

NEWSTATESMAN

Force for good

Opportunities and challenges of
deployed operations



Round table report with:

John Hutton MP
Frank Gardner

Amyas Morse
Michael Clarke

Atos 
Origin

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Foreword by Atos Origin

With the government supporting intense military operations on two main fronts – in Iraq and Afghanistan – the UK's deployed forces are under constant pressure. Despite the UK playing a significant role in international peace and stability efforts, the media attention is normally drawn to the negative aspects of the conflicts and the sad news of military men and women being injured or killed.

At a recent high-profile roundtable discussion – organised by the *New Statesman* and Miles Hutton, the Account Director responsible for Defence and Homeland Security at Atos Origin – the focus was on the positive and valuable roles the military play in complementing the UK's foreign policy and international development agenda. The agenda drew attention to the often unrecognised role of the back office and how it supports the UK forces on active duty in a range of ways:

- **Overseas operations depend on an efficient and effective supply, one that is able to cope no matter how complex the situation.**
- **Materials and equipment must be up to the tasks involved – all the way through to the post-conflict period and beyond.**
- **The well-being of those serving must be ensured through facilities that cater for the rigours of today's operations, and that satisfy both current expectations and the needs of post-deployment.**

The discussion recognised the significant effort, dedication and success of those serving both directly in the forces and indirectly within the military support chain. It highlighted opportunities to share and transfer best practice in areas such as civil governance, logistics, supply chain, procurement, healthcare and resource management. For example, Tom Hall, Defence and Intelligence Partner at Atos Consulting, suggested that further improvements to simplify, secure and seek efficiencies in the supply chain would strengthen support for frontline operations while building a durable and sustainable infrastructure.

Significant benefits have already been achieved in this area. The support provided by Atos Origin to the Ministry of Defence (MoD) acquisition and supply chain communities over the past 10 years has been invaluable. Atos Origin helped improve the government's savings targets by generating more than £1 billion in cash benefit, while at the same time improving equipment availability.

As to the well-being of the troops serving, David Wright, Chief Medical Officer and Clinical Director for Occupational Health at Atos Healthcare (a division of Atos Origin, and provider of occupational health services to the MoD), explained that whereas there has been considerable media criticism of the medical support given to servicemen returning from conflict, there is no doubt that there have been considerable improvements. The in-theatre support and care during evacuation is the best it has ever been.

The treatment available at the MoD's Defence Medical Rehabilitation Unit at Headley Court, Surrey, is outstanding. Casualty numbers are small at present, but should these numbers increase significantly, there is concern as to whether or not the rehabilitation services, in particular, would be able to cope.

With increasing numbers of reservists involved in operations, there is a need to rehabilitate those injured back into both military and civilian workplaces. The requirements may well differ and the necessary support services need to be well integrated to provide for the full range of physical and mental health needs.

A full report of the discussion can be found on page three. See page 15 for Atos Origin's views on how some of the issues discussed can be addressed.

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With over 400,000 personnel and the second-highest expenditure in the world, the UK's armed forces are a significant player in international peace and stability efforts. Applied expertise in areas such as civil governance, logistics, procurement, healthcare and resource management can help secure real advantages.

However, the politics of the Iraq and Afghanistan operations have impacted on the national narrative about defence: negative stories in the press mix with reduced public

engagement with the armed forces, closing off open discussion about the broader opportunities and challenges raised by current deployed operations.

This round table discussion, sponsored jointly by Atos Origin and the *New Statesman*, examines the valuable role that the British Armed Forces play in complementing the UK's foreign policy and international development agenda, and considers how these benefits can be sustained and enhanced over time.

Round table participants



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Guide to military terms used in this round table

16 Brigade 16 Air Assault Brigade is the newest and largest brigade in the British Army. It forms the Army's primary rapid reaction force, and is prepared to be deployed for use in any eventuality

52 Brigade served in Afghanistan between September 2007 and March 2008, and was relieved in spring 2008 by 16 Air Assault Brigade. During the time that the Brigade was in Afghanistan, it successfully retook the strategic Taliban stronghold of Musa Qaleh

Cougars armoured fighting vehicles

DIS Defence Industrial Strategy. A white paper aiming to provide greater transparency of future defence requirements and setting out the industrial capabilities needed in the UK to meet requirements.

Headley Court Defence medical rehabilitation centre in Surrey

IISS International Institute for Strategic Studies

ISAF International Security Assistance Force

ISTAR intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance

Mastiffs unmanned aerial vehicles

MoD Ministry of Defence

MRX mission rehearsal exercise

NCOs non-commissioned officers

Operation Herrick the codename under which all British operations in the war in Afghanistan have been conducted since 2002

Operation Telic the codename under which all British operations of the 2003 Invasion of Iraq and after are being conducted

PRT provincial reconstruction team

RUSI Royal United Services Institute

UORs urgent operational requirements

Round table: How can British Forces best support foreign policy?

Frank Gardner (chair) Thanks very much for coming, today, everybody.

I cannot think of a time in my lifetime when British forces have been deployed on such intensive operations over such a long period of time. This throws up a lot of issues. Procurement is one, morale is another, purpose is another, perception about the mission. These are all really important issues. From my perspective as a journalist, I have noticed with some sadness how, for the most part, the excellent work and bravery of the British servicemen and women has gone unnoticed for many years because of the confusion in the public mind about what they are actually doing.

Part of this goes back to the whole debacle over the invasion of Iraq, weapons of mass destruction, dodgy dossiers, and so on. It is getting better and, actually I hesitate to say it but the Secretary of State did give quite a good explanation of why Britain is in Afghanistan in a speech to the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) a few weeks ago. But I think most people still tend to conflate Operation Telic and Operation Herrick, the British military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and think, "Oh, well, it's all part of the Bush/Blair wars, isn't it?"

However, the rationale for being in Afghanistan is very different from the one for being in Iraq. In my experience, quite a few of the servicemen and women in Iraq do not really understand why we are still there. Certainly the Iraqis, according to our sources in journalism, are not particularly keen on having the Brits after the operation but the Secretary may dispute this.

