDSR process was far from a collegiate, 'all-of-one-team' event; instead, it was more akin to a fraught, high-stakes battle involving all of the defence- and security-related government departments, whilst acknowledging the most dangerous opponent was almost certainly the Treasury.

Recognising the confrontational nature of the cross-government SDSR process outlined above, defence has responded by building and operating internal ways of working that best prepared it successfully to participate. In 2015, at the MOD head office level, this revolved around preparing and presenting options for the Defence Strategy Group (DSG) to endorse and feed up into the macro-SDSR decision-making cycle. The options were developed from internal conceptual analysis around the capabilities defence believed it needed for the outputs it thought were expected of it, an input from allies (notably the US and France), and the priorities initially identified by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer (see Interviewee 09 (2017)). This generated a short list of key capabilities (around six or seven) that needed to be addressed. The next step was to identify and cost the capability improvements that would provide the best value for money and operationally significant enhancements to the key capabilities, which generated a prioritised list of approximately 130 options. At the same time, savings and efficiency measures were being developed to provide the resource to underwrite the capability improvements. The two parts came together to present a decision-making matrix to the DSG, which identified how much money could be generated, to reach how far down the priority list, to enable how much capability enhancement.

Notwithstanding the effect of the political direction injected into the process, the methodology outlined above could be considered a credible defence input into the cross-government SDSR process. However, it was not without flaws. As recognised in the 'problem space' section of chapter one, all capability decisions are shaped by the force in being, or, in other words, what defence already has. The baseline for the conceptual analysis at the start of the process will always be the existing force structure. As a former incumbent of MOD head office's most senior capability management appointment observed:

"It would be tempting to say, 'every defence review, a blank sheet of paper – what do we need for the future?' Then we'd put together an investment plan which achieves that. Then we'd look to see how that matches up with what we're already planning to do. In a pure world, you'd be absolutely right, but we're not [in a pure world]. The reality is here's the force we've got. That in many ways defines the defence policy and the whole process."

Furthermore, regardless of the thoroughness of the analysis and the trustworthiness of the associated costings, the reality was that defence was constantly being pressured by politicians to realise more savings, to buy more capability enhancements, to progress further down the priority list. This pressure was the source of so many interviewees' concerns about the affordability of defence, identified in chapter eight.

Single Services' approach to Strategic Defence and Security Reviews

As the shaping category analysis revealed, defence is not a single homogenous construct, and, therefore, it was no surprise that the elite interviews generated conflicting evidence concerning defence's approach to the quinquennial review process. It was suggested that, from the outset, defence's interaction with SDSR 15 was deliberately established as a centre-led process, with only "relatively light touch consultation" with the service commands (Interviewee 32, 2017). This approach received differing levels of support from the elite interviewees in single service appointments. The RN view was that the single services were kept out of the process for too long; the response from the British Army was that the single services felt slightly ostracised by the process and would have preferred to have been more fully engaged; and the RAF considered that the service chiefs had had very little influence over the process (see Interviewee 01 (2016), Interviewee 03 (2016), Interviewee 05 (2016), and Interviewee 13 (2017)).

There was, however, congruence between the single services and MOD head office on pre-budget views over finance, with one single service four-star commenting "People imagined that SDSR and CSR 15 would be about a mega-savings exercise. So, I think a lot of people were preparing themselves for a knife fight in a phone box" (Interviewee 02, 2016). Even when the initially feared budgetary restrictions failed to materialise, the single service reading remained that finance was the driving factor, with one four-star confirming "What was clear from our viewpoint [was] there was going to be a pot of money, which the individual chiefs were invited to pitch for, for

want of a better phrase ...” (Interviewee 03, 2016). Officers from all of the single services and JFC asserted that they prepared and delivered a proposition for SDSR 15 to the DSG (see Interviewee 01 (2016), Interviewee 13 (2017), Interviewee 31 (2017), and Interviewee 32 (2017)). This was confirmed by a senior officer from MOD head office (Interviewee 26, 2018). However, this approach inevitably led to an element of inter-service confrontation, as, even with the Chancellor’s relaxing of the purse strings, there was never going to be enough money to go around. This was corroborated by a senior RAF officer who, when asked ‘was there protectionism from the services?’ answered:

“Protectionism is the wrong word. Was there ambition? Yes, and I can tell you that the Army wanted two-star divisional warfighting, two-star divisional command, was their name. They wanted Scout; they wanted the two strike brigades. The Navy wanted protection of the carriers, they wanted more frigates than they ended up with, and they wanted more people. I think their bid was about 2,500 and they got 400. So, there are games played in that space, in terms of affordability, you know, pushing programmes left and right, and finding headroom within them. So, that’s half the problem. The next problem is, the services then, sort of eye each other across the table, and go, ‘Well, I want this, and you want that, and I want the other.’ So, there is a game within a game. Personally, I would prefer if all those positions were just laid on the table. Of course, it’s right and proper of a service chief, as the expert of his field, to put a case for what he believes he needs to meet the strategy.”

(Interviewee 03, 2016)

Even during an SDSR when, as one three-star civil servant from MOD head office confirmed “the debate became how the money should be best spend” (Interviewee 19, 2017), it was clear the single services all believed that they were in a contest, which would have winners and losers. In fact, very much a ‘one-step-down’ position from where MOD head office considered itself, within the overall quinquennial review process. Moreover, in a contest where, as we have already ascertained, the politicians call the shots, the single service winner would be the one that understood best the political appetite and could provide the capability choice that supported best what the politicians actually wanted to do. This analysis was confirmed by an RAF three-star officer, who was closely involved with his service’s preparations for SDSR 15. He explained that the RAF’s ‘pitch’ did not include a ‘big

idea', whereas the British Army's presentation was built around the new strike brigade concept, which caught the eye:

"The lesson I took from it is that it is ultimately about politics, and the Prime Minister was going to stand up in the House of Commons and announce this thing. He needed stuff that would catch the eye. If you read his transcript, he led with strike brigades. I guess the deduction from that is that it's all very well being steady, stable, logical, rational, which are, I think, important factors in it, and using evidence that is understood and seen. But you also need to have an eye to the announcement, something that will get them."

(Interviewee 32, 2017)

Constraints, Freedoms and Future Reviews

A three-star military officer, working in the DE&S offered an extremely pertinent comment about SDSR 15 during his interview. He said "I came away from [SDSR] 15 thinking 'oh, we might be alright' [but] what we'd done is, we'd put the difficult decisions off until tomorrow" (Interviewee 15, 2017). As the elite interviews progressed, more and more post-SDSR 15 problems began to emerge. These were most obvious in the financial management space (see Interviewee 23 (2017) and Interviewee 32 (2017)). One TLB holder confessed: "the financial reality was, the year of the SDSR ... just closed out, effectively in moratoria to get there, and I was nowhere near closing out years two and three, they were a billion quid adrift in each year" (Interviewee 08, 2017). The UK's decision to leave the EU, examined in chapter seven, undoubtedly contributed to defence's budget challenges; however, as one British Army three-star officer pointed out, decisions taken as part of SDSR 15 were equally to blame: "We didn't want to make large changes to the balance of the programme, so we just balanced the books on paper by giving ourselves wedges" (Interviewee 15, 2017). Notwithstanding the resource management improvements that the DRP was designed to engender, it is clear that until defence adopts a more robust and credible approach to its financial management, future reviews are likely to unravel as swiftly as SDSR 15 appears to have done.

A further, sizeable constraint, identified by interviewees from all backgrounds, was the time allocated to complete SDSRs. All who expressed an opinion about either

SDSR 10 or SDSR 15 confirmed that the process was conducted too hastily, and outputs suffered as a result. One former three-star civil servant believed that the limited time allocated to SDSRs led to immature thinking (Interviewee 07, 2017); others considered that it resulted in the need to reverse engineer some decisions (see Interviewee 03 (2016) and Interviewee 13 (2017)). One RAF three-star officer commented that “it felt like there were a series of pre-conceived conclusions that had been reached [and] that this work was now about evidencing them” (Interviewee 22, 2017). Another former three-star civil servant, who was close to the political process in 2010, believed that the time to deliver SDSR 10 was very constrained, and the Secretary of State “simply didn’t have enough days for him to devote a lot of attention to each and every report” (Interviewee 06, 2016). This observation was supported by a third senior civil servant who confirmed that many of the supporting studies commissioned by the MOD for SDSR 10 “ended up on the cutting room floor” (Interviewee 19, 2017). A similar situation occurred five years later when the SDSR 15 Cabinet Office team was seeking to secure direction from the NSC. A three-star officer working on the review externally to the MOD, reported that only three sessions of the NSC were devoted to reviewing SDSR documentation, with all other information having to be circulated out of committee. His recollection of the process was:

“You have to deliver your key points to the National Security Council; you’ve probably got five bullets to discuss in a very short period for their business. This is what we’re doing. Here’s where we’re going. Key points are the following. Key issues and worries. Are you happy with the progress?”

(Interviewee 21, 2017)

The actual content of SDSR reports generated some strong discussion, with current practice being seen as a freedom by some interviewees, but as a constraint by others. For example, one RAF two-star officer believed that the lack of detail included in formal SDSR documentation was a positive, as it gave the government and defence the flexibility to do things differently as and when circumstances changed (Interviewee 20, 2017). However, other interviewees expressed the view that the loose language in SDSR reports was counterproductive as it was not “taut enough to actually describe what’s required” (Interviewee 18, 2017) to the extent that the single services could

“easily attribute their aspirations against the strategy and effectively argue for any force structure” (Interviewee 22, 2017). External messaging was another issue identified with the content of SDSR reports. One four-star officer expressed a concern that both the activity and timeline associated with the realisation of JF25 essentially confirmed that the UK would be unable to undertake major warfighting at scale against a peer adversary until ten years after the SDSR. He considered there was a risk in:

“Publishing white papers and defence reviews ... which say, ‘We are weak in the following areas and we’re going to get better. I think an important part of deterrence is what’s behind the curtain, what’s not known and what’s not said. We want to create dilemmas in our opponents’ minds which says, ‘We don’t know what the UK is actually capable of. We know what they say they’re capable of but maybe there’s more.’ I think maybe we need to be careful about being too honest, if you like.”

(Interviewee 09, 2017)

The final data collection question to be recognised in this sub-section concerned potential changes for future SDSRs. Most interviewees had a view on this issue, and they broadly fell into three groups. The greatest number of comments concerned an increased role for the single services, which, unsurprisingly, echoes the analysis from the previous sub-section (see Interviewee 01 (2016), Interviewee 03 (2016), Interviewee 13 (2017), Interviewee 17 (2017), and (Interviewee 25, 2017)). The second group of comments focused on changes outwith defence; for example achieving a consensus on the national vision for the UK’s place in the world (Interviewee 05, 2016), generating a political climate where an honest review about the state of UK defence could take place (Interviewee 08, 2017), or receiving a credible fiscal envelope to plan against (Interviewee 12, 2017). One interviewee argued that the Secretary of State should be legally obligated by Parliament to create a balanced programme and demonstrate that it was so (Interviewee 11, 2017). The final, and smallest, collection of comments concentrated on changes that could be made within defence to improve the process. Here, there was a recognition that good internal process or documentation was often not fully exploited or, in some cases, was ignored completely. Particular examples given were MOD joint doctrine and risk management procedures (see Interviewee 18

(2017) and Interviewee 30 (2018)). One three-star officer also acknowledged that the defence approach to the quinquennial review process needed to be more agile, particularly to be able to accommodate politicians' preferences for last-minute decision making. Accepting the political nature of the process, and abandoning the military's desire to confirm courses of action as early as possible, were, in his view, essential internal improvements that needed to be made (Interviewee 16, 2017).

9.3 Contemporary Capability Management

The organisational changes that the DRP and, in particular, the delegated model introduced to defence were discussed in this chapter's first section. However, those organisational changes were accompanied by significant alterations to defence's internal processes and procedures, many of which were still bedding down during the period of the elite interviews. As a result, a number of discussions were heavily influenced by interviewees' experiences of the new ways of working, both good and bad. At least twenty-five open codes could be directly aligned to a 'contemporary capability management' subcategory; furthermore, many more data points located within open codes that were better aligned to other categories and subcategories could also be considered indirectly associated with contemporary capability management. In all, the open coding process identified over 200 separate data points that linked either directly, or indirectly, to this subcategory.

Capability Management Principles

A British Army three-star general, with considerable capability planning experience, explained how defence's approach to managing the force structure had changed since the introduction of the delegated model. He confirmed that the new philosophy was focused on generating approximately eighty per cent of the capability requirement and then recognizing that the flexibility in the remainder of the programme existed to attend to future variations that would inevitably occur (Interviewee 05, 2016). Unfortunately, in the view of a four-star officer responsible for delivering capability to the new processes and procedures, that was easier said than done. He believed that all of defence's energies were being used to maintain the extant programme, leaving no time or resource to react to the variations:

“... what you’re actually doing is fighting a programme where a vast amount of money is being spent on things which are held to be existential to a service, at the expense of smaller sums of money that you want to spend on the stuff you’re actually using and are going to need in the future.”

(Interviewee 08, 2017)

This problem was expanded upon further by another four-star officer who pointed out that defence’s biggest problem in adopting this new approach was its inability to identify and disinvest in capability it no longer required. His conclusion was simple: “If we want a load of new things, we’re absolutely going to have to stop doing some things too” (Interviewee 04, 2016). He considered that the recently introduced Defence Capability Assessment Register (DCAR) was a reasonable handrail for identifying and prioritising new requirements but had been less successful as a decision-support tool for disinvestment. He offered the following analogy:

“So, we need a new land EW [electronic warfare] capability, because our existing one is becoming obsolescent, or obsolete. So, we come to the table, we’ve identified in the DCAR that we need it, but it doesn’t get funded, and it doesn’t get funded because it’s easier not to fund the new things than it is to stop funding the old things. Even though the new things may be more pressing than some of the old things ... so instead of saying ‘this is such an expensive capability, why don’t we get out of it completely, and then we can distribute that largesse much more wisely,’ we’ve salami-sliced.”

