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British Security Policy

Merging Big Power with Human Security through Joined-Up National Strategy

British security policy is at a crossroads. Contemporary British power is placing the burden of leadership upon the British. However the gap between what Britain needs to do and its ability to do it is a profound challenge for London. In response the British are re-crafting security policy in pursuit of a vital end-state-strategic stabilisation. That means better organisation of all national agencies through a comprehensive security policy, reaching out by the armed forces to civilian ministries and agencies within government and the creation of broad partnerships with like minded states. The US, NATO and the EU provide the first order pool of such partners, but such is the complexity faced by the British that other partners are sought, not least amongst them Switzerland. Fifty years after the Suez Crisis, when Britain effectively handed national strategy over to the US, a question remains; are the British up to it?

Julian S. Lindley-French *

Introduction

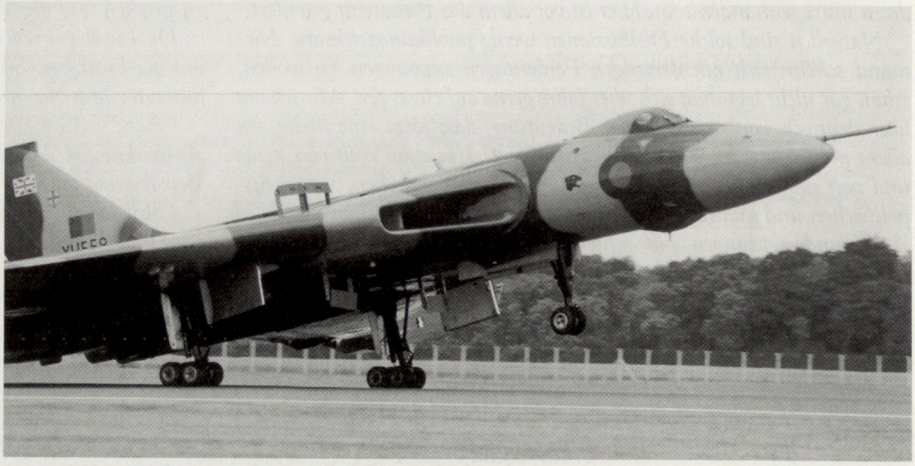
Security policy is not defence policy. The latter being simply a component of the former. This is an important distinction when considering both the scope of Britain's current security efforts and its attempts to weld all national instruments into a joined-up national strategy. Moreover, British security policy is at a crossroads. Put simply, Britain's relative power, its role and its security tradition are imposing the burden of leadership upon it at a critical juncture in the evolution of international security. Equally, limits upon British power are all too apparent to those that wield it and reinforce the need for effective organisation of the security effort with partners and allies through an over-arching internationalist security policy of which the role of the armed forces, albeit important, is but part. **Consequently, after fifty years of following the United States a new British strategic concept is emerging that will necessarily see a re-evaluation of the relationship between the stabilisation of world security the British seek and the means and end of British security policy.**

The rehabilitation of British strategy will require a profound change of mindset on the part of those responsible for it. That will not be easy. Since the mid-1950s much of Britain's security effort has been necessarily focused on the security and stability of Europe, primarily under American leadership. This was for two reasons. First, with the collapse of the European Defence Community (EDC) in 1954 Britain made a commitment to the peacetime physical defence of Continental Europe that was unprecedented in British history. Second, following the fiasco of the 1956 Anglo-French intervention in Suez, London lost all pretence to strategic self-confidence as de-colonisation accelerated and effectively handed over British grand strategy to the United States.

Today, those twin pillars of Britain's national strategy are under the most profound of reviews, driven by the challenges posed by a world in which both the nature and focus of power is changing rapidly. However, given the fact of contemporary British power there is increasing realisation in London that Britain must play a more pronounced security role if it is to assure the security of its citizens and state institutions in a complex and dangerous world. Moreover, the sense that Britain must re-consider its security policy goals is reinforced by concerns both about the nature and direction of American security policy and the need somehow to introduce a degree of strategic sobriety into EU security and defence that too often seems disconnected from the world around it.

Equally, 21st century Britain is not 19th century Britain. It would be impossible for a British Foreign Secretary to say as did Lord Palmerston in the 1840s that Britain has neither permanent friends, nor permanent enemies, only interests. Indeed, today Britain does indeed have permanent friends, but no permanent enemies, and like all European states the mix of liberal-democratic values with state interests results in a complex set of goals and objectives that in turn generate security policy. Consequently, Britain's motives for action can be said to be threefold; normative, self-interest and the fulfilment of legal obligations. British security policy is thus focused primarily on the extension of human security as a way of enhancing British national security.