The main points we will cover today are procurement, getting the right kit to the troops in time and avoiding unnecessary deaths. Squaddies, for want of a better word, love being on operations but they cannot stand feeling let down. They love doing it. There is not a morale problem in that sense. There is a morale problem with the intensity of operations coming one after another. Sixteen Air Assault has already been pencilled in for a third deployment to Afghanistan. It is not just about procurement; it is about having the right conditions for them back home.

When you have highly intensive operations like this you will get the attrition of experienced non-commissioned officers (NCOs) and officers leaving, often at the height of their careers or certainly before their best years are over. That is a problem. Recruitment is up but retention is a problem. Mastiffs (unmanned

aerial vehicles), Cougars (armoured fighting vehicles), protective kit, I think all come under urgent operational requirements (UORs) so we can look at whether the right kit is being delivered effectively on time.

Then there comes the whole clarity of the mission. It is extremely unfortunate that John Reid's comments were taken out of context when he was Secretary of State for Defence. What he actually said in 2006 was, "Of course it would be nice if we could leave Afghanistan without a shot being fired." He did not say that was what was going to happen. He was merely expressing a wish. However, the subtext of that is that the Operation Herrick in Afghanistan is a very different operation now, in late 2008, to the one that was envisaged in early 2006. It was supposed to be about reconstruction. I think that was a misnomer because there was nothing to reconstruct in Helmand – there was not much there in the first place. One could say that British forces actually drew the battle to them because the Taliban said, "Right, we are going to go and fight them." The fighting only really kicked off in the summer of 2006 when the Taliban thought they could go and fight the Brits and kick them out. Actually, neither side won decisively, so there is a long-term problem here about the clarity of mission, what are trying to achieve in Afghanistan, and whether it is achievable.

Operation Herrick in Afghanistan is a very different operation now, in late 2008, to the one that was envisaged in early 2006
Frank Gardner



Sierra Leone and Kosovo are important missions where British Armed Forces have played a pivotal role in securing settlements
John Hutton

John Hutton There is virtually nothing in that that I would disagree with but I would like to wind the clock back a little bit and talk about the role that British Armed Forces have played. It is right to say that they have had a very constructive role in pursuing the very decent and profoundly ethical aspects of British foreign policy in recent years.

Sierra Leone and Kosovo are important missions where British Armed Forces have played a pivotal role in securing settlements and outcomes to disputes that have really challenged the NATO Alliance; they have challenged all of us.

I agree that operations in Iraq have cast a shadow to some extent over the perceptions and the role of British foreign policy, and particularly British Armed Forces. I think this is unfair and unjust, but that is the reality we deal with. So, when we introduce a discussion on this and we start the inevitable reference to Iraq, there is a danger that we lose sight of some of the important missions and the roles that the British Armed Forces have played in recent years.

At the moment, we probably have the most experienced armed forces that we have had actively deployed since the Second World War. The stresses and strains that Frank identified need to be very carefully managed. We cannot sustain this level of operation indefinitely. That is what the Chief of the Defence Staff has been making clear in recent weeks.

In the context of Iraq, we are on track to see a significant withdrawal of UK forces in the first half of next year. At that point, we will be able to say that the role British Armed Forces have played in Iraq has been a positive one. I know that is an unfashionable view and probably many round the table would take issue with me on that. However, we are going to leave a very capable and well-developed network of Iraqi security forces. We are going to leave, certainly in the south, an economy that is on the way up, is improving. We will have an ongoing relationship with the Iraqis, which will help stabilise and secure the sustained progress

that has been made, progress in the context of officer training, in developing the Iraqi navy. We will continue to play a positive role in Iraq and we have been forced to do it in that theatre.

On Afghanistan, my view is that this will be increasingly the focus for debate in the form of comment on the role of the armed forces in the UK and the contribution that the military force can play in the context of our wider foreign-policy objectives.

I say that because we know already that there will be a significant redeployment of US forces into Afghanistan and that is going to begin to change the parameters of the debate. We also know that the security situation in Afghanistan has improved and developed. It is not secure enough to allow the wider economic and social progress that I think is an essential part of a wider strategy to begin to move us towards a situation where Afghans can deal with their own security challenges and so on. That will require a renewed focus on a political reconciliation process because that has to be the endgame here. The next 18 months to two years are going to be decisive in the context of Afghanistan for those of us who are charged with responsibility for the conduct of foreign policy in all its various forms in my neck of the woods and the defence-policy agenda.

There are three or four critical things that have to be right if we are going to get the right results in Afghanistan. Our strategy must be clear – it can and ought to be made clearer. Delivering a clear and coherent strategy in a substantial network, in an alliance like the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), with 41 countries participating, 41 different defence ministers, 41 foreign secretaries and 41 heads of state is a complicated operation. However, the ISAF mission and role is pretty clear. I believe we have the right strategy and objectives, and that we are pursuing the right means to deliver it. The strategy is Afghanistan. It is stabilisation of the remit of the Kabul government across the country, and the backfilling of improved security space with proper economic and social development.

Other challenges that we face are more on the operational side. The issue of equipment is fundamental. The equipment available in theatre now is the best that it has been, according to those in theatre. I went round recently trying to find things that were wrong with equipment in Afghanistan. I could not find any. The thing people repeatedly complained about was the weight of the body armour.

I think the protective mobility programme we have invested in has been very substantial. The firepower of the infantry has been dramatically improved. We have a much more capable body of soldiers, capable not just of defending themselves effectively but also of taking the fight to the insurgents in a way that has not always been the case. Now, that has not happened by accident. It has been a lot of effort, policy effort, a lot of resources have gone into re-equipping and retooling British forces in Afghanistan, and we have a very capable force in there. Not every procurement challenge has been met and mastered. There is more we are going to need to do as the nature of the security challenge we face there



changes. It has gone through a very substantial change in the past 12 to 18 months in Afghanistan. Three-quarters of our casualties now come from improvised explosive devices and contact explosives. We take far fewer casualties through direct fire and gunshot wounds. We have had to recalibrate our sense of the type of tools and equipment that we need to fight that mission successfully.