(Interviewee 04, 2016)

Another significant impediment to managing the force structure was, as one three-star officer described, the existence therein of “exquisite irrelevance” capability (Interviewee 05, 2016). He applied this label to the growing number of increasingly expensive platforms being calibrated against the highest possible requirement, which resulted in prohibitive costs and a correspondingly reduced fleet-size. He suggested that:

“They’re rendered irrelevant for a number of reasons. They’re not in the right space or the right place at the right time because you’ve not got many of these things. They are a very high technological risk therefore they do break sometimes ... They may be calibrated against the wrong threat i.e. the opposition is not playing cricket in the way that we thought they were going to play; they’re playing a slightly different game.

They're so expensive and valuable bits of commodities, you don't put them in harm's way anyway. As a consequence, you then find they've been rendered irrelevant."

(Interviewee 05, 2016)

A number of interviewees also discussed how the latest industry procurement techniques could be introduced into the defence capability management toolbox to achieve the required flexible management of the force structure. 'Tailorable', 'adjustable' and 'agile' were the adjectives favoured by both delivery agent practitioners and single service capability deciders (see, for example, Interviewee 17 (2017) and Interviewee 22 (2017)). Future acquisitions should exploit technology that could be incrementally improved by utilising plug and play capability upgrades, or have its utility changed entirely through software drops. This approach, they argued, would allow defence to preserve its existing policy of major platform procurement by safeguarding the relevance and utility of the platforms over a projected lifespan measured in decades. However, although some interviewees had seen this approach becoming more and more commonplace in comparable, high-tech industries, none were able to offer any evidence of it happening at any scale within defence.

Developing Joint Force 2025

The remaining cluster of open codes within the 'contemporary capability management' subcategory centred on JF25, and the ongoing capability challenges in both adapting and updating the current force structure to meet the new requirements within the ten-year timeline that followed SDSR 15. A fundamental problem identified from the elite interviews was the headmark for JF25 that the SDSR identified was a programmatic headmark and not a concept headmark. That is to say, it created a task organisation for the new joint force but provided no direction on how the force elements contained therein should actually fight. As a British Army two-star officer observed:

"... why would all of these capabilities we were buying, or the skills we were developing in our people, or the organisational design of our structures, or any of those cross DLODs, ... add up to a different way of warfare? We've never put that down [in writing], so we've never had a unifying operating concept that has applied to our defence strategic direction."

(Interviewee 30, 2018)

As a result, over and above the components of JF25 listed at Figure 7-1, SDSR 15 provided no conceptual vector for defence planners to assist them in developing the JF25 capabilities' DLODs to ensure that they would actually be capable of operating against current and future threats. Instead, the same two-star officer posited that the concepts underpinning extant force development tended to generate such a broad range of insights that they had become all things to all men, allowing the single services to choose the outcomes that reinforced their own bias and prejudice, instead of developing capabilities that may not always be in the interests of a particular service but are necessary for a joint force. This view was supported by a British Army three-star officer working in MOD head office, who, when discussing single service involvement in SDSR 15, observed:

"The service chiefs were invited quite late in the day to produce their propositions for their service, without reference to how those independent capabilities were to be integrated. There was no clear proponent for the scope, scale and ambition of a joint force to which front line commands would contribute capacity and structure."

(Interviewee 26, 2018)

Some improvement have been made, for example the DCDC has, since SDSR 15, produced a future force concept, approved by VCDS and endorsed by all of the service chiefs and Commander JFC (Development Concepts & Doctrine Centre, 2017). It brings together the individual environmental concepts into a single concept to guide coherent force development, is evidence based, and resource and policy aware. However, the DOM remains ambiguous about who within the delegated model is responsible for designing and delivering the joint force, with the result that "there [remains] a ... huge gap between future force concept and the capability we get!" (Interviewee 30, 2018).

Another barrier to the development of the optimal capabilities to populate the JF25 force structure identified during the elite interviews was defence's susceptibility to path dependence, which can be defined as the tendency of institutions or technologies to become committed to develop in certain ways as a result of their

structural properties or their beliefs or values (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2019a).

Edmunds (2010) argues that path dependence exists in UK defence planning as a result of competition over resources, the long-term nature of the procurement process, and established political, economic and institutional interests. This argument has been developed by Uttley et al. (2019) who posit that even though the MOD is committed to futures work and horizon scanning, primarily through the DCDC, it is the UK's past and present that drive its vision of, and planning for, the future. The impact of this closed thinking was explored by several interviewees during discussions over contemporary capability management.

The clearest example given during the elite interviews of defence planners' preoccupation with the recent past when considering how JF25 should be constructed related to the maintenance of force elements at readiness. A retired RAF three-star officer, who had commanded the JFC's joint force development organisation, argued that the RN and the British Army continued to commit a disproportionate level of resource to maintain extremely high-readiness forces, i.e. the Lead Commando Group and the Lead Airborne Task Force respectively, two battalion-sized forces permanently held at forty-eight hours' notice to move, even though the endorsed joint operational capability analysis suggested that defence did not require both an amphibious and airborne capability to be permanently available for immediate deployment. He also asserted that similar arguments could be evidenced to support a reduction in command and control nodes (Interviewee 18, 2017).

At the opposite end of the readiness scale, a number of interviewees considered that the development of JF25 should be influenced by greater clarity and an endorsed policy position with regard to warning times, to enable sensible decisions to be made on the maintenance of seed corn capabilities⁸⁴ and their regeneration when required (see parliament.uk (2012)). Whilst not advocating a return to the Ten-Year Rule of the early Twentieth Century, the argument was made that significant, cost-effective

⁸⁴ The seed corn initiative was a series of targeted measures taken to ensure that the MOD could regenerate a military capability that it had disinvested in if necessary. An example was embedding RAF airmen in maritime patrol crews of friendly nations.

capability decisions could be made against an endorsed view on regeneration. A British Army two-star officer supported this approach, pointing out that if it takes ten years to build a warship, fifteen years to develop a complex fast jet, but only five years to equip an army, then this should lead to different warning times and drive a different order of spending priorities (Interviewee 31, 2017). Such a policy would rely on a pragmatic view of risk, a willingness to maintain investment in seed corn capability, and a confidence in regeneration timelines. In the view of one three-star officer, it would also require that existing capability had to be as utilitarian as it could be for the contemporary problem set. As an example, he suggested:

"... the most beneficial platform ... in the fleet at the moment is a Bay Class RFA [Royal Fleet Auxiliary]. They can use it as a C2 node, a medical facility, a logistic disaster release facility, a helicopter platform. It can launch marines out the back as a mother ship; indeed, it can carry armoured tanks if I really needed it to. But, it's an RFA and if we put a gun on the front actually, it looks like a warship so, I can hold a reasonable cocktail party as though it were a warship. You get maximum utility out of it, but it is just an RFA."

(Interviewee 05, 2016)

The influence of the force structure in being on defence policy was considered in the previous section. In the opinion of a British Army four-star officer, however, it was also a path dependence issue, and it was having a considerable effect on the capability decision making shaping JF25 (Interviewee 04, 2016). In his view, the existing force structure drove employment protectionism that stymied innovation and blocked change. For example, he suggested the default option for replacing an obsolete capability was invariably the acquisition of a more modern version of what was currently in the force structure. This was because it generated the least amount of disruption across the DLODs. The existing manpower could transition to the new version of the equipment, which would be familiar to them and could probably be maintained under existing repair and overhaul arrangements. Existing training facilities were likely to require only minimal reconfiguration to re-role the existing manpower, plus doctrine and organisational constructs were unlikely to need significant amendment. Furthermore, this 'more of the same' approach would probably be supported by the defence industrial lobby, as it would in all likelihood

maintain existing employment levels. It would also be unlikely to lead to the disbandment of historical regiments or squadrons, thus keeping happy the retired senior officer cadre and supporters of the 'traditional military'. That said, the interviewee was firmly of the opinion that replicating existing capability would seldom deliver the most cost-effective solution, and the 'like-for-like' approach would not provide the tailorable, adjustable and agile capability that JF25 sought. In voicing this concern, he fully acknowledged that the principles of smart acquisition had been designed to encourage a comprehensive examination of all possible options to fulfil future requirements; however, he believed that the path dependence behaviour of the single services was so deep rooted that it regularly overrode smart acquisition process and procedure.

9.4 Decision Making within Defence

The final constituent of the 'internal defence process' category is decision making. Although it could be argued that decision making is an integral part of all three subcategories above, evidence from the open coding process suggests there is merit in analysing it as a subcategory in its own right. Twenty-three open codes could be aligned to a decision-making grouping, with 310 associated data points. Moreover, although the elite interview preparation did not identify any specific data collection questions, decision making became a default topic of conversation in many of the interviews themselves, generating a rich vein of relevant information to support analysis around all of the thesis' research questions. This section considers how decision making within defence has affected its contribution to the quinquennial review process, as well as examining some of the issues around how defence makes decisions in general.

Difficulties of Making Decisions in Defence

A 1966 RAND Corporation project developed a theory of bureaucratic decision making that could be applied to government, civil and military establishments. Its most significant conclusion was that "it is impossible to define the 'perfectly efficient' behaviour for any bureau" (Downs, 1966, p. vi). More recently, Knighton (2009) studied how strategic decisions within the UK government are affected by

psychological and cognitive biases. He argued that the complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty inherent in strategic decisions make them more susceptible to a series of psychological biases that can lead to seriously flawed decisions. He also contended that, although the effects of these biases could be mitigated to some extent, there were no simple formulae for success and concluded that “strategic decision making is very definitely an art not a science” (2009, p. 22). This argument has support in the secondary literature on both decision making in general, and military decision making in particular (see, for example, Dixon (1976), Gladwell (2007), Page (2007), and Taleb (2010)).

In 2014, concerns regarding decision making in defence policy prompted the HCDC to conduct an enquiry, which examined the relationships between ministers, officials and the military to understand the contemporary state of decision-making processes within the MOD and to assess whether changes needed to be made (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2015d). The enquiry determined that, once high-quality, relevant information had been gathered, effective decision making in defence was dependent on three further inter-related elements (2015d, pp. 23-24):

- Who makes the decision?
- What is the process used to make the decision?
- Whether the options chosen is decided through a process of rational, logical consideration of the risks and alternatives available.

The Committee considered two separate case studies: the decision to deploy UK forces into Helmand Province in Afghanistan in 2006, and decisions surrounding the procurement of the QEC aircraft carriers. In both cases, the enquiry concluded that: the MOD seemed to have been poorly informed and misunderstood the nature of the problem; the structure of decision making was bewildering; and no-one admitted actually to taking the decision (2015d, p. 3). Although both case studies considered events that had taken place prior to the DRP, the HCDC concluded that significant problems, particularly relating to the evidence to support decision making and the ability of the decision makers to make good decisions, had not been addressed by the introduction of the delegated model. Against this backdrop, a number of interviewees

shared views on how decision making within defence affected the translation of strategic direction into military capability.

One four-star commander believed that, at a mechanistic level, the control framework of the DOM provided the wherewithal to support decision making across defence. He suggested that “fundamentally, if you want to go and see the things that the government said it was going to do in the SDSR, you will find them in the defence plan and you will find them in my command plan” (Interviewee 04, 2016). The inference here was that the associated decision making would be made by the owner of the command plan, i.e. the service chief or Commander JFC. The lack of detail included in SDSR reports provided a degree of flexibility that supported this view. As an RAF two-star officer explained, decisions were made during SDSRs to create a capability or support a task, but the subsequent report did not go into great detail about the how they would be achieved (Interviewee 20, 2017). The consequence was, according to a British Army three-star general, that most of the resultant optionality was defence’s choice. By way of example, he suggested:

“... if I said to you tomorrow, please go out there and make sure nobody crosses the road, you could do it in a number of ways. You could shout a lot, you could lay a barbed wire fence, you could do X or Y, but you have that choice”

(Interviewee 05, 2016)

The same interviewee saw it as a positive that defence had been given a series of directions rather than an end state, and that some of the requirements were relatively subjective with no single point of success or failure.

The counter argument is that this approach has given the single services too much freedom to shape capability development that favours their own environment over the needs of the joint force. There was definitely a general agreement across the elite interviews that the single services’ influence over defence decision making had increased as a result of the delegated model (see, for example, Interviewee 01 (2016), Interviewee 02 (2016), Interviewee 03 (2016), Interviewee 04 (2016), and Interviewee 26 (2018)). One MOD head office three-star officer talked about ‘discretionary orders’, which, in his view, was unequivocal direction from the centre that the single services

had the strength either to amend subtly before implementing or simply ignore (Interviewee 05, 2016). Specific examples of this were given by a three-star officer who explained that delivery teams in DE&S continued to support platforms in excess of the numbers directed in an SDSR because the relevant single service insisted on operating the fleet size at the pre-review level (Interviewee 17, 2017). In an organisational design where the chief executive officer, i.e. CDS, has no line management responsibility for his heads of division, i.e. the single services chiefs – a chain of command construct not even understood by the company chairman⁸⁵ (House of Commons Defence Committee, 2015d, p. 32) – the opportunity for the heads of divisions and their teams to ‘consent and evade’ is undeniable (Interviewee 18, 2017). This situation is exacerbated by the defence’s top committees’ structure, which includes, just in the non-operational space: a defence board (supported by investment approvals, audit and people subcommittees); three service boards⁸⁶; an executive committee; an armed forces committee; and a defence strategy group (Director Corporate Strategy Ministry of Defence, 2015). The overlapping responsibilities and authorities of these committees do little to streamline decision making within defence.