The United Kingdom also shares and suffers from some of the same challenges as Switzerland. Like Switzerland, Britain is often under-estimated, which is due in no small part to those in the British media who seem to delight in exaggerating British 'decline'. Like Switzerland, the UK is often accused of being a 'poor' European, although who decides is a debate in its own right. Like Switzerland, Britain is in fact very serious about security, far more than most Europeans, but retains its sovereign right to apply its efforts in the manner, and through the channels, it regards as most likely to be effective – UN, EU, NATO, G8, the Commonwealth, coalitions of the willing or purely national efforts. As stated in the March 2006 Foreign and Commonwealth Office White Paper 'Active Diplomacy for a Changing World', 'An international system based on effective multilateral institutions and shared values has long been



During the Cold War the United Kingdom had a strong strategic nuclear deterrence. One pillar of the nuclear triad at that time was the Royal Air Force's Bomber Command which had – among others – *Vulcan* bombers in its inventory. This picture of a retired Vulcan bomber was taken at RAF Fairford in 1989. Foto: J. Kürsener

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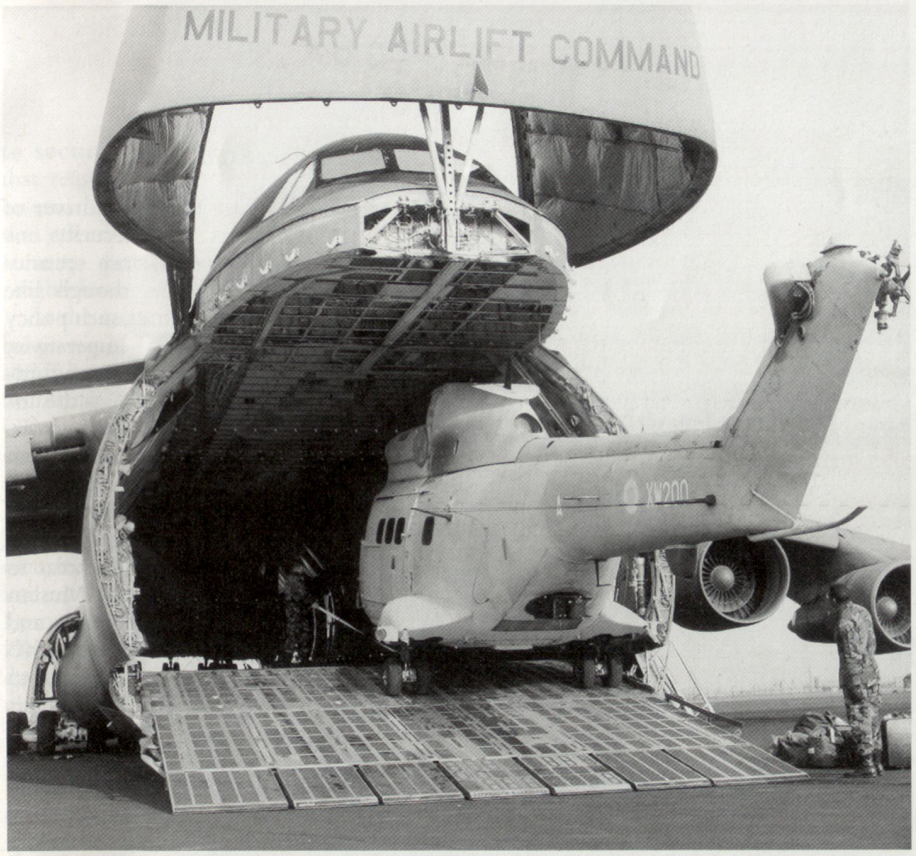


The United Kingdom always had and still has a very special and close relationship with the United States and its Armed Forces. During the first Gulf War in 1991 both countries were building a strong alliance against Saddam Hussein. Here a US Military Airlift Command *C-5 Galaxy* is loading British *Puma* transport helicopters at RAF Brize Norton to fly them to the Persian Gulf. Foto: Royal Air Force

a cornerstone of British foreign policy. In an age of interdependence, it is more necessary than ever. But the scale and the complexity of today's challenges are putting pressure on a system designed in a different age. We must continue to lead efforts to reform these institutions to ensure they remain effective and respected'.[1]

However, the sheer scale of the British security effort is markedly bigger than that of Switzerland, given the relative size of the two countries and two very different security traditions. Indeed, it is worth stating some of the basic facts at the outset. According to the 2006 IISS Military Balance, Britain has a population of 60.5 million people, with some 9 million Britons living abroad. With a GDP of $2.22 trillion Britain has the world's fourth largest economy. In 2006, the British defence budget is $50.2bn, which represents some 25% of the whole of Europe, with wholly professional armed forces. Switzerland, on the other hand, has a population of 7.5 million, with a GDP in 2005 of $367bn. In 2005 Switzerland spent $3.82bn on defence and whilst the Swiss Armed Forces (mainly a militia) number some 220,000, active British forces number 216,890 plus 241,520 reserves. Consequently, the British could put almost 436,000 in the field in an extreme national emergency.[2]