However, major challenges remain. We have to deal with the whole construct of Pakistan policy. We have to pursue a clearer strategy in relation to border security. We have a substantial nexus to break around counter-narcotics, which feeds and fuels the insurgency and is the reason why it has been difficult to suppress the insurgency. I do not think any of those issues raises specific procurement or equipment challenges. We have the equipment we need. Particularly, we have a significant investment going into intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance (ISTAR) and intelligence assets, which will be a very significant part of our capabilities in that area. All in all, I believe, getting to the detail of this, that the strategy is broadly the right one. We are not short of strategy. The question is delivering effectively on the ground in this complicated alliance.

Some of the more fundamental issues that this mission raises refer back to your point about people. The stress and strain on the armed forces cannot be exaggerated. In the welter of statistics that dominate this debate about the mission in Afghanistan, we often lose sight of the people. Our ability to sustain this mission over the long term, if that is necessary, will depend on the resourcefulness of the people that we have in uniform and their ability to sustain these operations. There is no magic solution. How do we minimise and address that as best we can?

Well, we have set out our comprehensive approach to improving service morale, 14 action points that we are taking forward at the moment relating to honouring Army guidelines, looking at issues to do with service accommodation back in the UK, and so on. We have improved the suite of financial incentives in the wars for

people who serve operations. There is a very attractive end-of-operations tour allowance which is well regarded, well spent by those who receive it, and tax-free. We must address the issue of training and support and so on, and provision of medical support services, which we are doing.

Recruitment is heading in the right direction now. We are recruiting very strongly across all four services: marines, army, navy, and air force. We have to work on the retention piece. I was very struck when I was in Colchester, talking to 16 Air Assault Brigade when they came back, how many NCOs were thinking, "Well, this is my time to come out." We have to work with them to make sure that they have a positive reason to stay in. The experience that that cadre of NCOs have is a very precious resource and will help us sustain the level of training that is needed to sustain these operations.

The challenge of deploying active armed forces now on a sustained basis is very demanding, it takes its toll on the people in the front line but I do believe that the MoD is rising to the challenge. We have more to do on all of these fronts. I do not think the work is ever done. I do not think we will ever cross the finishing line either on improving your procurement efforts or improving your work on retaining and recruiting the right people to staff these operations, but the commitment is absolutely there.

As I said in my speech at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, the greatest threat to this generation, to the values we hold dear, is international terrorism. It is not a threat to our borders, it is a threat to our way of life. It cannot be appeased out of existence. This evil has to be confronted and defeated. It will not be defeated by military means alone, but it cannot be defeated without appropriate military commitment and effort.

Frank Gardner Secretary of State, thank you very much. We are here to try to come up with ideas and to help maximise the benefits rather than to score points. Let's start with Dr Ian Kearns from the Commission on National Security in the 21st Century, who has just published an acclaimed report on security.

Ian Kearns I want to make a few contextual points and just then go on to make a point about where I think the significance of them is. It seems to me that we have a debate in this country about defence policy, which says the international environment, the split environment, is characterised by a couple of things. One is the fact that we live in a world of weak states, it is more weak states than strong states, and we live in a world of transnational threat, including the threat of terrorism. The other is that we still live in a world of potential interstate threats. Nobody has overexaggerated them directly to the UK at the moment but the assumption is that you cannot assume that they have gone away. They may come back and so your posture needs to be able to handle both of these environments.

In addition to that, we also have an ongoing debate about the limits on the use of force or the limits to the utility of force, which is creating a discussion about how

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we use force effectively and use defence instruments effectively, especially how can we use them when coordinating with a wider range of instruments. I think these factors in the environment are important to the debate we are having today because they connect to some of the underlying politics and public opinion related to defence policy.

The public instinctively gets the idea that interstate threats may still be there and we have to be ready for them. The public is buying far less the strategic rationale that policymakers are creating in relation to weak states and transnational threats and how we might need to respond to those. I think the public is right to be sceptical, not because being in Afghanistan is the wrong place to be or anything like that, but because what they are seeing is politicians and policymakers not really nailing their colours to the mast.

Whenever you hear debates, such as those around the politics of the NATO Alliance, challenges to do with how we get burden sharing in the right place, and so on, the public sniffs a policymaking class that does not quite believe its own rhetoric on the nature of the threat. When we had the global financial crisis, we had the G20 meeting in Washington very quickly. The public sniffs that, when the challenge is really serious and the politicians believe it is really serious, they are focused on the challenge. I think the public can sniff too much politics around how we deal with things like Afghanistan and they are saying, "If it is really that serious you would not be having these disputes, we would be doing this job absolutely effectively, we would be dealing with the alliance politics."

I think it goes to the heart of how we make a case for dealing with some of these threats. In relation to the discussion we have today, we have to be aware of the backdrop when people talk about types of defence capabilities, types of procurement, how we use our forces, how forces are seen by the public, how valued they are by the public, the morale of the forces, and so on. We need to have a debate about how we clarify our strategic rationale and build public support for it.

David Wright Thanks very much. Clearly, as a medical man, I am coming at this from the well-being and

support for the service person. By having an effective support system that improves retention, boosts morale, and improves well-being, it improves public perception of the services – and the healthcare of the service person has not necessarily had a very good press over the past few years. Despite that, there is no doubt that there have been very significant improvements in the healthcare of servicemen coming back from operations. Healthcare in the field is much better than it used to be.

Birmingham is sorted out now. People are having the best possible care there and rehabilitation at Headley Court is outstanding. In addition to that, psychiatric care is significantly improved, although there may be gaps here and there. There are a few buts to all that. Since the first Gulf War, the number of casualties has been very small. At the moment, we are talking about four or five people a week coming back to Birmingham. If it was 40 or 50 a week, could the system cope? To a degree, Headley Court is a victim of its own success. There is a lot of emotional commitment to Headley Court being the place where rehabilitation should take place, but is it a 21st-century facility? Is it big enough to cope with the numbers coming back? Would it be better to have somewhere nearer the acute care facilities?

There is the big issue of servicemen coming back to the UK and – to a degree – getting lost. A serviceman's unit may be in Germany, his home headquarters in Scotland, his immediate family in Germany, his extended family elsewhere in the UK. Who is managing all that? A system has been put in place to improve that over the past few years but it is still possible for it to get muddled. Interestingly, we have an enormous commitment to the regimental system and that can occasionally work against the health of the individual because the regiment says, "This person is part of our family," and forgets that the medical issues may actually be more important.