Lessons from the Chilcot Inquiry

An analysis of contemporary decision making in defence would not be complete without a consideration of the relevant lessons from the Iraq Inquiry – commonly referred to across government as the ‘Chilcot Inquiry’ (Chilcot Sir John et al., 2016). However, even though a Chilcot implementation directorate, under a two-star civil servant, had been established to progress the defence-wide changes demanded by the inquiry, only two interviewees raised the potential implications of the inquiry’s findings on the translation of strategic direction into decision making (see Interviewee 29 (2017) and Interviewee 30 (2018)). This was surprising, not only because the work of all the elite interviewees should have been affected in some way by the implementation of the Inquiry’s recommendations, but because the evidence in

⁸⁵ During the HCDC’s enquiry into decision making in defence policy, former CDS Lord Richard pointed out that even the prime minister did not understand that the CDS did not command the service chiefs.

⁸⁶ On each for the RN, the British Army, and the RAF.

this section confirms that decision making in the round was clearly considered by many interviewees to be a significant influencing factor on the thesis' general research question.

In headline terms, the Chilcot Inquiry suggested the UK government had a propensity for 'groupthink', which reflected insufficient challenge and a lack of diversity of thought, and suffered from multiple impediments to effective decision making. The MOD itself provided further clarification for the latter failing: "structures and processes impeded the flow of information and evidence; strategy making was weak and inflexible; and insufficient attention was paid to the capability required for the operation [TELIC] and to determining the resources required to ensure success" (The Chilcot Team, 2017, p. 7). These conclusions were acknowledged by one interviewee who confirmed the Inquiry's 'groupthink' concern:

"I think the way we think, organisationally, is very much along those lines. You're taught, instructed, 'staff-colleged' and everything to think a particular colour. If someone says to you 'well the world has changed completely and what you need to worry about is the cyber threat from Russia and not delivering ordnance at Mach 1.1 ... It's very difficult to think that different thought because, 'No, I'm springing back into shape. This is what I understand.'"

(Interviewee 29, 2017)

Seven months after the Report of the Iraq Inquiry was published, the House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) completed a review on lessons still to be learned (House of Commons Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, 2017). It recognised that the government was conducting a 'lessons learned' investigation across Whitehall and recommended that the findings be reported to Parliament so that the PACAC and other relevant select committees could scrutinise and comment (2017, p. 32). However, it did not identify any corrective actions being taken, or even considered, within the MOD, which supported the view of one British Army two-star officer who believed: "We're starting to think 'Chilcot's learned' and ignore it. I think in doing that, we're showing that actually we haven't learned the lessons from Chilcot" (Interviewee 30, 2018). If defence is unable or unwilling to learn the lessons from what was probably

the highest profile public inquiry of the last generation, which took seven years to complete at a cost of £13.1 million (The National Archives, 2017), it is difficult to see how it will ever solve the fundamental flaws in its decision making process.

Decision Making in support of the Quinquennial Review Process

Whilst recognising that doing nothing, or choosing not to take an option, are still decisions, a key concern with defence decision making at the highest level, expressed during the elite interviews, was simply not making a decision because it was difficult. One three-star officer working in MOD head office confirmed:

"We failed, spectacularly, in the previous planning round in ABC [annual budget cycle] '17 to take any decisions that would have eased the situation we are in now. Some of that is politics. Some of that is we just were not willing to do it ... you just need to be prepared to take some bloody decisions, which we find quite difficult."

(Interviewee 32, 2017)

Another interviewee suggested that there were often political reasons why uncomfortable decisions were not made, citing that "[Gordon] Brown was a Rosyth MP, so the carriers were not going to disappear" (Interviewee 03, 2016). Some of the concerns expressed about defence's decision-making ability during SDSRs echoed the findings of the HCDC inquiry. For example, poor data quality was identified as a problem reaching all the way back to SDR 98 (Interviewee 06, 2016), and a lack of management information in general, and evidence to support cost estimates in particular, was seen as the dominant factor in some bad judgements made by senior officials in defence in both SDR 10 and SDR 15 (see Interviewee 15 (2017) and (Interviewee 20, 2017)). In addition, the reliance on process and procedure over the ability of individuals to make good decisions was also raised as an issue. One RAF four-star officer questioned how much "real brainpower and analysis" was being used to get to the right decisions for defence (Interviewee 03, 2016).

One specific data collection question, relating to the existence or otherwise of idiomatic ‘men in grey suits’⁸⁷ within the defence decision-making process, generated considerable discussion in a number of interviews. In particular, one three-star civil servant confirmed their presence within the MOD, but stressed they were not the decision makers. In his view that was always the role of the secretary of state, CDS and PUS. However, when prompted, he did recognise they had an influential role as ‘holders of the pen’:

“They [the men in grey suits] were the holders of the pen, but the way these processes work is that you have to have people owning the pen to make the proposition that the decision makers sign up to – so, thesis, antithesis, synthesis and situation. If you just have a sea of everyone thinking thoughts, you never get to that point where someone is making a proposition which you can test. So, no, they didn’t make the decisions, but they had to corral this process into putting forward propositions.”

(Interviewee 29, 2017)

All of the interviewees who had experienced the MOD’s contribution to the quinquennial review process at the highest level confirmed that the DSG was its single decision-making body that filtered the defence input up to the SDSR team in the Cabinet Office and thence to the NSC (see Interviewee 06 (2016), Interviewee 09 (2017), Interviewee 19 (2017), Interviewee 20 (2017), Interviewee 21 (2017), Interviewee 23 (2017), and Interviewee 29 (2017)). In addition to the Secretary of State, CDS and PUS, the group also included the Minister for Defence Procurement, VCDS and the MOD head office three-star appointments: Director General Security & Policy; DG Finance; and Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff Military Capability. Although the DSG was the forum within which the department agreed its inputs into the review, one of its members during SDSR 15 confirmed that, as part of the process, the higher-profile defence issues were being concurrently staffed up to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer by the Cabinet Secretary, supported by the Cabinet Office’s SDSR team (Interviewee 09, 2017). The inevitable feedback from this approach, usually in the form of requests for more capability enhancements, led to the

⁸⁷ Powerful and influential members of the organisation operating in the background or behind the scenes.

constant adjustment of the defence position with, more often than not, the need to unearth more efficiencies. As a result, the DSG's decision making was influenced just as much by political prompting from above as it was from single service arm-twisting from below.

Chapter 10: Conclusions

The tenth and final chapter of this thesis draws together the analysis, observations and insights from all of the data chapters. It is divided into four sections, which focus on the conclusions produced from the content analysis, the conclusions produced from selective coding, the substantive theory generated through theoretical coding, and a summary and reflection on the implications of the thesis findings together with recommendations for future research.

The focus of this thesis has been an examination of the many and varied reasons why the successful translation of strategic direction into military capability, which actually meets the requirements of that direction, is not easily achieved. In doing so, it has provided an answer to the question ‘why does the UK have the military that it has?’ Specifically, it has concentrated on the actions of defence decision makers. It has identified the factors that have shaped capability choices and determined why those choices have had the effect that they have. Its analysis has drawn on historical trends and contemporary elite interviews to assess whether the UK’s current methodology to link strategic direction and the development and maintenance of military capability will fare any better than its predecessors.

The literature review unearthed a number of associated avenues of research that offered this thesis an element of direction; however, some of its key themes have, to date, been devoid of academic scrutiny. For example, broad examinations of national strategy are plentiful, but commentary on how strategy is transmitted by politicians and received by the military is not. Similarly, there is an abundance of monographs and journal articles on defence policy and planning, including detailed studies of defence reviews; however, very little consideration has been given to how defence decision makers have contributed to the process. Finally, there are very few instances of contemporary secondary literature that consider the development and maintenance of military capability, especially since the introduction of the delegated model in 2011. To that end, in investigating the translation of UK strategic direction

into military capability and answering the question ‘why does the UK have the military that it has?’ this thesis has filled a significant conceptual and empirical gap in the academic literature.

The thesis’ research methods were a combination of qualitative content analysis of relevant government policy documents together with associated policy analysis from the commentariat, and semi-structured elite interviews. The methodology selected to underpin the research was constructivist grounded theory. Planning for the research project was undertaken using the hierarchy of concepts outlined in Figure 10-1.

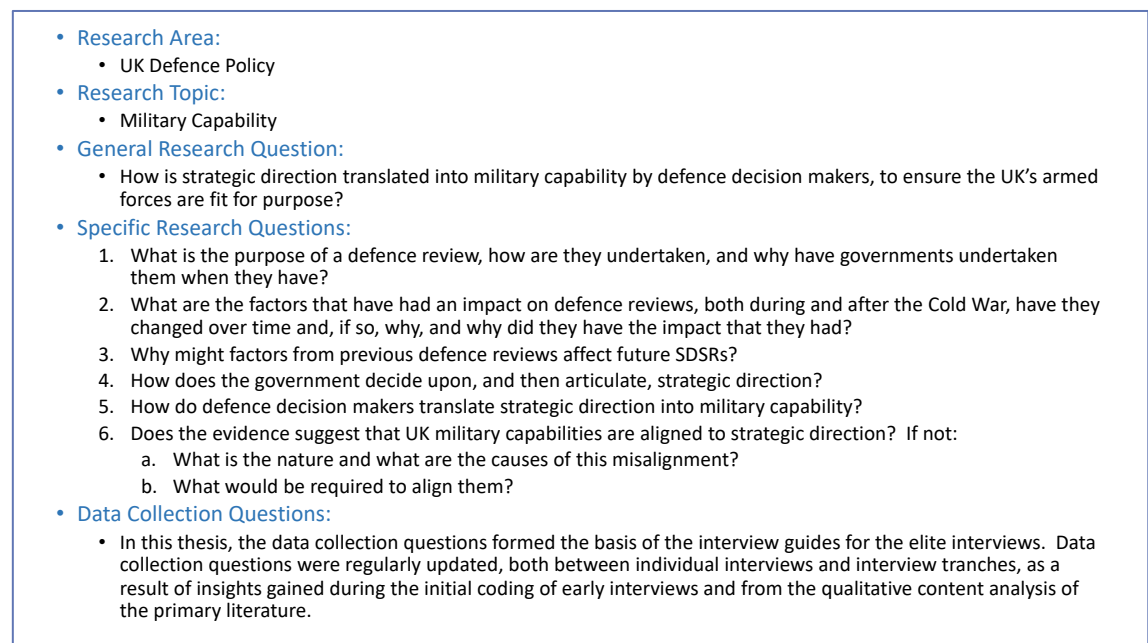


Figure 10-1: Thesis’ Hierarchy of Concepts.

A total of thirty-two elite interviews were undertaken in three tranches, with interview guides informed initially by the literature review and subsequently by theoretical sampling from the initial coding of early interviews and concurrent content analysis. The elite interviews were analysed using grounded theory methodology. In the first instance, open coding was undertaken, with data points collected into a manifest, latent or global code. This was followed by selective coding to scale up the open codes into categories important to the research problem. At this point, insights from the content analysis were introduced. The final coding stage was theoretical coding, during which relationships between the categories were considered and

confirmed, with the aim of identifying what is central in all of the data generated during the research and generating a substantive theory.

10.1 Content Analysis Conclusions

The literature review, background chapter, and content analysis all contributed to the following high-level description of the activity that underpins the translation of strategic direction into military capability. They confirm that the government decides on the defence policy it wishes to pursue, either a continuance or a change of existing understandings, and allocates resource to achieve it. The senior decision makers in defence interpret the associated strategic direction and spend the resource allocated by the government on retiring, maintaining or introducing the military capability necessary to achieve the government's defence policy aims. However, that activity is regularly disrupted by both internal and external factors that force changes to policy, resource allocation, or required military capability. Prior to 2010, minor changes were absorbed by the MOD's normal planning routine, with amendments directed through the annual statement of the defence estimates process. Major changes demanded a more substantial response, which required time to study, agree and subsequently deliver. At this point, a defence review became the accepted course of action. Since 2010, the quinquennial review process has managed minor changes through the MOD's annual budget cycle, with major changes considered during SDSRs.

Of the six defence reviews that occurred during the Cold War and Early Expeditionary period, three were initiated by Labour governments immediately after winning a general election⁸⁸. Indeed, apart from the immediate post-World War II election, the Labour Party has undertaken a defence review every time it has entered government during the research period. Moreover, both the 1966 and 1975 reviews followed a specific manifesto pledge to reduce defence expenditure (see Chalmers (1985) and DeWeerd (1966)), which had been included to provide the financial headroom for the government to achieve other political priorities (see Greenwood (1975), Chichester and Wilkinson (1982), Carver (1992), and Jackson and Bramall

⁸⁸ Healey's reviews of 1966-68, Mason's review in 1975, and SDR 98.

(1992)). Furthermore, although SDR 98 was not explicitly used to generate financial savings, it was knowingly constrained by the Labour Party's commitment to maintain its predecessor's spending plans for at least two years.

The three defence reviews initiated by Conservative governments were all held for different reasons. There is no academic consensus as to why the 1957 review was undertaken, though the strategic shock of Suez and the need to reduce defence expenditure are the reasons most regularly cited (see Dockrill (1989), Navias (1989), and Dodd (1993)). In 1981, Nott was not seeking financial savings; in fact, between 1982 and 1984 the defence budget increased by eight point three per cent, four point three per cent, and four point seven per cent respectively (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019). Instead, he had the equally challenging task of rebalancing the MOD's long-term Equipment Plan, which was unrealistic and considerably underfunded (see Carver (1992) and Dorman (2001d)). The final Conservative defence review of the Cold War and Early Expeditionary period was the 1991 Options for Change review. Notwithstanding the implications of Greenwood's 'funding gap' (1991), this review, and the Defence Costs Study that followed it three years later, actively sought a post-Cold War financial peace dividend (see Sabin (1993a) and Dodd (1994)). Therefore, although the 1957, 1981 and 1991 reviews were all held for different reasons, they were all affected by a significant financial undercurrent that influenced decision making and impacted their outcomes.

From this, it can be interpreted that, prior to 2010, a government instigated a defence review when it needed to make changes to policy or associated resourcing that could not be managed as part of its normal business. In a number of cases, these changes were promulgated as manifesto commitments of an incoming government; accordingly, defence reviews often occurred immediately after a general election. Evidence also suggests that the overriding factor in the majority of defence reviews between 1945 and 2010 was finance and, in particular, the need to address the affordability of defence.