And yet all power is relative and, however impressive the statistics may appear, as the Americans are discovering to their cost, the sheer scale and complexity of the challenges faced by the West is of such magnitude that power can be as much a curse as a blessing. Indeed, many Europeans seem to have decided that given the responsibilities power imposes in such a world, the most cost-effective strategy is thus to avoid it. The emphasis for those for whom avoidance is not an option is to promote the most efficient use of national strategy, policy and resources through as creative and comprehensive an approach to security as is possible. Therefore, **this article looks at how British security policy is made, the change with which it must cope and the new Comprehensive Approach that the UK is forging for the generation of contemporary security effect.**

British Strategic Priorities

Security policy serves national strategy, which in turn is established at the supreme political level and involves the establishment of strategic priorities. In turn, defence policy supports security policy of which it is one component amongst several, albeit vitally important. Thus, according to the 2006 Foreign and Commonwealth Office White Paper, British security policy is organised around the fulfilment of nine strategic priorities:[3]

1. Making the world safer from global terrorism and weapons of mass destruction;
2. Reducing the harm to the UK from international crime, including drug trafficking, people smuggling and money laundering;
3. Preventing and resolving conflict through a strong international system;
4. Building an effective and globally competitive EU in a secure neighbourhood;
5. Supporting the UK economy and business through an open and expanding global economy, science and innovation and secure energy supplies;
6. Promoting sustainable development and poverty reduction underpinned by human rights, democracy, good governance and protection of the environment;
7. Managing migration and combating illegal immigration;
8. Delivering high-quality support for British nationals abroad, in normal times and in crises; and
9. Ensuring the security and good governance of the UK's Overseas Territories.

The making of **British security policy involves a range of actors and stakeholders under the leadership of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet Office and increasingly incorporates the work of both international and domestic ministries as part of a new Comprehensive Approach to security policy.** Such co-ordination and cohesion is driven by two factors. First, the military can but play a small part in overall mission success in places such as Afghanistan and Iraq where societal stability matters as much as balances of power in establishing security. Second, British security policy is founded on the aim of projecting just influence through both cooptive and, on occasions, coercive means. Such a role is necessarily reliant upon strong public support which in turn emphasises the need to protect society by making it as resilient as possible to the type of catastrophic penetration prevented by British authorities in August 2006.

The three international ministries most intimately involved with British security policy are necessarily the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Ministry of Defence (MoD) and the Department for International Development (DfID). Whereas, the ever-more important role of homeland security is reflected in the prominent security role played by domestic ministries, particularly the Home Office

[1] Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2006 'Active Diplomacy in a Changing World' (London: Crown) p. 6.
[2] IISS (2006) 'The Military Balance 2006' (London: Routledge).
[3] Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2006 'Active Diplomacy in a Changing World' (London: Crown) p. 28.

During the Cold War the United Kingdom had a strong permanent military force deployed to Germany. One British Army corps was responsible for an entire sector along the inner German border in the Hannover area. Here *Chieftain* combat tanks aboard flatbed cars are sent to the exercise area of "Spearpoint" in 1984 in Northern Germany. Foto: NATO

(Interior Ministry) and their Scottish equivalents. Equally, given the centrality of free trade to Britain's security and wealth the Department of Trade and Industry also plays an important role.

The Making of British Security Policy

The making of British security policy is far more European in its formation than, say, American. This is first and foremost because the **Pentagon is far more influential in the formation of American security policy than the British Ministry of Defence in British security policy. Indeed, there is no European country in which the defence ministry has greater influence over security policy than the foreign ministry**. This can partly explain why in the eyes of many Europeans Americans tend to over-militarise security, whereas in the eyes of many Americans Europeans tend to over-civilianise it. In the absence of true national strategy it could be said that Britain 'solved' this dilemma in a rather novel way by allowing the FCO and the MoD to be 'captured' by the main objectives of their respective efforts. Consequently, the FCO tends to be overly focused on Europe and the European Union and the Ministry of Defence overly focused on the US and American armed forces. This is again because British security policy went through a period during which it was very reactive. Consequently, much of the contemporary debate about how best to re-establish a national strategy necessarily concerns the harmonising of effort and replacing the European reflex of the FCO and the American reflex of the MoD with a British reflex for both.

Furthermore, the 'reglobalisation' of British security policy is also being reinforced by the other influences. Naturally, the professional international class – policy advisors, diplomats and intelligence officials – tend to look at security at its broadest but from a very bureaucratic angle. Indeed, much energy is expended in ensuring that outside ideas fit existing policy. Such exclusivity is partly due to the British bureaucratic tradition of 'not rocking the boat', but it is a tradition exacerbated over recent years by the gap between spin and reality. At the same time, external policy and academic advisors are slowly gaining greater influence which is helping to re-invigorate the renewed debate about security policy at its most broad and, in particular, the role of defence therein. Moreover, the conflation of values with interests has also increased the influence of internal national stakeholder groups over foreign and security policy. Unlike Churchill's assertion upon hearing of the entry of the United States into World War Two that victory was simply a question of the sustained application of overwhelming power, **success today requires a much more nuanced concept of power. Indeed, 'sensitive power' might best describe Britain's approach to its contemporary security policy. That is why, in addition to the use of national strategic instruments, the role of soft power tools, such as aid and development and information and media strategies are integral parts of achieving both tactical and strategic level effect.**

East of Suez ... Again?