Who is managing the return to work? If the soldier is in the UK, his unit is somewhere else, he may go home, and yet again potentially get lost in the system. What about the reserve soldier and his return to work, his return to his civilian work, and his return to his military work? They are not the same thing and there may be a conflict between the two, and managing that.

What is a veteran? Is it any serviceman? Is it just a serviceman who has been injured? We do not have as comprehensive a system in place as some other nations do for looking after our veterans.

Finally, we need to think about the people providing medical support. Those military people providing medical support in theatre are mostly reservists. When a medical unit goes out to a theatre, a lot of individuals are brought from other medical units to make up the numbers, so individuals are out of their own comfort zone and are not with their own friends. That is a significant issue for all service personnel if they are not with the people they know.

Michael Clarke When we leave Basra in the summer or late spring or whenever it is, the press will look for the iconic images of British forces in Basra. We need to have a balanced view. At the Royal United Services Institute

**I think
Afghanistan is
the right war
but we are in
the wrong
place for the
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What matters
is Kandahar
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(RUSI), we are working on doing something on this to say, “Let us look at this in context”. The context is changing and it will be a big PR moment for everybody.

Afghanistan is the war we have got. It is not the one we want or the one we might have chosen but it is the one we have got. NATO is at war in Afghanistan, no question about it, so we have to address the war we have. When you say, Secretary of State, that it is a national interest argument, I just do not think people believe it. There is the sense that we are fighting in Afghanistan to prevent a failed state becoming a terrorist haven, but the fact is that all the terrorism in Britain does not originate in Afghanistan. It comes from the tribal areas in Pakistan. So, if we settled Afghanistan, it would be Pakistan, and if we settled Afghanistan and Pakistan, it would be Somalia. If we settled Somalia, it would be Mali. If we settled Mali, it would be the Philippines, and so on.

There is a national interest argument but it is a much subtler one, and I understand the difficulty. How do you make a national interest argument that this is about the rule of law, a legitimate international system, and the western allies representing democracy, doing something to preserve that system in the face of threats to it? It is difficult to translate into a top line. But Afghanistan equals preventing terrorism on our streets? I honestly do not think it washes. Empirically, it is just not true. It was true but it is not any more.

For the next few years, the public must buy into the Afghanistan strategy because we are going to be there for the next few years. It is no good thinking in terms of a year, 18 months, two years. For five or eight years, or whatever it takes, we will be in Afghanistan. Somehow we have to think through the political and public opinion argument that would support that.

I think Afghanistan is the right war but we are in the wrong place for the right war. We should not be in Helmand. What matters is Kandahar and we are not there. Our strategy is good. We make more of a comprehensive approach than anyone else does. We have more to offer in the strategic mess that is the international response to Afghanistan. We have more to offer than just about anybody else, but we need to be

in Kandahar to make it work. I know that will not happen but we can build around Obama’s desire. We can build our ability to work with our allies to convince them that this is the war we have got, and that we have to have strategic coherence. I wish we were somewhere other than Helmand, that is all.

It is not only Afghanistan and these sorts of wars. It is also about the existential value of defence in hard and soft power. Whatever we face in the next ten or 20 years, whether it is a resurgent Russia or failures in southern Europe or the Baltic states, that we may have capable forces is an investment in both hard and soft power. It is an instrument of government. They offer more in soft-power terms than most people assume.

On equipment, the Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS) is very good and needs to be implemented. The urgent operation requirements (UORs) system is extremely good, but it would not need to be that good if the whole system had not kept drifting to the right to create these great gaps in the process. We all know that there are no quick fixes for this, and the Ministry of Defence (MoD) is better now than it has ever been at handling these issues, but the target keeps moving. The goalposts keep moving and I think we all know that.

There is a more fundamental issue that we face, which is that we always maintain a balance of equipment at very low numbers of platforms, and we say, “It does not really matter because the platforms now do so much more combat and are more combat capable.” That is absolutely true, but when the numbers of platforms become so low, then you begin to wonder whether the kinetic energy that we can deliver is actually what we want. I think there are some more fundamental questions here about combat power as opposed to sheer numbers of platforms or, for that matter, numbers of boots on the ground.

Amyas Morse The Defence Industrial Strategy is not just a bit of paper. It is how we work with the defence industry – as partners and colleagues, solving complex problems in a business-like and open way. So it is important to keep on publishing and developing policy. In fact, during the time since the first Defence Industrial Strategy, we have continued discussions with industry, working on and developing shared policy views.

One of the first things I experienced, being part of the Mastiff procurement, was that it was very rapid. However, it is important to understand how our defence activity is a complex system. You cannot just bang things into it. They have to fit into that complex system, into all of the electronic, complex activities. They have to fit into the support capability. We have to train people to use them. These are quite mundane points but they are important. Often you find that you can get something very quickly but, actually, there is a significant lead time in being able to put it into effect. It is a very complex operation when we are deploying.

When you go to Basra or you go to some of the bases in Afghanistan, you realise that this is the nearest thing on this planet that you could do to putting a base on Mars. There is nothing there at all. It is an extremely hot and hostile environment. You are putting north





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Europeans in there. You have to support and maintain them; temperature, water, waste handling and defence being some of the many factors. You have to think of everything and you have to provide everything to make this work. Not least, you have to think about the effectiveness of the airbridge and their ability to get home and get on relief and to do that in the most efficient way possible. It is one of the constant subjects that we are always working on and trying to strengthen.

We have very strong policies on using local contractors. I remember going to Basra and being amazed at the really large numbers of Iraqis in every phase of what we were doing on site. There are strong economic by-products, and the more thoughtful we are about how they are used and put into place, I think the more enduring the benefit may be.

It is normal to start a discussion of this kind by saying something about civil servants, and I am bound on behalf of my colleagues to testify to how strongly they feel dedicated to supporting people who are going out there and putting their lives at risk. They feel it very deeply, and they feel a very strong sense of dedication to supporting our people who are in harm's way.