In addition to finance, this study reveals a number of other recurring factors that have had an impact on the defence reviews of the Cold War and Early

Expeditionary period. The policy aspirations of a government link back to the requirement to hold a review in the first place; therefore, they will always feature prominently in the outcome. The contemporaneous state of the world in general, and the nation in particular, have also done much to shape reviews. At any given point in time, world events, threats and risks, and the UK's relationship with allies all influence decision makers. Closer to home, evidence also suggests that the extant political environment, including personalities, have a clear influence on defence reviews. Finally, the way in which a defence review is undertaken has a significant bearing on its outcome. With no proven process to follow, a defence review has no guarantee of success; moreover, without a recognised operating framework, it is likely to become more vulnerable to external influences.

All of the factors above were initially identified during the literature review, and their recurring nature was confirmed during the content analysis. These conclusions were used progressively to develop the interview guides for the elite interviews and, more importantly, contributed to the open and selective coding process that both identified the categories discussed in the following section, and supported the theoretical coding process detailed in the section thereafter.

10.2 Selective Coding Conclusions

Selective coding scaled up open codes into five categories important to the research problem. The first four categories consisted of factors that defence decision makers were, for the most part, unable directly to affect, which were labelled as 'shaping' categories. The shaping categories were: strategic context; politics and politicians; affordability of defence; and single services' conduct. The final category was internal defence processes, which included factors that were subject to oversight and amendment by defence decision makers. As a result, this category was considered to be a 'determining' category.

Strategic Context

The strategic context category was the least straight forward to emerge from the selective coding process. It was essentially an amalgam of elite interviewees'

observations concerning the UK's approach to strategy, how military capability aligned to the direction derived from the strategy, and how well the current and planned force structure countered the risks and threats articulated in the strategy.

All of the relevant evidence generated during this research supports the supposition that developing national strategy is decidedly more challenging today than it was during the Cold War. The changes to the roles of defence during the Early Expeditionary period meant that strategic decision making became subject to external factors that had only previously impacted on 'ways' and 'means'. This unfixing of the UK's strategic 'ends' introduced variables to the left-hand side of the 'ends' equals 'ways' plus 'means' equation, which has made formulating strategy considerably more complex. This situation still exists today and the considered opinion of many of the elite interviewees (see, for example, Interviewee 06 (2016), Interviewee 07 (2017), and Interviewee 30 (2018)) aligns with both the government's view (see Her Majesty's Government (2018) and Secretary of State for Defence (2018b)) and academia (see Thomson and Blagden (2018) and Black (2019)); complexity will endure for the foreseeable future.

Although the research uncovered a consensus on the increased challenges in developing national strategy, it also exposed disagreement on how well the current approach adopted by the government was meeting them. A risk management methodology is a perfectly acceptable way to develop national strategy, and the latest NSS provides a credible whole of government articulation of the UK's strategic position. However, it is a reactionary posture, which is why it draws criticism that the government is too focused on attending to events (Interviewee 30, 2018). Letwin's confirmation to the JCNSS that the government's default would be to "do what we can that looks sensible at the time" (Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, 2012, p. 15) reinforces this. The government's preference is for adaptability and flexibility in its decision making and the current approach to developing national strategy facilitates this. Nonetheless, it also means that the government is not always best placed to shape international affairs for its own benefit, because it is instead focused on responding to events that arise.

A further concern is the perception that, once an SDSR is over, “the strategy is done” (Interviewee 10, 2017). Yet, as Houghton counselled, the UK’s strategic approach must be adaptive, with a constant revisiting of ends, ways and means to ensure coherence is maintained (chathamhouse.org, 2015). It should be an ongoing process, involving suitably qualified and experienced staff from across Whitehall dedicated to the task. However, prior to the NSCR report in 2018, there was no evidence that the government recognised that developing national strategy was an ongoing activity, rather than a one-off event. The introduction of Fusion Doctrine suggests government thinking has changed, although it is still too early to determine whether developing national strategy has been elevated to the ‘ever present’ position it demands.

In addition to the government’s generic approach to developing national strategy, this study has focused equally on the lower-level issuance of strategic direction to defence decision makers that provides a bearing for the development of military capability. Here, prioritisation of risks within the NSS is a problem, and, specifically, the imprecision within the National Security Risk Assessment priority risk matrix that has resulted in a substantial lack of guidance for defence planners. As an example, the Tier One risk of international military conflict is supported by no more than the phrase “UK involved in a conflict between state and/or non-state actors” (Her Majesty’s Government, 2015, p. 87). Moreover, although the NSS’s chapter on the national security context does provide some background, it does not offer any real direction on the likelihood of conflict or with whom. In a world of finite resource, defence planners have to make choices, which should be evidence based and aligned to the bigger picture. This lack of detailed strategic direction results in a planning vacuum that simply exacerbates the issue encountered in chapter eight, where single service capability managers are able to pursue their own environmental agendas over potentially higher priority capability requirements to meet the needs of JF25.

This problem is compounded by politicians’ reluctance to be associated with any decision that reduces ambition or might be seen as diminishing the UK’s place in the world, regardless of the realities of resource availability. To that end, instead of

regularising ambition within strategy, what eventually occurs is a failure to deliver the strategy through a lack of resource. The most obvious recent example of this was the assertion in NSS 10 that “Britain’s national interest requires us to reject any notion of the shrinkage of our influence” (Her Majesty’s Government, 2010b, p. 10). Even without the seven point five per cent real terms reduction in the defence budget that accompanied SDSR 10 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019), the idea that the armed forces could support this position was irrational. In today’s freedom of information environment, the government is obliged to promulgate an explanation of its national strategy. Nevertheless, that strategy should be credible and supported by sufficient additional strategic direction to enable defence planners to make capability development decisions that conform to a bounded and prioritised higher-level intent. If the sensitive nature of this additional direction requires its distribution to be limited, then it should be withheld from general circulation and protected with an appropriate security classification.

The overriding view from the elite interviews was that military capability could never be fully aligned with strategic direction, although those responsible for its delivery, i.e. military officers and civil servants in single service and delivery agents appointments, were generally more positive about the narrowness of the gap between the two, than those serving in MOD head office. The inability of the defence acquisition process to keep pace with the changing nature of potential threats was the most regularly cited reason for the enduring nature of the misalignment, although the acceptance of capability gaps and unrealistic ambition, both at the political level, were also offered as excuses. Defence continues to pursue transformation activity to improve the agility of its procurement and support contracts; however, it must be recognised that, for a number of its highest-profile capabilities⁸⁹, it is a junior partner in a collaborative programme and its ability to affect acquisition decisions and timelines is limited. There is certainly evidence to suggest that defence decision makers understand the imperative behind improving procurement processes, and either have, or are prepared to pay for, the knowledge and experience to identify the changes

⁸⁹ For example, F-35B Lightning II, RC-135W Rivet Joint, P-8A Poseidon.

necessary to achieve the required effect. That said, even with the right answers, re-directing the defence acquisition bureaucratic super tanker, and ensuring the defence industrial sector transforms as well, will not be easy.

Finally, although not a main discussion driver within the elite interviews, the impact of contemporary events should not be overlooked within this category. Analysis of both primary and secondary literature supports the conclusion that 'strategic shocks' have had an impact on previous defence reviews and could do so again in the future. The Suez Crisis and the end of the Cold War are both examples that have been used frequently during this research. In addition, the UK's exit from the EU may influence the outcome of the next SDSR, although Michael Clarke and Helen Ramsar argue that, in theory, "security, defence and foreign policy should be the least challenged areas of British policy as a result of the Brexit controversies" (2019, p. 162). As well as the obvious effects of a 'strategic shock', the relevance of lower-level contemporary events should not be ignored. For example, a national newspaper's campaign about the lamentable state of military housing in the early 1990s, which influenced the Options for Change command paper, proves that an ostensibly tactical narrative can have a strategic effect. Moreover, as both Patrikarakos (2017) and McFate (2019) argue, the impact of social media on military activity is continuing to increase. To that end, the seemingly most minor contemporary event could become a major influencing factor of a defence review on the future.

Politics and Politicians

Analysis from all of the data chapters confirms the prominence of the political element of this thesis. This should not be a surprise, as, whilst in government, politicians are the providers of the strategic direction that drives the decision making in defence that generates and sustains military capability. Moreover, although it may not always have been seen as a positive, evidence from both the content analysis and the elite interviews strongly supports the view that the personalities of politicians involved, from Sandys in 1957 to Williamson in 2019, have influenced the translation of strategic direction into military direction (see Smith (1996), Interviewee 03 (2016), Interviewee 09 (2017), and Curtis (2019)).

Another major influence throughout the research period was, what one three-star officer called “small and large ‘P’ politics” (Interviewee 32, 2017). From Wilson’s and Healey’s difficulty in managing rebellious backbenchers in the 1960s (see Chalmers (1985) and Jackson and Bramall (1992)), through Wilson’s and Mason’s challenges with trades union in the 1970s (see Mason (1975) and Mason (1999)), to the public opposition to Hoon’s support for General Sir Mike Jackson’s British Army reforms of the last decade (see *The Spectator* (2004) and *The Telegraph* (2004)), lobbying has been a consistent factor in defence decision making. Furthermore, its influence has been wide ranging, both impacting the strategic direction given by the government and also constraining capability planning decisions within MOD head office and the single services. Although exerting influence through lobbying usually originates from outside Parliament, members of both houses of the Palace of Westminster are not averse to employing the same tactic to influence government decision making. Seeking new employment opportunities within constituencies, safeguarding jobs that already exist, or defending a much-loved regiment that has been targeted for disbandment, can all attract internal political lobbying. However, depending on the situation, lobbying can be helpful or hurtful to defence. For example, one four-star officer highlighted how lobby groups generally support capability that is already embedded in UK military culture – ships, tanks and fast jets (Interviewee 04, 2016). This is useful for a single service if it is arguing to retain a capability that falls into one of these categories, but a hindrance if it is seeking to support innovation elsewhere within its environment, and it needs to disinvest in one of these capabilities to fund it. Either way, evidence suggests that lobbying is a constant within the construct of government in the UK; therefore, defence decision makers will need to take its impact into account during future SDSRs.

Most of the elite interviewees acknowledged that defence reviews were a political process; however, this acknowledgement seldom extended to a recognition that the owners of the process made and imposed the rules, and, therefore, believed they were entitled to ignore them, if they so wished. An example of this was the clash of views at the start of SDSR 15, with the government wanting a ‘light touch’ review that did not revisit all of the assumptions made in 2010 (see Interviewee 01 (2016) and

Interviewee 24 (2017)). By contrast, senior officers and civil servants from the MOD believed there remained significant unfinished business from SDSR 10 and wanted to revisit certain decisions including, for example, the maritime patrol capability gap (see Interviewee 19 (2017) and Interviewee 23 (2017)). Even though the government acquiesced in this instance, the default for the military officers and civil servants interviewed was to lay the blame regarding shortcomings of the SDSR process firmly with politicians. As one three-star officer put it: “the SDSR process has been hijacked by the political process” (Interviewee 11, 2017).

There was only limited evidence from the elite interviews of an appreciation that politicians and the military often had a different expectation of the outcome of a review and, as a result, those involved were regularly focused on different aiming points. For instance, one three-star officer questioned “what was more important – the policy that was in the SDSR or the sum of money to be saved as part of the efficiencies [from the] spending review” (Interviewee 14, 2017). Politicians will generally commit to minimal up-front strategic direction and make decisions as late as they can, in order to retain maximum flexibility. Military officers seek the opposite. They want clarity on operating boundaries, early and unambiguous orders, and the freedom to plan and execute thereafter. This misalignment between politicians and the military was ever thus; however, what was consistent from the elite interviews was the almost complete lack of acceptance of responsibility, from both senior officers and civil servants to help rectify the problem.

It remains a failing that some defence decision makers consider the provision of strategic direction to them, by the government, in isolation. Whilst that direction may be their largest input factor, it is not necessarily viewed in the same regard by the Prime Minister, the Cabinet or the NSC. The outcome of a defence review will always be considered within the wider political context. Moreover, it remains the prerogative of the politician to decide on the means with which strategic direction is given; therefore, there is no guarantee that the currently accepted norm of the quinquennial review process will endure, Nott’s abandonment of Mason’s ‘Critical Level’ in 1981 confirms there are no absolutes. The pre-eminence of the political over the military

may be a fundamental truism of the UK's unwritten constitution; however, this study shows that its effect on the issuance of strategic direction to defence decision makers is inconsistency and uncertainty.

Affordability of Defence

In considering the relevant specific research questions earlier in this chapter, it was concluded that the overriding factor in the majority of defence reviews prior to 2010 was finance. To that end, it is unsurprising that the affordability of defence generated enough data points during open coding of the elite interviews to justify its own category in the selective coding process. Most interviewees concentrated on the affordability of defence today and into the future, and understandably argued the issue from the defence viewpoint. Whilst recognising that the amount of money allocated to the defence budget was a political choice, and that there were many competing funding requirements to be considered cross-government, their conclusion remained that the military capability necessary to achieve current strategic direction was not being adequately resourced.

Greenwood was clear in his belief that the state of the economy defined the limits of a government's policy choices, but it did not in itself force defence cuts (Baylis, 1986). A politician's interpretation of this is that the government can only allocate to defence what it can afford (Mason, 1975). Affordability is a judgement and, in this instance, is a political judgement. In the mid-1970s, Jackson (1990) believed that the political judgement put re-establishing the national economy above national security. In 2015, it appeared that the reverse was true when, even though austerity was still a factor in the Chancellor's summer budget (Gov.uk, 2015), the government signalled a real-term rise in defence spending, seemingly putting national security above the national economy. In both instances, it was a political call and the realpolitik reality is that it probably always will be. What does this therefore mean for the affordability of defence? It returns to the point made by one interviewee that the SDSR is a negotiation (Interviewee 32, 2017). It is, however, more complicated than defence just trying to secure the largest possible financial settlement, because its output parameters are also on the negotiating table. A balance has to be struck between what

should be expected of defence and how much that should cost. Ultimately if that balance is not achieved, everyone loses, as either defence is under-resourced and struggles to meet the tasks it is called upon to undertake, or the government has been profligate in its settlement with defence and other departments' spending priorities suffer. When viewed through this 'affordability of defence' lens, most interviewees actually argued that, in both SDSR 10 and SDSR 15, an unbalanced financial settlement had been reached – or imposed – to the detriment of defence.