However, the most important driver of security policy remains the security environment it must serve. British security policy is no different, even though like every other democratic partner, such policy also reflects internal political imperatives, spending choices and the need for affordable security investment, as well as the influence of powerful individuals and actors. The main external drivers of British security policy today are particularly poignant given events in Iraq and Afghanistan, the bombings that took place in London on 7 July, 2005 and the August 2006 threat to transatlantic airliners from British Muslim extremists. Both the 2006 Foreign and Commonwealth White Paper and the 2003 Defence White Paper list the challenges to Britain's security as *inter alia* the dangers posed by international terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and possible access thereto by extreme groups. The list also includes regional and potentially global implications of failing states, the impact of social and demographic pressures and religious and ethnic tensions. Equally, **the British are increasingly exercised by the re-emergence of state competition driven by Asian nationalisms and the search for energy. It is hoped that China will strengthen the international system, but concerns persist that it will not.** It is also hoped that the recent tendency of Russia, to exercise what might best be termed a 'Soviet-lite' strategy, might be assuaged. Whereas five years ago British national strategy was almost wholly focused on strategic terror and the prevention thereof, **today the clouds of renewed great power competition can just be discerned creeping over the horizon of the British strategic landscape.**

It is the role that Britain (and indeed France) plays in such a landscape that separates the UK from other European states. Britain is very much a status quo power, an architect of the international system and thus a guardian of the system of institutionalised security governance that the West spent so long endeavouring to create. Consequently, **unlike many European states that believe they can remain below the radar screen of threat, Britain (and France) is too powerful to hide. Membership of organisations such as the EU and NATO naturally imposes the strategic responsibilities of the most powerful in return for the protection that such power can also afford. This drives Britain and France to continually seek partnership in spite of the political differences that so often keep them apart. At the same time, like France, Britain is too weak**

to secure its interests unilaterally. For that reason, Britain places great emphasis on ensuring international institutions function effectively and on promoting effective security partnerships with friends and neighbours.

At the same time, Britain is not the global power it once was, if such power is the ability to influence global politics through unilateral action. Rather, like France, the UK is a regional power with global interests and is thus forced to make choices about where best to invest its effort given British strategic priorities. Consequently, Britain has of late invested most of its security policy energy in places where its interests are most likely to be affected; Europe, the Gulf and the Mediterranean. However, as the world gets bigger by the day the return to a global role is necessarily under consideration. This is reflected in the revisions to security policy that took place in the wake of the attacks on the US after 11 September, 2001 to re-shape British capabilities and capacity to counter international terrorism and to close the havens of support for terrorism.

The First Axis of Strategic Effect: International Strategy

Whilst the legitimising role that institutions play remains central to British strategic effect, London recognises that for the UK to contribute fully to a stable world it must retain significant 'sea room' for political and diplomatic manoeuvre. That said making international institutions work still remains central to British national strategy and thus security policy. This renaissance of national power and strategy is changing the role of institutions in British security policy from that of ends in themselves, to that of enabler (or otherwise) of British strategic effect. Consequently, **British security policy seeks to exploit four lines of operation; a close strategic partnership with the United States, permanent membership of the UN Security Council (UNSC), strategic leadership through NATO, the EU, the G8 and the Commonwealth, as well as leading or participating in ad hoc coalitions where necessary.**

However, for hard security and defence NATO remains the cornerstone of British security and defence policy. This is primarily because NATO was first and foremost a British invention and because the Alliance affords London the greatest strategic influence both within the organisation and beyond. Indeed, **NATO remains the only effective collective defence guarantor for Europe and through the link with the US ensures European stability.** Moreover, as a proven mechanism for the generation of inter-state military effect, and an example of effective democratic control of armed forces at the international level, the **Alliance is slowly developing in line with British thinking that NATO must act as a mechanism for the co-ordination of all like-minded states that seek to ensure stability and moderate state behaviour in a troubled world.** Indeed, the West is no longer a place, more of an idea.

Much of the work at NATO therefore involves changing the mindsets and military capabilities and capacities necessary for the Alliance to undertake such a role. That is why Britain places so much emphasis on the development of sustainable and deployable military capabilities through smart transformation and smart organisation as part of a comprehensive approach to strategic security and stability that includes strong links with existing partners and forging links with new state partners and civilian actors. Experience that is being reinforced by the leadership role British forces play in southern Iraq and under NATO command in Afghanistan.