Francis Tusa Thank you. The Secretary of State said, "We cannot sustain this level of operations." But what if this is the level we have to sustain operations at in future? I think saying we cannot is one of the problems. I do not think there is any debate on defence. To have a debate would be to actually raise some pretty nasty things like, we might have to spend more! Yes, it is true the UORs system has delivered extra kit and it has delivered more money. Yes, there has been more money on the social benefits side, but it still might not be enough. It is "What can we get away with?" We see and have seen it for at least a decade, if not 15 years. The coroner in Wiltshire said he was disgusted that troops in the field were having to make do. One of the essences of service personnel is that you have to make do. If it takes every single bit of the MoD's working day to deal with operations today and they lose the bigger picture, we are in for a serious problem down the line.

Specifically, I would point to the way the longer term equipment plan is being massacred to come up with the Afghanistan equipment. We are creating asymmetries for ourselves. I will not get into the question of conjuring up imaginary enemies, but what I would say is, why have British forces survived so well in Iraq and Afghanistan? It is because they went into both operations relatively balanced. They had good training. The equipment may not have been right but they were ready to cope with a wide range of scenarios.

If we do not have balanced armed forces and if the only thing we have our armed forces ready to do is to fight in Afghanistan, someone will find us out. After all, the MoD was criticised very severely in the aftermath of 9/11, with people saying, "You did not spot that. You were still preparing for a heavy war." Well, I would say we are so focused in Afghanistan that lots of things are falling off. The appearance of the piracy threat off Somalia is just one. The Falklands guardship must be withdrawn to go and deal with that.

I have written on a number of occasions that I think the whole lure of net-enabled capability in warfare is one of the biggest cons that we bought into. How a single ship can shuttle between the West Indies and the west coast of Africa and claim to be having an effect on both places at once is pretty laughable. Now there will be one frigate, in theory, covering West Africa, the West Indies and the Falklands. Platforms matter. Numbers matter. If we were serious about doing what we are meant to do, it would require more money.

That Falklands guardship going away to East Africa is the defence equivalent of us saying, "Heart disease has increased in Birmingham. We are going to stop treating cancer in Cornwall to find the resources to deal with that," that is what we are doing in defence. No one will ever fund the UK to cope with absolutely every eventuality but I think we have been biting into the flesh too much over the past five years.

Theo Farrell I would echo the comments made by Mike Clarke which is that, by and large our boys in the field are getting the equipment they require. From the people I have spoken to in 16 Brigade and 52 Brigade, they have got a replacement for the basic utility vehicle. The problems they face are what you expect if you rush equipment into theatre – problems of logistical trial and training packages. The MoD has taken action on this, I understand. In the case of the 16 Brigade, they had to leave 10 per cent of their Mastiffs behind to train with, but they got the Mastiffs, so that is the nature of it. Of course, there are some areas of shortfall such as support helicopters, and that is going to be addressed.

The broader question is whether this is going to result in a reconsideration of equipment planning, whether we are going to reprogramme our armed forces in terms of considering the issue of platform quality versus platform number. That is a bigger issue raised by it.

I believe that British forces are transforming to meet the challenges. It is quite extraordinary when you think about what has happened in the past ten years. Our military now are routinely used to the idea that their plan should be as much about supporting local

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Theo Farrell

government structures and reconstruction and development. For instance, our troops do not like to call in air strikes unless they absolutely have to because they appreciate the impact that 500lb bombs have on the local environment. They do not even like that it causes a lot of noise, which creates the perception of insecurity, so they would rather use their old indirect fire weapons or just direct fire weapons. So there has been a real change of mindset in our military. The amount of change they have gone through is quite remarkable.

Against that, I take Francis Tusa's point that we have to look not only at the obligations and challenges we have now in Afghanistan but also at the future state of our forces. The view the army is taking is that the future is high-bred warfare, and that we need balanced forces able to combat opponents that will simultaneously make use of terrorist insurgent and conventional modes of operation and force structures inside a single campaign against us. So, we must deploy sustainable but also combat-capable, fully balanced forces. I think this thinking is percolating into the British Army, and I believe this concept is now coming right through into doctrine and training.

The third point I would make has to do with comprehensive approach, which has been discussed. We are nowhere near fully involving all our government partners. Even in Whitehall, deficit and stabilisation units speak completely a different language from the military and, in discussions with them off the record in recent briefings, they literally do not understand the language. The civilians especially do not understand military speak. It is still the case that civilians may be deployed with very little training, with different degrees of qualification, whereas our forces will have trained for months to go into theatre.

Our forces are trained to understand that the subordinate commanders understand the commander's intent. That is the essence of mission command. Civilians are barely getting it, basically. A very simple suggestion would be to break off the deputy provincial reconstruction team (PRT) commander, who is civilian head of policy, and embed

him for the mission rehearsal exercise (MRX) for any brigade before it deploys. Getting the head of the civilian mission to begin to understand how the military are thinking would save weeks of hassle when the brigade deploys to theatre.

Tom Hall On the changing threat and how variable it will be, looking at how the civil servants and the military are supporting that, I have to agree with Amyas. I have worked in a number of industries and I have very rarely seen the passion that people have for supporting troops in the front line. In some respects, this history that we were talking about, Secretary, of setting out success with the military, has created its own legacy in people, processes and systems. We have had separate military arms that all have their own systems, their own legacies and their own way of doing things. This adds to the complexity where UORs can get round it but, actually, your inherent capability has not improved at the level it needs to. So our ability to firefight is there, is great, and should be applauded. However, our ability to plan through our support chain probably is not there.

Dominick Donald Secretary of State, you mention that we have a good strategy in Afghanistan – Afghanistanisation. To me, that is not a strategy. That is a set of tools that you use to achieve a strategy. As far as I can tell, the strategy has yet to be identified, and certainly the people I have talked to indicate that there is a vacuum at the strategic level that Afghanistanisation does not fill.

Second, there is a domestic facet of strategy that has yet to be properly adopted or absorbed. This is the first expeditionary operation the UK has mounted since the Cold War where there is a domestic security consequence as a result of operational practices. During the Cold War perhaps there was a domestic communist threat; Northern Ireland was a domestic problem that had a UK mainland manifestation. There is a domestic consequence of the force we use abroad. We do not have a grand strategy for the wars we are facing, an understanding of the threat, of how responses to that threat have domestic implications.