The impact of delivering efficiencies on the translation of strategic direction into military capability is a recent phenomenon; during the reviews of the Cold War it was not even considered by defence planners. Today, it is perhaps the most vexing issue within the boundaries of MOD financial management. The sums of money involved are significant, and the way they have been managed to date puts budget holders on the back foot from the outset. Traditionally, efficiency targets were arbitrarily divided amongst the TLBs with budget totals commensurately reduced. This system of 'wedging' took money from capability managers before they had even considered the measures that they could enact to manage the shortfall. Their default response was a 'salami slicing' of control totals across all programmes, which generally led to reductions in sustainability and training, or delivery delays and cost overruns. Notwithstanding this default, defence has regularly fallen short in its attempts to meet its efficiency targets, and the likelihood of it achieving those currently baked into TLBs was considered extremely low by most of the elite interviewees.

As part of the MDP, defence has reappraised its approach to delivering efficiencies and is now managing a small number of high-level transformation programmes⁹⁰ that are charged with delivering pan-defence efficiencies across their area of responsibility. Moreover, it is also holding efficiency targets centrally until these programmes can satisfactorily evidence the efficacy of their projects. Once projects are accepted by the relevant TLB holders, appropriate downward adjustments are made to their budgets. This is a much-improved method to achieving externally

⁹⁰ Brigaded under acquisition, information, people, and support.

imposed efficiency targets, which has the potential to avoid the damaging salami-slicing approach of the past.

In addition to centrally managing imposed efficiencies, under the delegated model, the single services have also been encouraged to seek efficiencies within existing programmes, with the incentive that the savings generated would be theirs to reinvest. This has created an unfavourable consequence. A perceived efficiency today will produce a cost reduction profile that is projected over the relevant programme's budget for future years. Once the efficiency measure is accepted, the reduced budget figures are programmed into the overall TLB, seemingly creating headroom in the profile. However, that headroom only exists on paper until the efficiency measure is actually enacted, which is often a year-on-year occurrence. As a consequence, the actual delivery of the cost reduction frequently cannot be confirmed until it happens. Nevertheless, to benefit from the efficiency, capability managers have to plan to spend against the perceived budgetary headroom in advance and, in most cases, commit to that expenditure in the form of a contract. The result is guaranteed expenditure against a non-guaranteed efficiency. Consequently, if the anticipated cost reduction is not delivered, defence's budget deficit is increased. Several elite interviewees suggested this situation already existed across the single services; furthermore, as it is essentially internal TLB business and the effects may not be felt for years to come. Estimating its defence-wide impact and instigating appropriate mitigation will not be easy.

Analysis earlier in the thesis focused on the validity of Greenwood's 'funding gap' hypothesis and, in particular, whether it likely to be relevant for defence in the future. One of Cornish and Dorman's (2015) ten unwritten rules of the character of defence reviews is that, on completion of a review, the government will claim to have gained control of defence inflation and cost overruns. This rule was corroborated in the Prime Minister's forward to the SDSR 15 report where he stated "In 2010, the total black hole in the defence budget alone was bigger than the entire defence budget in that year. Now it is back in balance" (Her Majesty's Government, 2015, p. 5). However, just four years later, in 2019 the MOD had, by its own estimate, a £7 billion

shortfall in its ten-year equipment and support programme budget (National Audit Office, 2019). Moreover, that figure was based on the assumption defence would achieve all of its share of the £11 billion efficiency target placed on the defence and security departments in SDSR 15. As recognised above, that appears most unlikely. Notwithstanding the additional £2.2 billion of funding for defence announced by the Chancellor in the 2019 Spending Round (Hansard House of Commons, 2019), which Chalmers (2019) confirms brings the four-year, real-terms increase in core defence spending to nine point six per cent, defence inflation and cost overruns are again threatening the credibility of defence financial planning. This chimes with the frank assessment of an externally recruited four-star acquisition specialist who questioned the lack of accountability in the MOD's financial planning, and who's view on Greenwoodery was:

"... we are either knowingly, and probably in many cases unknowingly, allowing ourselves to be sucked even deeper into a piece of financial fiction that means that the most likely outcome is, at some stage, we will have a bust of some quite sizeable proportion in the ability to finance what has been positioned through government as a defence plan."

(Interviewee 10, 2017)

Whether defence's finances are heading for a cliff edge in the near or medium term is a moot point. The reality is there is considerable pressure on the equipment and support programme that only four years ago was in balance. This would suggest either a lack of appreciation of the factors affecting the affordability of defence, or poor capability decision making, or both. The NAO (2019) highlighted that the MOD's business and financial planning risk of finding a sustainable, long-term balance between the available budget and the cost of the programme remains challenging. Findings from this study's research into the affordability of defence support this.

Single Services' Conduct

Although the initiatives to strengthen the central organisation for defence between 1946 and 1985 reduced the defence-wide influence of the service chiefs and the single services, the delegated model's alignment of responsibility, accountability,

and authority for capability management with the single services and JFC definitely went some way to reverse that trend. However, the introduction of the delegated model also produced some additional effects that generated considerable nervousness among some of the elite interviewees.

Analysis of previous defence reviews is replete with examples of the single services acting in their own interests, particularly during reviews when resources were known to be scarce, for example Sandys review in 1957 and SDSR 10. Whether, in a presentation during Healey's reviews of the 1960s, an RAF staff officer did deliberately reposition Australia hundreds of miles to the west of its actual location to strengthen his service's argument for land-based air power over carrier-based air power, remains an urban myth that may always be contested. Darby (1973) believed he did, Jeffrey Bradford (2010) thought otherwise. Either way, the fact that this is even considered a possibility points to how far the single services might be prepared to go, in order to protect current or future capability.

Notwithstanding this, some may argue that protecting capability is the *raison d'être* of the single services and, therefore, it is precisely what they should be doing. To illustrate this, the RN's own website makes it clear that, in the first instance, 1SL is "responsible for the fighting effectiveness, efficiency and morale of the Naval Service." It then goes on to record that he also "supports the management and direction of the Armed Forces" (Royal Navy, 2019). Senior service enthusiasts may reasonably contend that looking after 'The Andrew'⁹¹ (Jolly, 2011, pp. A9-A11) should always be 1SL's priority, and his wider defence responsibilities should always be a secondary consideration. However, there were strong views among the elite interviewees that the delegated model had done too much to encourage single service parochialism and that the development of JF25 was suffering as a result (see Interviewee 08 (2017), Interviewee 11 (2017), and Interviewee 16 (2017)). In particular, senior officers from all of the single services expressed concern about the complexity of the lead command arrangements, as well as known capability management interdependencies. As an

⁹¹ A widespread nickname for the RN used by all ranks.

example, an RN four-star officer pointed out his service's reliance on both the MOD head office strategic programmes team and the defence nuclear organisation for the ongoing development and delivery of the Dreadnought programme⁹²: "Eventually, it's going to produce a submarine that I have to man, train, sustain, and operate. How we keep the governance mechanisms in place, to enable that procurement programme to deliver what I need, is going to take some significant work" (Interviewee 01, 2016).

Within the period of this thesis' research, the high point of the single service chief's influence over broad defence output was undoubtedly their defence policy and global strategy papers of 1950 and 1952. During the defence reviews of the Cold War and Early Expeditionary period, they were excluded from the inner circle of decision makers in 1957, 1981 and 1991 (see Dodd (1993), Bolton (1991), and Carver (1992)); evidence from the elite interviews suggested those serving over the periods of SDSR 10 and SDSR 15 fared little better (see Interviewee 01 (2016), Interviewee 02 (2016), and Interviewee 03 (2016)). Given the potential dangers to collegiate working that the delegated model introduced, a possible safeguard could have been to keep the service chiefs closer to the central decision making of defence, through continued membership of the MOD's business and operationally orientated boards. Instead, the language of the Defence Operating Model could be seen as encouraging them not to 'behave in the long-term interests of the board'.

The differences between the three services are often seen as strengths and identified as a reason why the whole of defence is greater than the sum of its parts (see, for example, Development Concepts & Doctrine Centre (2017)). These strengths are deep-rooted in single service histories, from which their distinct cultures and sometimes opposing etheas are generated. However, these environmentally specific attitudes also underpin how the single services manage themselves as professional bodies, valuing their own esoteric knowledge and experience, advancing their own champions, and safeguarding their own continuance. Therefore, there is a danger that these strengths can also become weaknesses for defence as a whole, encouraging the

⁹² The successor to the Trident class of submarines on which the continuous at sea deterrent is deployed.

single services to pursue self-serving goals, increase their insularity and become less concerned about what is good for the joint force. As one RAF three-star officer noted, when you introduce different organisational constructs and associated process, you generate different boundaries and seams, which creates a requirement to manage across those boundaries and seams (Interviewee 32, 2017). In increasing the single services' responsibility, accountability, and authority for capability management, the delegated model has given them far more freedom to exercise their individuality. It has been designed to improve defence's ability to develop and maintain military capability, but it has also introduced a tension around the needs of the joint force versus the aspirations of the single services. To help reduce this tension, an equitable balance is required that affords the single services sufficient freedom of manoeuvre to manage capability, yet also provides MOD head office sufficient control to ensure that capability management delivers an appropriate joint force. Such a balance will not be easily found. As a four-star General observed "successful translation of strategic direction into military capability needs to take account of the fact there's a deeply cultural thing in this space that gets in the way of doing the right thing" (Interviewee 04, 2016).

Internal Defence Process

Internal defence process and procedures made up the final category identified during selective coding. This category differed from the preceding four because, in general, the former consisted of factors that defence decision makers are unable directly to affect, hence they were labelled as 'shaping' categories. By contrast, internal defence process and procedures are factors in the translation of strategic direction into military capability that the most senior officers and civil servants in MOD head office can affect, which is why this category was identified as a 'determining' category.

The evolution of defence's interaction with the quinquennial review process since 2010 is an important factor in how strategic direction is accepted, interpreted and translated into military capability today. Defence decision makers do not see the government's current approach to SDSRs as a collegiate undertaking, and defence's internal practises have developed accordingly. Evidence of this is the admission that a

key consideration in defence's pre-SDSR 15 planning was how to prepare arguments to counter an unfavourable budget allocation. That said, the misalignment of the military and politicians is also a contributing factor and, with the politicians' viewpoint always likely to prevail, defence decision makers will understandably adopt a more cautious and defensive approach to a review until the political direction of travel has been revealed. SDSRs will always be about what the government seeks, which will always be politically motivated, but may not always satisfy the strategic direction expectations of defence decision makers. Nevertheless, prior to any review, defence will be obliged to invest time and effort in considering the future operating environment, threats and risks, and strategic trends. It must always be prepared fully to contribute to an SDSR, even if its analysis does not survive contact with the reality of the government's decision making.

The introduction of the Defence Reform Programme has radically changed the organisational construct and associated process that underpins defence's delivery of military capability. Unsurprisingly, the elite interviewees from those areas of defence that have seen their authority increase under the delegated model, i.e. the single services, are all advocates; whereas almost everyone else who was interviewed highlighted issues that the change has introduced. Some of the concerns raised, for example the lack of suitably qualified and experienced personnel, should disappear over time as personnel become more familiar with the new operating environment and training catches up with extant ways of working. However, the differing views from practitioners on responsibility boundaries are of more consequence and not easily resolved. It was clear from the elite interviewees that there is a considerable disconnect between what the single services think they are responsible for, and the authority senior staff from MOD head office believe has been delegated down to them. Even in a decentralised operating construct, some amount of centralised direction and control is necessary. MOD head office remains the strategic headquarters and must retain responsibility to ensure defence policy is serviced to the best of defence's ability; however, evidence suggests that the single services were given too much latitude to implement their own idea of the delegated model within their own area of responsibility. As a result, they now enjoy too much freedom of manoeuvre in their

development of military capability. This creates an inconsistency in defence-wide military capability decision making, and increases the likelihood that the needs of the joint force will be overlooked in favour of the wants of the single services.

Another problem that this capability management disconnect generates is defence's inability consistently to follow an agreed macro-level approach to the development of military capability. The new philosophy of only financially underwriting a percentage of the capability requirement, whilst retaining an element of flexibility in the remainder of the budget to react to variations or exploit emerging opportunities is, for whatever reason, not being followed. The MOD's admission of a £7 billion shortfall in its ten-year equipment and support programme budget is evidence of that. The reluctance of the single services to create headroom within their budget by disinvesting in capability, even though it is they themselves who are introducing new capability requirements into the Defence Capability Assessment Register, is difficult to understand, although it is possibly due, in part, to a belief that the new financial ways of working will be circumvented to their disadvantage. For too long under the Equipment Capability Customer construct, unallocated resources in one service's programmes were vulnerable to re-allocation to alleviate a cost overrun elsewhere – often in programmes destined for another service. Accordingly, even under the delegated model, the urge for single services to protect budgets remains strong. TLB holders will argue that this is simply part of their newly acquired environmental capability management authority; MOD head office will point out that this approach does not prioritise capability for JF25, nor does it allow for any defence-level budgetary veering and hauling. In short, the philosophy that underpins the delegated model is sound, what is missing is the trust of all involved that everyone will commit to it.