Britain has also taken a leading role in the development of both the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). To re-iterate, London is rightly sensitive to the accusation that Britain is a poor European because its efforts, particularly in the realm of European security and defence have been second to none. **Unfortunately, too often Britain has been attacked by France for not ascribing to (and thus paying for) French ambitions to use the EU as a counter-balance to American power and as an extension of French policy. This is something that Britain rightly regards as dangerous and pointless. It is not the Americans that the Europeans need to balance and contain, but rather the systemic instability the world faces, strategic terror and possibly new actors, such as Iran that seek to destabilise regions or interests vital to European security.** In such circumstances partnership with the United States through NATO remains central to British thinking. Consequently, Britain wants ESDP to develop as complementary to NATO. The British will never, therefore, accept an ESDP that actively seeks to compete or undermine the strategic relationship with the US. First, such a policy would be wrong in political principle. Second, with so many Europeans in danger of tipping into Euro-isolationism such a policy would result in vastly weaker security for Europeans. Equally, London does accept that Europeans have the right and need to influence American security policy. This position helps to explain why the British place so much importance on credible military capabilities and London's determination to remain the indispensable ally of the world's only superpower.

Consequently, **Britain seeks a more cohesive, state-led Common Foreign and Security Policy focused on the European Council that can rehabili-**

British forces have remained committed to many parts of the world, despite the closure of many bases abroad, particularly in the Far and Middle East. In 1982 Prime Minister Thatcher sent a strong military force to the South Atlantic to retake the Falklands Islands which previously hat been attacked by Argentine forces. A paratrooper of the UK Land forces secures a bridge head on the Falklands. Foto: UK MoD

The Royal Air Forces has always been a strong element of the UK Armed Forces. Substantial numbers of sorties have been flown in the Balkans and in both Wars in the Persian Gulf (1991 and 2003). Here two *Tornado F3* from RAF Coningsby are refuelled by a VC-10 tanker aircraft somewhere over the North Sea in 1989.
Foto: J. Kürsener

tate Europeans as serious security actors with a focus on security and stability in and around Europe. For that reason the British support pragmatic efforts to improve decision-making within the EU, particularly for crisis management, improved cohesion between the Council and the European Commission as part of a European Comprehensive Approach and foster a realistic interpretation of the Petersberg Tasks (rescue and humanitarian missions, peacekeeping and the role of combat troops in peacemaking) in light of current security challenges by strengthening both military and civilian capacities and capabilities as part of Headline Goal 2010.

Furthermore, the UK also supports the development of a Long-Term Vision paper (LTV) to consider Europe's changing role in the world and the development of the European Defence Agency (EDA) to make procurement and development of advanced security and military systems more affordable. Britain has also played a leading role in EU military operations in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) and Bosnia-Herzegovina as well as a lesser role in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The United Nations remains central to British security policy. For that reason the UK takes its position as a Permanent Member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) extremely seriously. Indeed, for London the UN will and must remain the forum through which the international community debates security matters of the first order and Britain is determined to see that the organisation remains so. Consequently, British armed forces remain at high readiness to support the UN, normally through direct action upon request of the UN, such as in Sierra Leone in 2000, or in support of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). Equally, there has been some debate over UNSC permanent membership with one school of thought suggesting that it reflects power in 1945, not 2006. This is plainly wrong. As the world's fourth richest country, with probably the world's second most capable military, the United Kingdom has every right to be a Permanent Member (as has France) if the UNSC is what it is meant to be – a security council founded on security responsibility organised those with both the ability and will to act in support of UNSC resolutions. Indeed, those who seek to turn the UNSC into an Executive Committee of the UN based on other criteria, such as size of population, must also recognise that in a world still dominated by great state power, it is the great states that continue to drive much of the change in this world and that have the greatest responsibility for change management. Britain might one day have to give up its permanent seat … but not yet.

The Second Axis of Strategic Effect: National Strategy

As Britain stood alone against the Nazis in 1940 Winston Churchill looked across the Atlantic and asked of America the tools so that the British could 'finish the job'. America responded and in time the war was won. **Today, Britain also believes that if one gives people the right tools they will 'finish the job' and a significant part of British security policy is found on that simple premise.** Indeed, if institutions and partners are international enablers of British security policy, the British see themselves as enablers of others. To that end, there are also a range of national enablers that London believes can enhance Britain's ability to shape the international environment. As discussed above, **national strategy is today a function of three instruments; diplomatic, economic and military. Through its security policy Britain is thus making a conscious effort to better fashion all three instruments into a strategic tool.** Specifically the fulfilment of the national security aim is the responsibility of Cabinet Office which in turn co-ordinates the objectives and aims of all relevant government departments to enable London to leverage better effect in complex security environments. This is particularly apparent at times of crisis or imminent terrorist attack when the COBRA (Cabinet Office Briefing Room A) process is engaged or the JTAC (Joint Terrorism Assessment Centre) is convened through MI5.