Perhaps the elephant in the room is that we are not in charge of our broad strategic direction. It is determined by another entity – the US. We can influence the decisions that the US makes but with an awful lot of the questions that we are trying to talk about right now, our position will, to a certain extent, be defined by what happens in the next three to six months in Washington DC. We do not yet know where the Obama administration is going to stand on a whole slew of issues.

David Clark What we are looking at is a future in which military interventions are discretionary. I take on board what you say about the imperative of fighting terrorism, but there is a wide variety of ways in which that can be done. The military instrument plays a different role in different scenarios. So, it is more important than ever that there is the capacity for governments to build political support in the country for those operations.



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It is clear that in the aftermath of Iraq, whatever position one took on that intervention, there is a crisis of confidence in a way in the ability of Britain to intervene, either as Britain or as part of a coalition. There is a practical set of criticisms about the efficacy of military power, about the ability of the British Armed Forces to change the internal dynamics of countries that are weak and failing. Then there is a set of moral propositions about whether Britain is really in a good position to intervene, given the way it has done so in the past few years. Can Britain envisage taking part in the type of interventions that we have seen without necessarily getting a UN mandate, a UN mandate looking very plausible given the make-up of the Security Council at the moment.

My personal view is that interventions will be necessary in the future and that the interventionist idea or framework needs to be reformulated in some way that will put us on a more sustainable footing. There needs to be a new framework of rules and principles that guide intervention, and what that might consist of.

My second point concerns Trident replacement and whether or not this is affordable, given the current economic situation, and more pressing claims in the defence budgets. In that environment, the Trident replacement plans seem questionable. If they were needed on a massive strategic imperative, surely Germany and Spain would be clamouring to acquire nuclear deterrents of their own. I take from that that the British nuclear deterrent is an implement of diplomatic prestige first and foremost and not a real defence system in the context that we discuss other defence capabilities. Plus, for Labour, it is something of a political taboo that I think is no longer necessarily affordable.

Another thing that I would question as to whether it is affordable in the current environment is the national defence industrial base. Equipment runs, really within the UK context, are far too short. Their competition possibilities are far too limited to really make this an affordable concept any more. The problem, of course, for Europe is not just that it spends less than the US but it spends less wisely and less efficiently than the US.

What we should be moving towards is not a kind of collaborative procurement model but some kind of single market concept, albeit one with rules of security of supply that satisfy concerns about access to military equipment in times of strategic and security need.

Frank Gardner There are a few points I think it is only fair to let the Secretary respond to. The first from Francis Tusa, why can we not sustain these operations? Is it fair to be sending our men and women abroad in difficult and dangerous conditions if there is not enough money to support them?

Then a couple of points by Dominick Donald. One is his contention that the Afghanistan strategy actually is not identified. Then the fact that this is the first expeditionary operation that he can think of where there is a domestic counterterrorism or security consequence. We should not forget around this table that a very large number of people in other parts of the world do not believe that British forces should be in either Iraq or Afghanistan. They think that our entire mission is wrong and it is a form of neo-colonialism.

Then, the elephant in the room, as he mentioned, about America. Is it sensible for us to have hitched our wagon to another country's policy? We are the junior partner in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and I think probably a lot of the public in this country feel quite uneasy about that. Secretary?

John Hutton My argument is that we are in Afghanistan to secure Britain's security interests and the security interests of our friends and allies. So, I think critics are entitled to say to me, you must put whatever is necessary into the field because, if it is that vital to the UK national security interest, that is the inevitable conclusion to reach. It is part of a NATO mission so I think it is right and reasonable for us to say that we expect our NATO partners to be more fully involved and we would like to see more NATO engagement. This is not just a threat to UK security, it is a threat to the security of the NATO alliances.

Where I take issue with you is your analysis that what I am saying is that we cannot afford these operations. That is not my argument. We have spent the best part of £10bn in the past few years sustaining the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. We will continue to devote the resources necessary to secure the right outcome here. The issue is not resources; it is one of strain and stress on people and on equipment. Those stresses and strains will be there whatever the size and scale of the mission that we face and I think it is true that a commander would say that those strains and stresses build up. It is a pressure cooker in a sense. I agree with you that we need more people in the military than we currently have. We are under strength, 4,000 or 5,000, maybe more.

I think the issue is not that we are not prepared to commit additional resource or sustain additional resource to secure UK security interests, we are. If absolutely necessary, we could sustain these twin operations for longer, if that was absolutely essential in the UK interest to do that. Fortunately, in relation to Iraq I think we have come to a fork in the road, we will

be able to go down there, and that will allow us to make decisions about future force levels in Afghanistan, it will allow us to re-prioritise our equipment.

One thing that I disagree with is this argument that we have been able to sustain operations in Iraq and Afghanistan only at the expense of the long-term equipment programme. What we have seen in Iraq and Afghanistan is not the long-term equipment programme being pared back to sustain those operations, far from it. We spent several billions of pounds more on our equipment programme to sustain those operations. I do not believe that that sort of linear connection between long-term equipment programme and urgent operational programmes can actually be sustained. I just do not think that is the right analysis.

On Dominick's point about whether Afghanistanisation is a strategy or a simple tool, I think what lies behind it is a long-term strategic objective of a secure and stable Afghan state, with the means and resources at its disposal to deal with the security challenges it faces. I call that Afghanistanisation but it is more than simply a tool or a mechanism. It defines the long-term objective for the mission in Afghanistan that will allow us at some point to descale our mission there. However, we cannot do that at the moment because there is no reasonable prospect of the Afghan government being able to sustain the sort of level of security footprint on the ground that is needed.

Frank Gardner Let me throw open the question of the other elephant in the room, the two aircraft carriers. A very senior officer said to me recently, "Those two bloody aircraft carriers, that could have bought me ..." Actually, I am not going to say it, but you can guess what he said.