The other factor in defence's inability to change course in capability development is path dependency. A mix of retaining the types of capability the single services and industry want, and politicians and the public expect, coupled with a predisposition for adopting the path of least resistance during the bureaucratically intense acquisition approvals process tends to result in 'more of the same'. There were

strong views amongst the elite interviewees that defence is either not investing sufficiently, or ignoring completely, capabilities that arguably should be its highest priority given current and future threats. Two examples that illustrate this were joint enablers and ballistic missiles defence (see Interviewee 18 (2017) and Interviewee 26 (2018)). An analysis of the capability investment decisions in the SDSR 15 report supports this. Most of the announcements were 'more of the same', for example the introduction of eight Type 26 global combat ships, the upgrade of Apache attack helicopters, and the establishment of three new fast jet squadrons. The only new capability announcements were nine P-8A maritime patrol aircraft (the, albeit welcome, reconstitution of the RAF's maritime patrol capability), and a pledge to "invest in cyber and space capabilities" (Her Majesty's Government, 2015, pp. 27-34).

Decision making in defence has recently been under considerable scrutiny, with both the Chilcot Inquiry and the HCDC recognising significant flaws in the process. Even though the MOD created a Chilcot implementation directorate, there is no clear evidence that defence is investing in the training and education of its people to improve its diversity of thought or making the changes to its structures and processes to aid evidence gathering and information flow. This is significant, as one of the central tenets of the translation of strategic direction into military capability is defence's ability correctly to decide upon the most suitable capability to meet the strategic direction it has received. Notwithstanding the inclination of politicians to get involved in macro decision making about equipment investment decisions, particularly during SDSRs, defence decision makers are given considerable latitude to shape the way capability is generated through the DLODs; for example, the development of doctrine by DCDC will directly impact how a capability is employed.

In order to achieve the successful development and maintenance of the most appropriate military capability to meet the strategic direction that they have received, MOD head office, the single services, and the delivery agents must improve their collegiate working, avoid 'groupthink' and accept altruistic intelligent jointery as a collective headmark. Evidence from this research suggests that will not be easily achieved; however, improvements could be initiated by a revision of the Defence

Operating Model that aligns all defence activity and reinforces jointery through the recognition of a ‘defence enterprise’. This would, bring together all internal process and procedure outwith operations, along the lines of schematic in Figure 10-2⁹³. To that end, this final category of the selecting coding process would be better identified as the ‘managing the defence enterprise’ category.

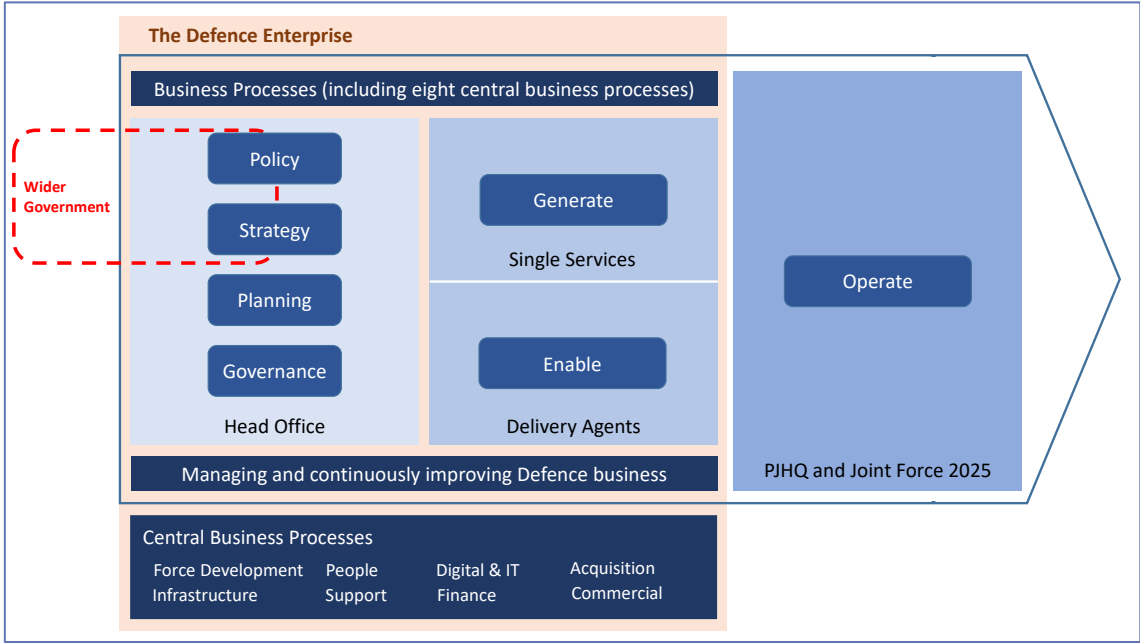


Figure 10-2: Alignment of emerging MOD Defence Operating Model core functions with the Defence Enterprise nomenclature.

10.3 Substantive Theory Development

This section brings together the final conclusions from the research’s observations and insights. It outlines the development of the study’s substantive theory through the identification of a core concept and the creation of a strategic direction into military capability activity model.

Core Concept Identification

Within GTM, the logical start points in seeking a core concept are the categories generated through selective coding. Evidence generated through this process

⁹³ At time of writing, a new version of the DOM was under consideration within MOD head office to update the main processes by which defence inputs are developed, agreed and delivered, as well as how defence is organised to support and operationalise these processes.

confirmed that notable interrelationships existed between the five categories⁹⁴ into which the open codes were scaled up. For example, there was a clear crossover of open codes between the strategic context and politics and politicians categories; furthermore, the managing the defence enterprise category had a noticeable affinity with all of the shaping categories. Moreover, analysis from chapters eight and nine confirmed the close association of the categories, with insights from the data points and associated codes in one category regularly contributing to the evidence base in another.

However, identifying one category as the core concept that encapsulated the process apparent in all of the categories and sub-categories proved difficult. Glaser argues that a core category is generalisable; in his view “it has grab; it is often a high impact dependent variable of great importance; it is hard to resist; it happens automatically with ease.” He also suggests that “Researchers tend to see their core category everywhere” (2007, p. 14).

An initial evaluation suggested that two categories were strong candidates for consideration as the core construct: affordability of defence and single services’ conduct. A conclusion from the previous section was that finance was the overriding factor in the majority of defence reviews. Furthermore, financial issues have been regularly cited in defence review command papers, and the considerable scrutiny of finance and the economy in the secondary literature confirms their academic significance. Also, the ninety-one open codes and 379 associated data points, generated from the elite interviews, reinforce the notion that affordability of defence remains a considerable concern amongst defence decision makers today. Affordability issues clearly permeated the other categories; it is easy to see the financial factors that impact the translation of strategic direction into military capability ‘everywhere’ within the research.

⁹⁴ Strategic context, politics and politicians, affordability of defence, single services’ conduct, and managing the defence enterprise.

Throughout the research, the single services' conduct category was also pervasive, having a high impact on many of the other categories. For example, it is officers from the single services who fill the appointments that, along with senior civil servants, constitute defence decision makers; to that end, they are instrumental in determining the processes and procedures that underpin the defence enterprise, both today and throughout the period of the research. They are also actively involved in defence financial planning and the delivery of efficiencies. In addition, within the delegated model, the single services now have responsibility, accountability, and authority for the development and maintenance of their environmental capability. By contrast, their input into the politics and politicians category may, at first sight, be difficult to identify; however, it is evident, as a senior civil servant pointed out in response to a question about political interference:

"Where do you think they [politicians] got those insights from? ... The answer is from defence officials who were working to them. So, anybody who says, 'This was politicians interfering inappropriately with the military judgements,' I'd say, 'Come on, how much does George Osborne really, really know about any of this stuff?'"

(Interviewee 23, 2017)

The previous two paragraphs contain strong arguments for both affordability of defence and single services' conduct to be considered as the thesis' core category. However, Birks and Mills (2015, p. 98) cautioned that selection of a core category can only occur "when the researcher can trace connections between a frequently occurring variable and *all* [italics added] of the other categories, sub-categories and their properties and dimensions." Herein lies the problem with seeking a core construct from the selective coding categories. Even though the factors that impact on the translation of strategic direction into military capability logically scale up into the five broad categories identified during selective coding, the factors themselves remain so individually wide ranging that no single selective coding category could possibly connect with them all. For example, it has already been recognised that contemporary events have had a significant impact on strategic direction into military capability activity; however, connections between the affordability of defence and the Suez Crisis, or single services' conduct and the fall of the Berlin Wall are, at best, extremely

tenuous. As a result, none of the selective coding categories could reach the benchmark set by Birks and Mills and, therefore, all were discounted as the core category.

If the thesis' core construct cannot be established through connections between other categories, Urquhart (2012) argues that it must be generated through connections formulated through ideas about relationships from the literature (see Spradley (1979)) or through theoretical codes (see Glaser (1978), and Glaser and Holton (2005)).

Strategic Direction into Military Capability Model

To understand how categories might otherwise relate to one another, a logical start point is to consider the actions that take place when strategic direction is translated into military capability, in order to deliver fit-for-purpose armed forces.

From the content analysis, it has been established that, in simple terms, the government decides on the defence policy it wishes to pursue and allocates resource to achieve it. In response, defence decision makers first determine, and then develop and maintain, the military capability best able to meet the government's policy aims. If this activity is successfully undertaken, the UK's armed forces will be fit for purpose. In stylised terms, this can be represented in the basic model at Figure 10-3.

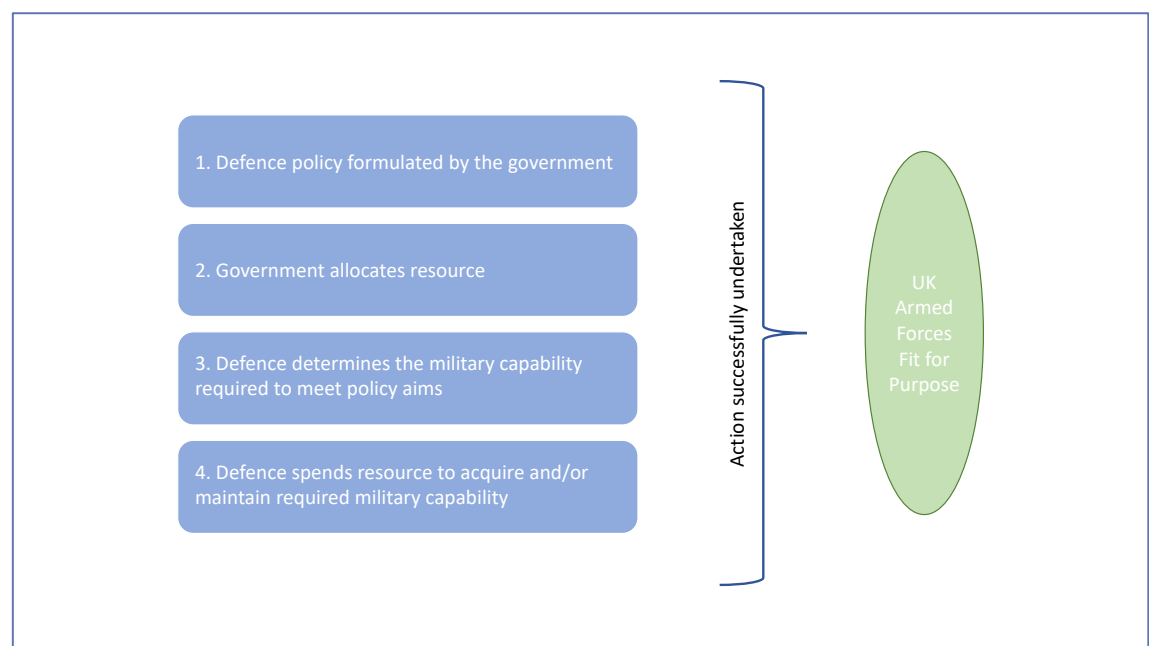


Figure 10-3: Activities included in the Strategic Direction into Military Capability Model.

However, this model is not a simple series of steps that are undertaken sequentially to achieve an end state. Within reason, the government can, at any point, elect to amend its defence policy or change the allocated resource (Cornish and Dorman, 2010), and defence decision makers have the discretion to introduce new or retire obsolete capability. Furthermore, in its present form, the model does not have an end state; it is enduring due to the requirement to revisit strategic direction as part of the quinquennial review process. To that end, the model can be more accurately described as an open-ended collection of interacting activities carried out by the government and defence decision makers that translates strategic direction into military capability. As before, if this activity is successfully undertaken, it will result in UK armed forces that are fit for purpose. This can be represented in the revised model at Figure 10-4.

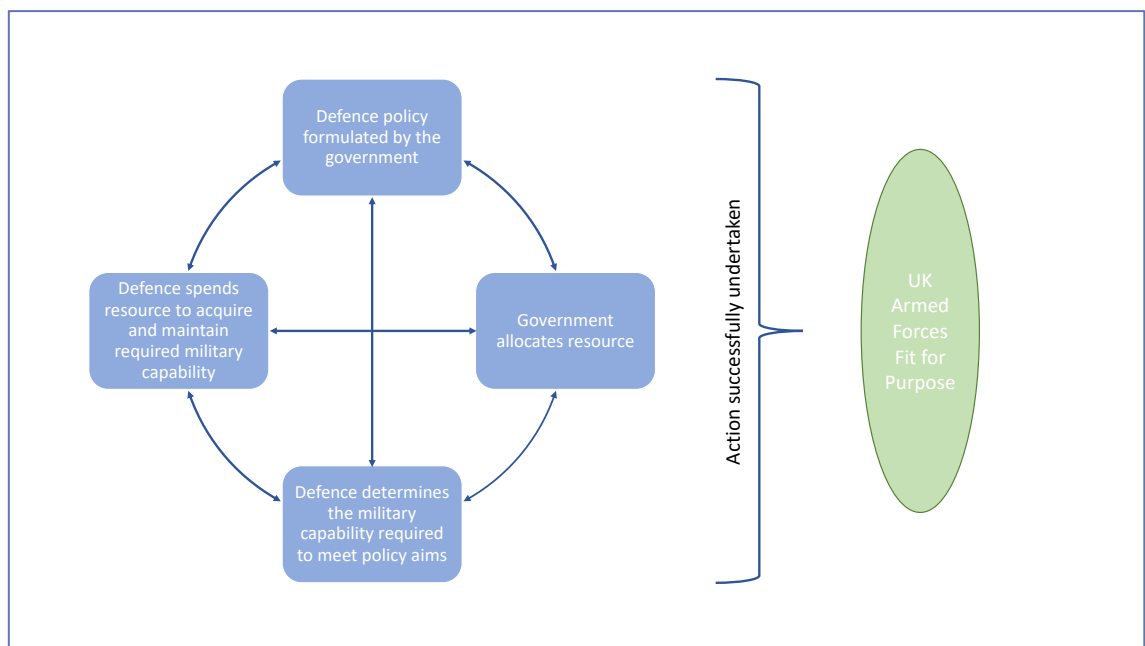


Figure 10-4: Revised Strategic Direction into Military Capability Model.