Furthermore, **lessons learned from past operations have reinforced the need for many disciplines and agencies to be incorporated into overall planning and response if security objectives are to be achieved and sustained. What is emerging is known as the Comprehensive Approach (CA), a conscious cross-agency effort to generate sustained effect as part of strategic change management through the protection and projection of all appropriate national instruments and expertise.** The Comprehensive Approach is in effect internal coalition-building to

realise an effective early-response, crisis avoidance and consequence management continuum. Consequently, as with all coalitions, judgements have to be made about composition thereof depending on the location, nature and scope of the challenge. In effect, by providing a conceptual framework for the better application of cohesive British influence the aim is to forestall some of the normal turf-battles that take place between very different agencies of state when forced to work together. This is not simply a question of egos and practice. Much of the debate comes down to doctrine as different ministries all have a certain way of going about their business and where one stands does indeed dictate to a significant extent where one sits, particularly during a crisis.

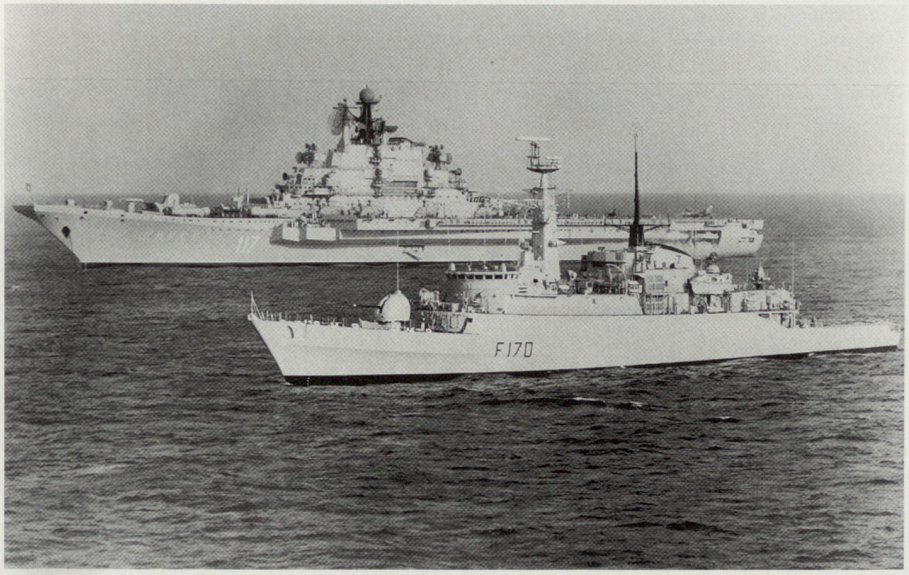
For that reason, the Comprehensive Approach emphasises flexibility, with government department or agencies being a supported or supporting entity depending on circumstance. Consequently, whilst military planning and doctrine tend to be to the fore, given the military's experience in the generation of projected effect over time and distance that need not always be the case.

The Comprehensive Approach is itself driven by a comprehensive view as to what entails security in the modern world given the firm British belief in human security as the end-state to which national strategy should work. Britain fully understands the vital importance of human aspiration and the responsibility of leading state actors to meet such aspirations. That is why, for example, the UK was a leading advocate of the UN's Responsibility to Protect (RtP) agenda. In a world that has become globalised precisely as a consequence of the supremacy of the Western system of security and democratic governance the desire to be free from violence, want, fear as well as access to sufficient basic needs is central to Britain's concept of being a force for good in the world and thus London has committed the national security effort to that end. Contemporary Britain does not seek power for power's sake, but rather recognises the burden that such power places on any leading state.

For that reason the Comprehensive Approach emphasises reinforcing all aspects of societal security in the battle to prevent the instability that undermines security; rule of law, education, legal commercial activity, humanitarian and health systems, open information, civilian controlled armed forces, open economies, representative diplomacy and sound and just governance.

The Role of British Armed Forces

The UK Defence Aim is 'To deliver security for the people of the United Kingdom and its Overseas Territories by defending them, including against terrorism, and to act as a force for good by strengthening international peace and stability'.[4] That is no mean challenge given the contemporary sources of insecurity that affect British interests and values and those of its partners. Indeed, a glance at Britain's military commitments reinforce the challenge policy-makers and planners alike face in making best use of Britain's small armed forces in pursuit of strategic security goals.