Francis Tusa This is the problem. I am not against support of current operations, it is vital, but it has become an obsession only with Afghanistan. Now, I am not even going to get into why we have got there. What is lacking at the moment is an Alan Brook, someone who is not focused on the day to day, who is able to

stand back and tell the clients on the ground, "Look, I will cover your back at the top, you are not going to get that, you are not going to get that."

Dominick Donald But if you do not have that overarching definition of what it is you are seeking to achieve then you can have all the Alan Brookses you like and all they are going to be doing is just chatting.

Michael Clarke But that is the answer to the aircraft carrier. If you think that our strategy for the long-term future is expeditionary operations of this sort at a long distance, outside the European Mediterranean theatre, then aircraft carriers make perfect sense. If you do not think that is our 30-year strategy, or a capability to do that, then there are quite expensive outcomes.

John Hutton There is the argument that, if we did not build the carriers, we would have all this money to spend on Iraq, but it is bogus. The principal spend on those programmes is still several years away and that money is simply not in the budget to spend elsewhere.

I think Bob Gates' article in the journal *Foreign Affairs* poses a very important question for all of us in NATO and outside about how we strike this balance between counter-insurgency operations of the scale that we are likely to have to be involved in and the interstate warfare planning assumptions that have dominated a lot of defence thinking in Europe and North America.

The Americans' budget is 20 times larger than ours is. By definition, they have more opportunity to flex bits of it at any one moment in time than we have. Fortunately, the risk of major interstate warfare is probably less now than it has been for 40 or 50 years. But that doesn't mean that we can not worry about that and spend everything on counter-insurgency.

The difficulty for us and our partners in Europe is the exact balance to reach between that long-term equipment programme (where we are talking about maybe relatively low risk of operations such as major expeditionary operations, where we need to use our carriers or interstate warfare in Europe and where we still need to invest significant resources) and the counterbalance of that, where we expect our troops to be fighting. None of us can predict the future with 100 per cent certainty.

No one is going to agree with every aspect of your decision-making. We are simply trying to keep the right approach on a balanced range of forces, forces that are capable of doing one mission, interstate warfare, defence of the national boundaries, if you like, and perhaps sometimes on our own without our allies. Then, the more predictable or likely operation, which could see British Armed Forces maybe in a number of different theatres, trying to support governments in alliances with our friends and allies when we are trying to take on terrorists.

Michael's point about terrorists actually coming from Pakistan, is an argument I hear all the time. The fact they are not coming from Afghanistan is because we are there. You are right, we do need a strategy for how we can consolidate in Pakistan, the efforts of the Pakistan

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government in tackling al-Qaeda and Taliban insurgents because it is a mortal threat to the Pakistan state, let alone to the conduct of our policy in Afghanistan. These counter-insurgency operations are going to be with us for some considerable time. Because there is no direct threat to our border, it will be harder to win public support for missions that are far away from home in countries that people are not that familiar with, with a foe who is very difficult to pin down and even sometimes to identify.

The job of political leaders is to make the case for those interventions. I do not want to hide from what I think is one of the fundamental issues of our time, that of how we are going to tackle the extremists, the terrorists, who mean us harm. In Afghanistan, we found what they were doing on nuclear, what they were doing on biological chemical weapons and we know they would use those weapons against us.

Theo Farrell It is reinforcing the point, if I may say, about the need for us to be able to do both, of course, the major combat operations, which is not just the resurgence of the state and state threat against UK national security. If you look at the Lebanon war in 2006 and the character of Hezbollah, in the early phase the campaign was a conventional campaign against the Israel Defence Forces. So our future opponents may be insurgent primarily but conduct conventional operations against us.

Ian Kearns Where do the non-military instruments come in? The Secretary of State made the point that it is not in Afghanistan now but used to be before we were there. Mike’s point was that it will just run on and on. After Pakistan, it will be somewhere else. That is a problem of weak states and it is a problem that we cannot address by chasing them around the world with military forces. There is no sign, for example, of the British government thinking about writing the International Development Act to say we can actually use some of the instruments of our A-policy to do more than just attack poverty, all of which we think ought to be attacked. But there are important links between conflict and poverty, and there are important development and aid instruments that we could use

more effectively as part of this strategy for dealing with the security challenge.

Frank Gardner Frustratingly, we are in the last ten minutes. I want to refocus us on the core issue here which is, is Britain making best use of its defence forces? Are we doing the best job that this country can? If you could wave a magic wand, what would you like to see improved in terms of the use of Britain’s forces deployed on operations?

David Clark I would probably return to the disparity in operational capability between European armed forces and the United States and that it is not just about the fact that we spend less money. It is also about the fact that we spend our money extremely badly. If there is to be a future in which we are capable of sustaining operations at a serious level of mobilising taskforces with carriers, of intervening with expeditionary forces in parts of the world far flung from our own shores, then it will have to be done on a much more European level. Part of that will be about moving towards a single market and part of it will be about burden sharing and specialisation and trying to do something to mobilise Europeans to be more actively involved. It has to be done by using the resources that we have much more wisely.

Dominick Donald Regulate the private security company sector. It is not yet clear whether the government likes the private security company sector or not. If it does not like it, put in place regulation that defines where and how it can be used, and it will then insulate itself against some of the consequences of their unsupervised, unregulated use. If, on the other hand, it would like to use the private security company sector – and I would argue that it should, particularly given that we have a terrorist threat, in its essence, an indirect threat, an indirect approach – we can use private security companies as a sort of force multiplier.

John Hutton I think we are not short of resources, so I want to deal with that argument. We have the adequate resources we need to do the job. I think if there is one area that is fundamentally critical, where we have to focus our effort and resources, it is the civilian military strategy and the joins between the two. Modern counterinsurgency operations are absolutely right at the guts of it. My argument today has not been that everything is perfect. It is not. But if you are asking me honestly, where can we do more with greater effect, I think that is the area. I do not think there is anyone here who would express any word of criticism, I hope, of the professionalism and courage of the British soldiers. They are a phenomenal body of people and they do a brilliant job, but I think it is joining up this very complicated suite of tools and instruments and policy. That is where the heat is. That is where we have to do better.