Evidence from previous reviews confirms that the actions taken by the government and defence decision makers are regularly disrupted by external events, which require them to revisit and sometimes revise earlier actions. In the context of this strategic direction into military capability model, an ‘event’ could be defined as an occurrence that has sufficient impact on the actions of the government or defence decision makers to effect a change in any, or all of, defence policy, resource allocation,

or military capability. By this definition, events are extremely wide-ranging. Examples could be a strategic shock, i.e. the aftermath of the Suez Crisis in 1956; a significant deviation in the UK's economic fortunes, i.e. the 2008 global financial crisis; or an increase in the perceived national threat, i.e. the impact of Russia's annexation of the Crimea in 2014. A number of interviewees suggested that, in time, the UK's decision to leave the EU in 2016 may also fall into this category (see Interviewee 13 (2017), Interviewee 15 (2017), Interviewee 30 (2018), and Interviewee 31 (2017)). However, none of these events are likely to result in the complete abandonment of actions previously taken by the government or defence decision makers. This is because evidence from across the research period confirms that no event, or combination of events, prompts a complete revision of defence policy. For example, the end of the Cold War led to a significant decrease in the resource allocated to defence, which, in turn, caused a major reduction in conventional forces across all three services (Secretary of State for Defence, 1991). Nevertheless, the strategic deterrent was unaffected, and the core associated military capability, i.e. the Polaris submarine fleet, continued to be fielded as before, even though other supporting elements of the Cold War nuclear arsenal were withdrawn from service.

In addition to the impact of events, analysis from the data chapters confirms that the actions of the government and defence decision makers are also affected by less tangible factors. Grouped together under the moniker of 'influence', these factors are prevalent at the model's decision-making points. Some 'influences' occur only once and affect only action; others are ever present and disrupt every decision. Within the model, an 'influence' could be defined as a structural factor that impacts one or more of the decision-points within the model. As with events, 'influences' are extremely wide ranging, and their interpretation provides scope for 'agency'⁹⁵ by stakeholders within the activity. Examples of 'agency' manifesting itself could be through any of the following. Personalities, i.e. the egos and ambitions of politicians, senior military officers and MOD civil servants. Process, i.e. the way in which policy is formulated or defence reviews are undertaken. Lobbying, i.e. external pressure groups

⁹⁵ i.e. the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices.

(allies, the defence industry and the media) seeking to influence a particular policy or capability decision to their advantage. Specific occasions where instances of all these examples influenced both SDSR 10 and SDSR 15 were cited multiple times during the elite interviews (see, for example, Interviewee 03 (2016), Interviewee 06 (2016), and Interviewee 08 (2017)). A further revision can be made to the model, Figure 10-5, to include events and influences.

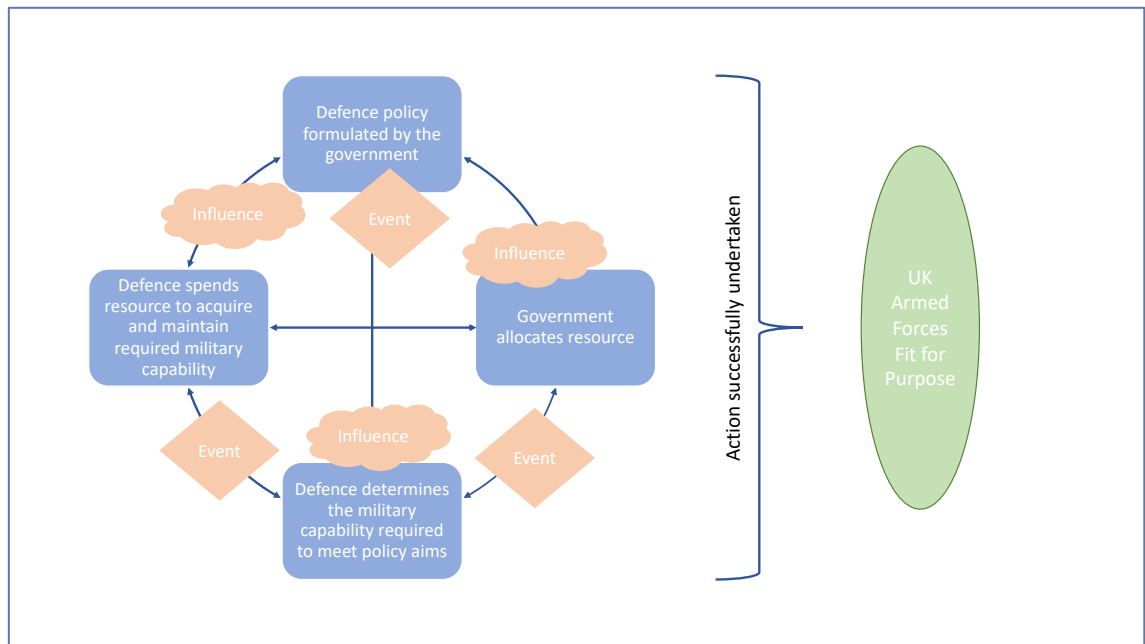


Figure 10-5: Strategic Direction into Military Capability Model with Events and Influences.

The types of events and influences likely to impact on future strategic direction into military capability activity were identified during open coding of the elite interviews. They were then scaled up into the five categories analysed in chapters eight and nine, during the selective coding process. Four of the categories were identified as shaping categories⁹⁶. They included a combination of factors, some of which are initiated by the government or defence decision makers, and others that are determined by agencies outwith the core strategic direction into military capability activity, including for example: national politicians; elements of MOD head office, the single services and delivery agents; the defence industry; the media; the public; allies; and potential state and non-state adversaries. Although, with the exception of

⁹⁶ Politics and politicians, strategic direction, affordability of defence, and single services' conduct.

potential adversaries, many of the factors that these agencies seek to introduce into the activity may be in pursuit of valid and reasonable effects, they all add complexity to the model and make the task of providing fit-for-purpose armed forces considerably more challenging. Moreover, as defence decision makers have only a limited degree of control over what shaping factors are introduced, when and by whom, they cannot guarantee that the subsequent disruption will not reach the point at which the translation of strategic direction into military capability activity is no longer able to provide fit-for-purpose armed forces. This situation can be depicted by the change to the model at Figure 10-6.

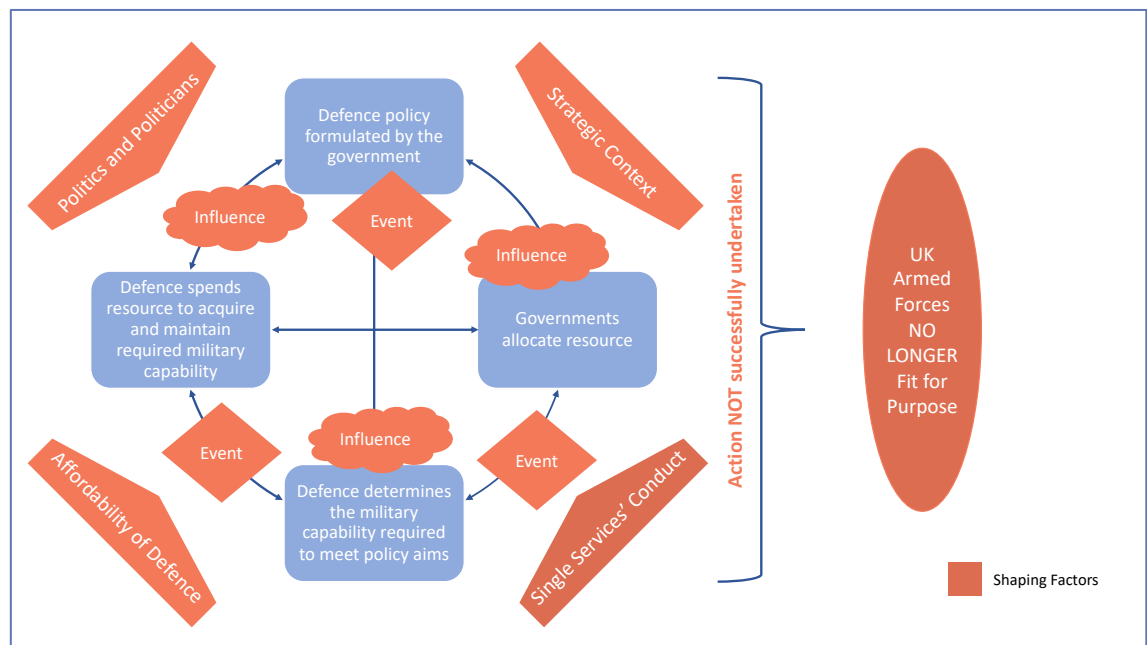


Figure 10-6: Impact of Shaping Categories on the Strategic Direction into Military Capability Model.

The translation of strategic direction into military capability is an open-ended activity, and the introduction of myriad uncontrollable and disruptive factors also make it complex and intractable. It has all the hallmarks of a wicked problem (see Rittel and Webber (1973) and Head (2008)). To that end, there is no single action that will resolve all the adverse effects of the events and influences that impact strategic direction into military capability activity; moreover, any attempt to mitigate the complexity that these factors introduce must be mindful of the following two points. In the first instance, an improvement in one aspect of the activity may well lead to a regression elsewhere. For example, in the opinion of a number of elite interviewees,

the freedoms within which the delegated model were implemented allowed the single services to introduce customised processes that best tackled the specific capability management demands within their environment. That resulted, however, in considerable inefficiency within MOD head office and the delivery agents who then had to align with four bespoke operating models (see Interviewee 08 (2017), Interviewee 14 (2017), and Interviewee 26 (2018)). Secondly, there will always be factors over which defence decision makers can never have control; for example, the actions of a potential adversary or a major natural hazard or environmental event. Against this backdrop, defence decision makers have to seek tractable ways to maintain the translation of strategic direction into military capability activity on or above the level that delivers fit-for-purpose armed forces. In considering this challenge, one British Army three-star general suggested that “what we are trying to achieve here is to get this as least wrong as we possibly can” (Interviewee 05, 2016).

Although the translation of strategic direction into military capability becomes considerably more complex as it is disrupted by the events and influences from the shaping categories, the four interacting activities within the model endure. Recognising that they have only limited scope to intervene in the shaping factors, defence decision makers should instead concentrate their efforts on maintaining balance across the interacting activities. Whilst in balance, the enduring, interacting activities afford the best chance of operating on or above the level that delivers fit-for-purpose armed forces. It is here that the fifth selective coding category joins the model. The fifth category consists predominantly of internal processes and procedures – factors that are almost entirely controlled by defence decision makers. Through the judicious management of the defence enterprise, defence decision makers can counter the worst disruptions caused by the events and influences of the shaping categories, with the goal of maintaining sufficient balance across the interacting activities to ensure they provide fit-for-purpose armed forces. How this would work in practise is relatively simple to articulate, but considerably more difficult to undertake. For instance, if the technological advancements of a potential adversary render a capability obsolete, defence decision makers must ensure that capability is retired, regardless of any single service sensitivities or external lobbying, with the subsequent financial

saving reinvested in accordance with the priorities in the DCAR. Similarly, if the government decides to reduce the resource available to defence as a result of higher priorities or financial pressures elsewhere, a commensurate reduction to Defence Planning Assumptions must be agreed between government and defence to facilitate the necessary disinvestment measures against the affected capability. If the correct decisions are implemented in these examples, the interacting activities within the model should remain in balance and it is likely that the armed forces would, therefore, remain fit for purpose, recognising that, in the second example, the defence output dictating what is 'fit for purpose' has changed. The balancing of the interacting activities, principally through the prudent management of the defence enterprise, can be characterised in a final version of the model at Figure 10-7.

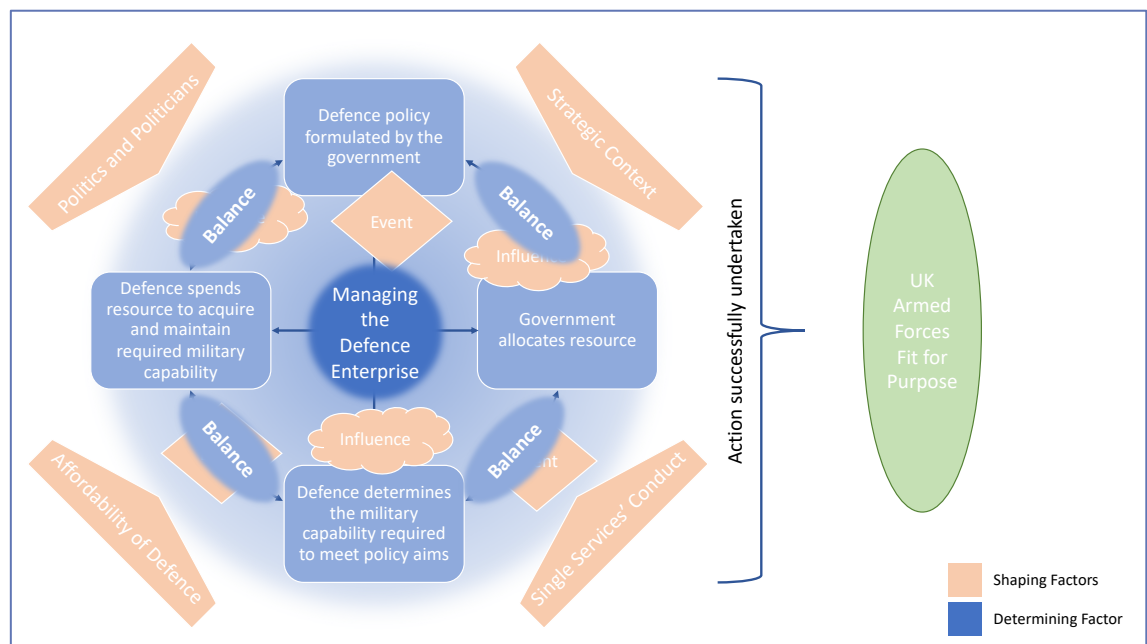


Figure 10-7: Impact of the Determining Category on the Strategic Direction into Military Capability Model.