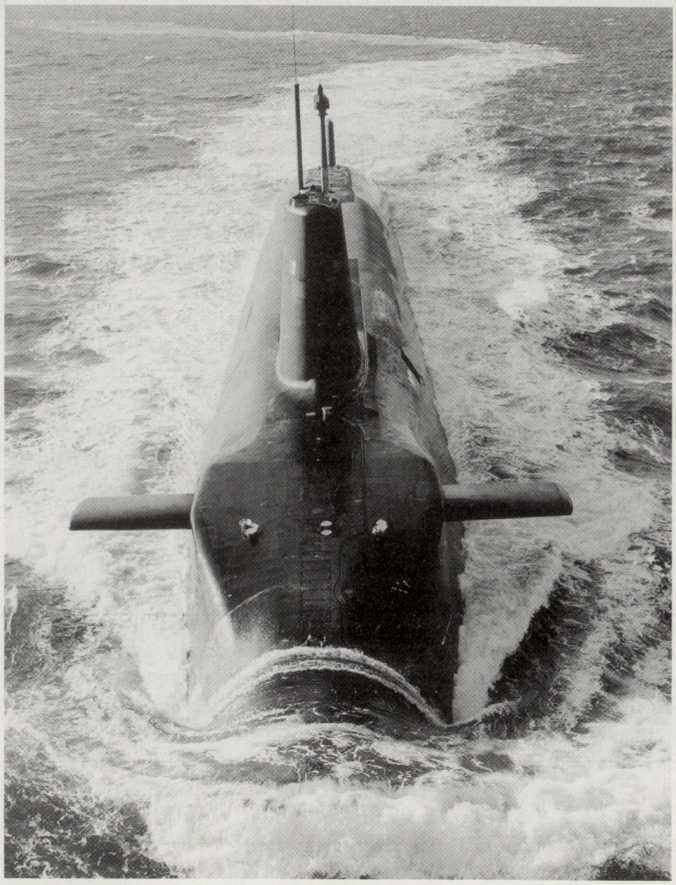
The Royal Navy always kept a number of ships deployed to the Mediterranean thus providing an important contribution to the security of the Southern flank of NATO. Here *HMS Antelope*, a type 21 frigate, keeps an eye on the Soviet helicopter carrier Minsk off Libya in 1979. Foto: Royal Navy Photo

Therefore, given the relationship between the aims of British security policy, the commitments they generate and the scale, capacity and capability of the tools and resources that can be brought to bear the importance of making sound strategic judgements cannot be over-estimated. British security policy is designed to create cost-effective strategic effect. To that end, strategic judgements are at the heart of the British security policy process and involve how best to leverage effect in pursuit of British interests. Moreover, strategic leadership is a prime factor in British security policy, either to influence American policy or to shape and lead the policies of other key partners. For that reason the **centre of gravity of British strategic military planning is to maintain armed forces at the high-end of effect founded on Very High and High Readiness Postures, but capable of multi-tasking at other levels of conflict intensity.** This is in marked contrast to American forces that, because of their tradition of combat specialisation, tend to generate far less force impact per effective at most levels of engagement below the most intensive.

Strategic judgements also support the defence aim and the role of the armed forces therein and emphasise British leadership in the military aspects of security. In particular, British armed forces excel at advanced expeditionary operations and such qualities are evident in the role assigned by government to them. As leaders or main partners of combined and joint expeditionary operations founded, firstly, on an adaptable and expandable force structure that is configured to meet the most frequent types of operations and secondly, underpinned by sufficient capability to meet the most demanding operations. The generation of effect along both the capacity and capability axes thus requires a series of further judgements because it is evident that there is never likely to be enough British forces to cover all the commitments a country such as the UK generates. Consequently, the scaling of forces is designed to meet four criteria based on assessment of strategic and standing commitments and the likelihood of concurrent and contingent operations. To that end, the British defence planning concept foresees British armed forces undertaking three concurrent mission scenarios. These include one medium scale and two small scale operations and one large scale and one small scale operation.

Equally, the British still face significant challenges if the armed forces are to play the role assigned to them by British security policy. The professional British Army

[4] UK Defence Statistics at www.dasa.mod.uk/natstats/ukds/2005/pdf.



The UK Armed Forces had a particular relationship with the United States of America, in the domain of nuclear deterrence. Whereas Britain built its own ballistic missile submarines (SSBN), the missile technology was usually provided by the United States. The most recent generation of the SSBN force numbers four boats, here the *HMS Vanguard*, the lead ship of this class. It is equipped with 16 of the Trident D5 missiles with each up to eight MIRV warheads. Foto: *HMS Neptune*, Royal Navy

is some 108,100 strong, with some 7000 additional Royal Marines. Of those, some 9,000 are engaged in Iraq leading Multinational Division SE, whilst some 3,300 are leading the NATO Security Force in Afghanistan in addition to the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT).[5] There are continuing deployments in Bosnia and Kosovo, as well as Sierra Leone and standing commitments in Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands. The natural proclivity of the British is to rightly maintain forces that can work with those of the Americans at the high-end of military effect. Such a goal requires major investment in high-end capabilities, such as network centric warfare, advanced communications and stand-off precision munitions. At the same time, both British security policy and British tradition tend to emphasise constabulary and counter-insurgency capacity. Indeed, **the modern British Army was founded as an imperial police force. It is precisely this merging of advanced capability with muddy boots and counter-insurgency doctrine, allied to centuries of experience conducting advanced expeditionary operations that makes the British so attractive to other partners.** Unfortunately, even with a defence budget the size of the UK finding a balance between a critical mass of expensive high-end force (capability) and sufficient projectable and sustainable numbers (capacity) is proving a challenge, particularly as the unit costs of equipment escalates.