Tom Hall What I would love to do is to look at the balance of investment between current operations and equipment with the support infrastructure that has to

ensure availability. We have started to address a lot of the practices within that support infrastructure around demand planning, supply planning, procurement, those sorts of activities but the investment is not going to be behind them to make sure that you maximise the efficiency out of it. You can get more for less if you buy more effectively and if you supply more effectively and you do not hold stock in places where you do not need to hold stock. There are practical things that can be done inside the defence establishment to provide that kit and that availability to a better extent and to make efficiencies across industry as well.

Theo Farrell I would echo the Secretary of State's comments. I think the key thing is to better improve the integration of civil/military parts of the campaign, both in terms of the inter-agency process in Whitehall, which I think needs a lot more work, and the difference in cultures of planning, and so on between the agencies, but also crucially in the theatre. I would return to my suggestion to better integrate civilians to the provincial reconstruction team in pre-deployment training, particularly in the MRX, which is only two weeks long for brigades, before they rotate out.

Francis Tusa To go back to a point that Amyas made earlier about a partnership and so forth, he said Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS) is alive and kicking. Over the past three weeks, going round about nine companies in the UK, the one thing I found is that DIS is being stifled massively. It is a shame because it is the only thing that will keep our system working. The fundamental rationale behind DIS is absolutely correct, but there are enough backbiters in Abbey Wood who want to see it killed. It is being stifled at so many levels. It is going to cost the armed forces kit and it is going to cost the taxpayer money. I would love to see DIS properly put forward. At the moment, there are a number of support contracts that are just being pushed to one side.

If someone says to the army, "Look, if you want to get value for money you have to sign up for ten years", they

say, "No, not interested." I would love to see DIS implemented. It was on the road and it has now been pushed backwards. It is a shame.

Amyas Morse I think we started building a way of working closely in industry and we have made great progress. I do not agree with some of the remarks just made, but what I think is that it is definitely really fully open, and on a systems-integrated basis with a lot of our suppliers we could work better together than we do now.

If we actually allow information to drive our work together, we will get more efficient and faster than even we are, and we are improving.

Michael Clarke In terms of effectiveness of troops on the ground, I endorse the civil/military point that has been made. Other than that, at the MoD level, I would say that the thing that would make the greatest difference is the key enablers, more engineers, armed reconnaissance and intelligence. It is always the enablers who are the most overworked, not necessarily the infantry as such.

At the broader political level, the thing that would make the most difference is political understanding that what we have now got in combat terms is a very good one-shot force. We use it once, either in a war or in a relatively prolonged operation, but then it has to come home and recover for a few years. It is a one-shot force. It cannot carry on with high-level combat operations. It is a political assumption that we have to think about. If that changed then I think we would use our forces in a wiser way.

David Wright Public perception and public support for the armed forces is not as it should be, and I think we should build on the excellent work that the serviceman does. We should build on the excellent work that the healthcare system and support systems do for the servicemen, both in the field and back here, and use that as an exemplar for the rest of the country.

Ian Kearns I would also endorse the civil/military point that has been made. First, in terms of communications on the ground in the theatre, and communications of civilians and military, from the people I talk to, they continuously tell me that those communications are not where they need to be.

The second point is that there would be unity of command, unity of command under civilian leadership in theatre, which I do not think we have at the moment. I would extend that all the way back to the centre of government, including at cabinet level. That is why I plugged one of our recommendations in our recent Commission Interim Report, to have one cabinet minister in charge of security and diplomacy, effectively, in major conflict situations, looking after the cross-Whitehall contribution that is taking place on the ground and also being responsible for international diplomacy to drum up the support we need.

Frank Gardner Thank you all for coming.

We should build on the excellent work that the healthcare system and support systems do for the servicemen, both in the field and back here
David Wright



Support Chain Vulnerability



GETTY IMAGES

Prolonged operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have brought into sharp focus the need for radically new processes in back-room support for the UK military to deliver sustained capability and to meet Urgent Operational Requirements (UORs).

In the short-term, these processes have been very successful, but the long-term implications of supporting these requirements – such as the provision of spares, repairs and replacements – have yet to be fully addressed. The ongoing support of UORs will place increasing stress on the military support chain at a time of economic downturn and uncertainty over future military initiatives. Rising demand for military capability and equipment reliability at lower costs creates further tension and vulnerability in the support chain.

To address this vulnerability, sound practice in the commercial world would be to simplify, secure and seek efficiencies from the supply chain. Adopting this practice in a military context is more demanding but no less necessary. The merger of Ministry of Defence (MoD) departments to form the Defence Equipment and Support Department (DE&S) was a major step forward, but further integration of financial, planning and commercial processes are much needed. An integrated forward demand and financial forecasting system would allow the MoD to contract with industry with greater certainty over longer periods and maximise contractual incentives to drive continual improvement.

The military support chain has to deal with uncertainty over funding, delays to programmes, unpredictability of demand, long and detailed competitive processes – all of which drive up costs and reins in improvements.

The Defence Industrial Strategy started to address these issues by proposing longer-term partnering arrangements with major equipment providers. There are good examples of through-life availability based contracts now in operation, such as the in-service support of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, which won the 2008 Chartered Institute of Purchasing & Supply Best Public Sector Procurement Programme award. Longer-term contracts and collaborative relationships with industry that flow down through the support chain enhance its stability and realise efficiencies through closer working, simplification of requirements and clear information flows.

Progress has also been made through the use of optimised support planning to understand the forward demand for equipment and spares and to align the support chain to deliver those requirements that will best improve availability to the frontline. This work needs to be rolled out across all support areas to allow forward demand planning across capabilities thereby facilitating battle group optimisation.

Defence ministries in France and The Netherlands have understood the need for an integrated approach to planning and are both investing in single enterprise-wide systems. The DE&S is considering options through the Future Logistics Information Services programme, to integrate the legacy of systems currently in operation. This work should focus on the business intelligence required to improve operations and reduce support costs.

To simplify, secure and seek efficiencies in the military support chain, further investment is required in the people, the process and the systems. The improved availability of equipment, through a secure and stable industrial base, is a very real possibility, and at the heart of supporting sustained enduring deployed operations affordably. It is that improved support chain that enables our armed forces to be that Force for Good.



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