The strategic direction into military capability model relies on a balance between its interacting activities to ensure the delivery of fit-for-purpose armed forces. The maintenance of this balance is reinforced by the determining category of managing the defence enterprise, and counters the disruptive effect of all of the factors generated from the shaping categories. However, maintaining balance between the basic activities in the model is not a new aspiration. Carver, a former CGS and therefore defence decision maker, titled his book on British defence policy 'Tightrope Walking'

because he saw it as a “perpetual balancing act” (1992, pp. vii-viii). In addition, the need to maintain balance in defence decision making was also recognised by two other former defence decision makers:

“One requirement stands out above all others in the working of the Defence decision-making system, and that is the need for balance: balance between the politically desirable and the military practicable, or vice versa; balance between the needs of the three Services, operating together although in three very different environments; and balance between central policy-makers, who, as the old adage puts it, tend to know less and less about more and more, and the experts in naval, land and air warfare, who have the opposite skills, knowing more and more about less and less, but who are vital on deciding what is practicable in war and peace.”

(Jackson and Bramall, 1992, p. 440)

Balance touches all of the categories, subcategories, and their properties and dimensions. Although not a category in itself, it is central to all of the data generated during the research and is also a relationship grounded in the literature. It is, therefore, considered the core construct that underpins the substantive theory from which the strategic direction into military capability model is derived. This substantive theory is detailed at Figure 10-8.

The strategic direction to military capability model begins with the formulation of defence policy by the government and the allocation of resources to achieve it. In response, defence decision makers first determine, and then develop and maintain, the military capability best able to meet the government’s policy aims. This activity is an open-ended collection of interacting activities which, if successfully undertaken, will result in UK armed forces that are fit for purpose.

These interacting activities are regularly disrupted by factors that can be separated into events and influences. The events and influences that are likely to impact on the future translation of strategic direction into military capability were identified during the elite interview open coding, and scaled up into four shaping categories (strategic context, politics and politicians, affordability of defence and single services’ conduct) and one determining category (managing the defence enterprise). Even though many of the factors within the shaping categories may be seeking valid and reasonable effects, their introduction into the model adds complexity and makes the task of providing fit for purpose armed forces considerably more challenging. Indeed, as defence decision makers have only a limited degree of control over what shaping factors are introduced, when and by whom, they cannot guarantee that the subsequent disruption will not reach a point where the interacting activity within the model can no longer provide fit for purpose armed forces.

In response, defence decision makers must concentrate their efforts on maintaining balance among the model’s interacting activities, because, whilst in balance, the interacting activities afford the best chance of operating on or above the level that delivers fit for purpose armed forces. Through the judicious management of the defence enterprise, made possible by the factors within the determining category, defence decision makers can counter the worst disruptions caused by the events and influences of the shaping categories, with the goal of maintaining sufficient balance across the interacting activities to ensure they continue to provide fit for purpose armed forces.

Figure 10-8: Translation of Strategic Direction into Military Capability Substantive Theory.

10.4 Final Thoughts

Summary of Conclusions

The translation of strategic direction into military capability substantive theory is underpinned by the empirical evidence generated from the selective coding process. The key conclusions drawn from this evidence can be summarised as follows:

- Developing national strategy is more challenging today than it was during the Cold War and Early Expeditionary periods, and the complexity that surrounds it is likely to endure for the foreseeable future.
- The UK does not routinely treat national security strategy as an ongoing process, nor does it always follow its own risk management methodology.
- Defence decision makers do not always appreciate the political realities of translation of strategic direction into military capability activity, in particular the inconsistent and uncertain effects that they cause.
- SDSRs have become a layered confrontational negotiation involving central government, the MOD and the single services that focuses on resources and outputs, rather than considering a conceptual view of the application of military capability to meet policy aims.
- Most defence decision makers believe that the military capability necessary to achieve strategic direction is currently not being adequately resourced.
- Recent increased emphasis on delivering efficiencies within the defence enterprise has exacerbated the salami-slicing reduction of military capability and encouraged the adoption of guaranteed expenditure against non-guaranteed efficiency within TLBs.
- Defence encourages the service chiefs to pursue a system of professions approach to running their service, because, even though it results in the sub-optimal management of the defence enterprise, the culture and ethos that it engenders is considered critical to achieving operational success.
- Although the philosophy of the delegated model is sound, the way it has been implemented has created an inconsistency in defence-wide military

capability decision making, and increased the likelihood that joint force requirements will be overlooked in favour of the single service aspirations.

- The existing force structure and associated path dependency decision making are significant impediments to aligning military capability to strategic direction.
- MOD head office, the single services, and the delivery agents must improve their collegiate working, avoid 'groupthink' and accept altruistic intelligent jointery as a collective headmark if they are to achieve the goal of maintaining sufficient balance across the basic activities in the translation of strategic direction into military capability model to provide fit-for-purpose armed forces.

Improving the Translation of Strategic Direction into Military Capability and Opportunities for Further Research

Conclusions from each of the selective coding categories reveal opportunities where further developments could be made by defence to the translation of strategic direction into military capability activity. For instance, a wider appreciation by senior military officers and MOD civil servants of the realities of political and military misalignment, coupled with a recognition of the general expectations of politicians, particularly whilst in government, would help reduce tensions between both parties and improve the interactions between them at the decision points within the strategic direction into military capability model. Furthermore, a more committed, pan-government approach to an open-ended process of developing national strategy, most obviously through the embracement by all departments of Fusion Doctrine, would enhance the ability of the NSC to cope with the increasing challenges of today's global security environment. With regard to the affordability of defence, a fundamental review of financial management, which considers an unambiguous and enforceable accountability structure, should assist TLB holders to develop and deliver capability within budget and manage and deliver credible efficiencies. Finally, the overwhelming view among the elite interviewees is that the delegated model needs further refining, to ensure the correct balance is found between the needs of the joint force and the aspirations of the single services.

As well as identifying practical applications for its research conclusions, this thesis has also raised questions beyond its investigative remit and thereby uncovered potential topics for further research. The exploration of Greenwood's 'funding gap' hypothesis exposed the extant risk to defence of not finding a sustainable, long-term balance between its budget and its equipment programme. However, it stopped short of examining whether the financial problems experienced in the late 1980s were likely to re-emerge in either the short or medium term. Given the unpalatable consequences should Greenwoodery reoccur, a detailed study of the associated economic factors, that also anticipates the likelihood of its reoccurrence and determines suitable measures to avoid it, would certainly be of benefit to defence.

Furthermore, this thesis has recognised the importance of managing the defence enterprise and also highlighted potential issues with the single services pursuing self-serving goals to the detriment of the joint force. Defence accepts and encourages the single services as professional bodies, because the culture and ethos generated as a result is seen as fundamental to developing the military cohesiveness necessary to succeed on operations. However, with UK doctrine now recognising that defence must think beyond the three traditional domains of maritime, land and air, to also face the challenges and opportunities across space and cyberspace (Development Concepts & Doctrine Centre, 2017), an approach espoused by the CDS (see rusi.org (2018a)), now may be the time for a re-appraisal of the macro-level structure of defence, to identify a construct that develops the necessary military success factors to prevail in operations across all five domains, whilst, at the same time, enables the efficient and effective management of the defence enterprise.

Summary of Substantive Theory

This thesis sought clarity to the question 'why does the UK have the military that it has?' and, not unexpectedly, there is no single answer. The interacting activities that translate strategic direction into military capability will always be disrupted by events and influences, some of which will be minor and easily accommodated, others of which will drive substantial change to defence policy or the force structure. As Mark Twain observed, "it's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight

in the dog” (goodreads, 2007). It is not possible to state definitively which event or influence has had the most significant effect on the translation of strategic direction into military capability; however, the following example underlines just how impactful a single factor can be.

On 16 October 1964, the day the Labour Party won the general election, China detonated its first nuclear device. Before the election, Labour shadow ministers had favoured opting out of the nuclear deterrence altogether; however, at a crucial early policy meeting at Chequers only a month after the event, the Labour Cabinet agreed to retain the UK’s independent nuclear deterrent. Both Chalmers (1985) and Jackson (1990) linked the event to the decision. Since then, the nation has always maintained an independent nuclear deterrent, through the V-force until 1969 and thereafter through the continuous at sea deterrent (CASD), provided by the Polaris submarine force until 1994 and Trident to the present day. Identifying the effect that being a nuclear power has had on the UK’s relationship with the US, its NATO partners and the rest of the world is a thesis in itself; however, the effect on the defence budget is easier to quantify. The total acquisition expenditure on the Trident programme was £12.5 billion⁹⁷ with estimated annual in-service costs of £2.2 billion, or six per cent of the defence budget. Moreover, the estimated cost of the design and manufacture of four replacement Dreadnought boats is £31 billion and the government has also set aside an additional £10 billion contingency reserve for the programme (Mills and Dempsey, 2019). Had the Labour government cancelled the Polaris programme in 1964, it is doubtful that subsequent governments would have had the financial freedom or the political appetite to reinvest in an independent nuclear deterrent. To that end, it could be argued that this one event in 1964 had a profound effect on the UK armed forces, both in its obligation to maintain CASD and the reduced level of conventional military capability it has been able to field as a result.

As an abstract concept, the strategic direction into military capability model offers a credible methodology for defence decision makers to counter the worst

⁹⁷ This equates to approximately £18 billion at 2017 prices.

disruptions from events and influences and continue to provide fit-for-purpose armed forces. The analysis in this thesis confirms that the factors likely to impact on the translation of strategic direction into military capability, in the present and the future, can best be countered by striving to keep the interacting activities that provide fit-for-purpose armed forces in balance. However, this is not a simple task. Weathering the storms created by external events, as well as recognising and regulating the myriad influences on translation of strategic direction into military capability activity, both blatant and surreptitious, will be extremely challenging for defence decision makers, and they will not always be successful.

This thesis has provided an original contribution to academic knowledge within its research area, UK defence policy, and its research topic, military capability. Its originality can be found in two areas, both empirical and conceptual. The conclusions outlined in this chapter are the result of the first detailed empirical investigation of how defence decision makers interpret defence policy and expend resource to achieve the government's policy aims. This has developed a new understanding of the linkages between the articulation of strategic direction and the generation of military capability. This new understanding is the conceptual aspect of the thesis, and has been realised through its second original feature, namely the application of constructivist grounded theory. It is through this methodology that the core concept of the research has been identified and its substantive theory developed.

The thesis began with Harris' cartoon and it is, therefore, appropriate that it finishes with it as well. His character sought an explicitness to replace the 'occurring miracle' within his formula. Through the deductions from the qualitative content analysis of relevant government policy documents and associated policy analysis from the commentariat, together with the conclusions from the selective coding of the elite interviews and the substantive theory generated from the strategic direction into military capability model, this has been achieved.

Glossary

1SL	First Sea Lord
CASD	Continuous at Sea Deterrent
CDM	Chief of Defence Materiel
CDP	Chief of Defence Procurement
CDS	Chief of the Defence Staff
Cm	Command Paper
CSR	Comprehensive Spending Review
DCAR	Defence Capability Assessment Register
DCDC	Development Concepts and Doctrine Centre
DE&S	Defence Equipment and Support
DLO	Defence Logistics Organisation
DLOD	Defence Line of Development
DOM	Defence Operating Model
DPA	Defence Procurement Agency
DPAs	Defence Planning Assumptions
DRP	Defence Reform Programme
DSD	Defence Strategic Direction
DSG	Defence Strategy Group
ECC	Equipment Capability Customer
EU	European Union
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FF20	Future Force 2020
FY	Financial Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GTM	Grounded Theory Methodology
HCDC	House of Commons Defence Committee
ISIL	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant
ICNSS	Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy

<u>IDP</u>	Joint Doctrine Publication
<u>IF25</u>	Joint Force 2025
<u>JFC</u>	Joint Forces Command
<u>JSF</u>	Joint Security Fund
<u>JSP</u>	Joint Service Publication
<u>MDP</u>	Modernising Defence Programme
<u>MOD</u>	Ministry of Defence
<u>MODREC</u>	Ministry of Defence Research Ethics Committee
<u>NAA</u>	North Atlantic Alliance
<u>NAO</u>	National Audit Office
<u>NRA</u>	National Risk Assessment
<u>NRR</u>	National Risk Register
<u>NATO</u>	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
<u>NSA</u>	National Security Advisor
<u>NSC</u>	National Security Council
<u>NSRA</u>	National Security Risk Assessment
<u>NSCR</u>	National Security Capability Review
<u>NSS</u>	National Security Strategy
<u>PACAC</u>	Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
<u>PE</u>	Procurement Executive
<u>PUS</u>	Permanent Under Secretary of State
<u>QEC</u>	Queen Elizabeth Class
<u>RAF</u>	Royal Air Force
<u>RN</u>	Royal Navy
<u>RUSI</u>	Royal United Services Institute
<u>SDR</u>	Strategic Defence Review
<u>SDSR</u>	Strategic Defence and Security Review
<u>SIPRI</u>	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
<u>SPI</u>	Smart Procurement Initiative
<u>SR15</u>	Spending Review 2015
<u>SRO</u>	Senior Responsible Owner

TLB	Top Level Budget
TLCM	Through Life Capability Management
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
VCDS	Vice Chief of the Defence Staff

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