[5] Author's own research.

Consequently, the armed forces become necessarily smaller the higher the conflict intensity focus of military planning. This is creating force planning blight and a capability-capacity crunch as the British armed forces find themselves leading ever more policing and constabulary operations in dangerous places, or undertaking stabilisation and reconstruction in the absence of sufficient partners or civilian capacities … or both. The demand is thus for ever higher capabilities and ever greater capacity. Given other demands on the national exchequer is a crunch that will not be easily resolved. There are three further problems. First, the contingency costs of operations the world over are increasingly being borne by the Ministry of Defence, rather than HM Treasury (Finance Ministry). Second, operational tempo is leading to extended operational cycles that, in turn increases pressure on military personnel and their families. Third, there is ever-greater reliance on the use of reserves and volunteer reserves. Steps are being taken to resolve these challenges, **but even with a headline force that is over 40 % deployable, given the need to rotate forces and re-fit and upgrade equipment, it is evident that the British are at the limits of the operational envelope.** Moreover, such pressures could also have potentially significant knock-on effects, such as retention of key personnel, particularly the technical grades, and may have downstream implications for big ticket equipment projects, such as HMS Queen Elizabeth and HMS Prince of Wales, the two proposed global-reach fleet aircraft carriers.

Future Challenges for Future British Security Policy

Britain remains an immensely powerful actor in the world and one that is often under-estimated by partners and adversaries alike. There is also a tendency to imagine that British policy is static, be it the so-called Special Relationship with the US, its role in Europe or the wider world. For example, **it has become a popular cliché on this side of the Channel to parody the geographical isolation of Britain as being representative of the British themselves. In fact, Britain is probably the most internationalist of all Europeans with a far better grasp of, and understanding for, change in the world than many Continental Europeans** who seem to believe that the only change that matters takes place in Europe over Europe and its shape.

Equally, **it is certainly the case that after the 1956 Suez Crisis Britain effectively handed its grand strategy**

Despite shrinking numbers, the Royal Navy still deploys of a substantial number of surface units, including an impressive amphibious projection force. This latter also includes the amphibious helicopter carrier *HMS Ocean*. It can carry up to 830 Royal Marines and 12–18 helicopters. Foto: J. Kürsener

over to the US and thereafter spent fifty years either reacting to American grand strategy in the wider world or French European strategy in the 'Euro-world'. That is now changing. Britain is slowly restoring its national strategy, a process that can arguably be said to have started back in 1982 with the military victory over the Argentineans in the Falklands, a stunning all arms military victory which involved the longest sea-borne invasion in history and restored to the British some of the sense of pride that had been lost in the aftermath of Suez.

There is a further powerful reason why Britain should attempt such a role. Controversial though it may be no other leading Western state is currently capable of sound grand strategy at what is a tipping point in international relations. **US strategy has become dangerously one-dimensional, particularly in the pivotal Middle East. France is consumed by an excessive debate over an exaggerated sense of decline. Germany is still effectively isolationist as its internal checks and balances continue to give the past an eloquent voice when it comes to the shaping of a national strategy. The rest of Europe dithers between inadequacy and irrelevance** too obsessed with the architectural minutiae of political Europe to be effective security actors. And yet the world moves on ...

Equally, Britain too must recognise its own limitations and constraints. The task of welding British institutions, ministries and agencies into a single tool for the pursuit of national strategy will not be easy. Each has a long tradition of doing things in a certain way and doubtless bureaucratic politics and resistance will be encountered. The real challenge for this and future British Governments will thus be the extent to which they can force through the Comprehensive Approach. The tendency when faced with powerful internal opposition will be to desist and resort to that time-honoured British strategic tradition – muddling through.

During the Cold War UK forces also provided elements to defend NATO's northern flank. Many times UK forces participated in exercises in Norway such as this *Wessex* helicopter carrying Marines into Norway during the exercise 'Strong Express' in 1972.
Foto: UK MoD

Furthermore, convincing the Americans that increased British strategic 'sea room' will be in their interests will not be easy because doubtless such autonomy will lead to a more openly critical London. Part of the post-Suez sweetener the Americans offered Britain was access to American strategic enablers and, of course, the US seaborne nuclear deterrent. That saved the UK the equivalent of 10–15% per annum on its defence budget compared with France and has afforded Britain a strategic defence policy on the cheap, albeit at the cost of greatly reduced British strategic autonomy.

However, perhaps the most pressing question concerns the British themselves. After fifty years of 'followership' are the British elite any longer up to the task? Or, as with so much of British political life of late, has substance been lost for ever to the seeming never-ending obsession with spin and image? The world is about to find out.

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