





# Expeditionary Warfare in the Age of Global Terrorism:

## A Critical Assessment of Britain's War against Al Qaeda

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The war against Al Qaeda and its allies may well become the defining conflict of our age. Certainly it is cited as evidence of a transformation of war that is sweeping away older modes of warfare.<sup>2</sup> In theory at least 9/11 represented something new in the spectrum of conflict in the sense that the attack was planned and orchestrated by a trans national non-state actor 'with more lethal potential than any other nonstate threat' faced by a nation state.<sup>3</sup> As George Bush explained in a speech to West Point Graduates in 2002:

In defending the peace, we face a threat with no precedent. Enemies in the past needed great armies and great industrial capabilities to endanger the American people and our nation. The

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview of how political and economic trends are changing the nature of war see Mary Kaldor *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in the Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), and Herfried Munkler *The New Wars* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005). For an overview of how the conduct of war is evolving see Thomas Hammes, *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (St Paul, M.N.: Zenith Press, 2004), Rod Thornton, *Asymmetric Warfare* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006) and Richard H. Shultz Jr and Andrea J. Dew, *Insurgents, Terrorists and Militias* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Michael Scheuer, *Through Our Enemies' Eyes: Osama bin Laden, Radical Islam and the Future of America* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2006), p.3.

attacks of September the 11<sup>th</sup> required a few hundred thousand dollars in the hands of a few dozen evil and deluded men. All of the chaos and suffering they caused came at much less than the cost of a single tank. <sup>4</sup>

Not only did the attack result in over 3,000 deaths, equally important was the longer term effect of this event. Osama bin Laden later claimed the attack had cost a paltry \$500,000 to finance but had resulted in \$500 billion in damages to the US economy. This single act signalled that terrorism had evolved from being a tactical to a strategic instrument of war.<sup>5</sup> Of longer term significance, however, is the fact that Al Qaeda has not merely survived the war waged against it by the United States and its allies, but has continued to organise and orchestrate attacks against the West and apostate regimes in 'Islamdom'. It is interesting that whilst the US State Department's strategic assessment in 2007 referred to the successful efforts of the international community in the creation of a 'less permissive environment for terrorists, keeping their leaders on the move or in hiding, and degrading their ability to plan and mount attacks', but they also acknowledged that Al Qaeda retained the 'operational capability to mount large scale spectacular attacks, including on the United States and other high profile Western targets.'<sup>6</sup> This depressing assessment was reaffirmed by the British Foreign Affairs Committee, in spite of the success in targeting Al Qaeda's leadership hierarchy and their organisational infrastructure, in their view: 'the danger of international terrorism, whether from Al Qaeda or other related groups, has not diminished and may well have increased. Al Qaeda continues to pose an extremely serious and brutal threat to the United Kingdom and its interests.'<sup>7</sup> This bleak assessment was also supported by the independent think tank the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), they believe that Al Qaeda is stronger today

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<sup>4</sup> President Bush Delivers Graduation Speech at West Point, June 1 2002.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/print/200020601-3.html> Accessed on 24/07/07.

<sup>5</sup> Angel Rabassa, *Beyond al-Qaeda: The Global Jihadist Movement Part 1* (Santa Monica, CA.: Rand Corporation, 2006), p.24.

<sup>6</sup> US State Department, *Country Reports on Terrorism* (April, 2007) Chapter 1 Strategic Assessment <http://www.state.gov/sct/rls/crt/2006/82727.htm> Accessed on 21 May 2007

<sup>7</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (HCFAC), *Foreign Policy Aspects of the War Against Terrorism* HC 573, (London: HMSO, 2006), p.19.

than it was in 2001 and it still has the capacity to conduct an attack on the scale of 9/11.<sup>8</sup> The fact that western forces appear to be currently bogged down in an insurgency in Afghanistan and is becoming increasingly concerned about Al Qaeda's activities in both North and Sub-Saharan Africa, reinforces the impression that the West is actually losing this conflict. A poll conducted in 2010 found that only 37 percent of Americans believed the United States and its allies are winning the war on terror.<sup>9</sup>

This paper seeks to explain the reasons for the failure of the military campaign so far, but looks at this debate from the perspective of the British rather than the American experience of the war on terror. Britain's military strategy against international terrorism is a subject that has not received a great deal of attention or analysis, which is interesting given that the United Kingdom (UK) has provided a vital military contribution in the prosecution of this war. A further point which makes the UK interesting as a case study is that its armed forces possess a wealth of experience in counter terrorism and counter insurgency and yet, in spite of this, it struggled to get to grips with the various militias operating in its area of operations in Iraq between 2003 and 2009 and its involvement in Afghanistan has proven to be costly in terms of both blood and treasure. Although much of this failure can be laid at the door of the Bush Administration's poor policy on Iraq and Afghanistan, and its wider foreign policy in the Middle East<sup>10</sup>, it is also apparent that British strategy and operations experienced problems that had little to do with their principal ally but were in fact home grown. Criticism of British operations in Iraq made by the American military demonstrates the point that the British bear some responsibility for problems being experienced in the military domain of the current war.<sup>11</sup> It is also clear that the Americans have also been extremely critical of the conduct of British

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<sup>8</sup> Mark Tran, 'Al Qaeda will take decades to eradicate, think tank says' *The Guardian* Wednesday 12 September 2007. Richard Norton Taylor, 'Al Qaeda has revived, spread and is capable of a spectacular attack' *The Guardian* Thursday 13 September 2007

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public\\_content/politics/mod\\_of\\_america/war\\_on\\_terrorupdate](http://www.rasmussenreports.com/public_content/politics/mod_of_america/war_on_terrorupdate) 6 December 2010

<sup>10</sup> See Daniel Benjamin and Steven Simon, *The Next Attack: The Globalization of Jihad* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2005) and Michael Sheuer, *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> Luke Baker, 'Britain defends Iraq role on U.S. editorial pages,' *Washington Post* 31 August 2007.

operations in Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> It is recognised that military force has only a supporting role to play in winning a war of this kind, however, events in this domain have jeopardised the political, social and economic dimensions of strategy and it is therefore critical to explain why the British military complex has failed so far to meet the challenges presented by this conflict.

### **Problems with UK Grand Strategy and the War on Terror**

The British Government's response to the security challenge posed by Al Qaeda was to develop a multifaceted set of policies that could be loosely described as a grand strategy. Liddell Hart, one of the first to make use of this term, explained, the purpose of grand strategy was: 'to coordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, towards the attainment of the political object of the war – the goal defined by fundamental policy.'<sup>13</sup> More recently Kennedy stated: 'the crux of grand strategy lies therefore in *policy*, that is, in the capacity of the nation's leaders to bring together all of the elements, both military and non military, for the preservation and enhancements of the nation's long term best interests.'<sup>14</sup> In essence: "Grand strategy" integrates military, political, and economic means to pursue states' ultimate objectives in the international system.'<sup>15</sup> The British define grand strategy today in the following terms:

(T)he coordinated application of the instruments of national power ... in the pursuit of national policy aspirations. Accordingly it lies within the political domain, principally the Prime Minister and Cabinet, with advice from the most senior military officers. The Government's political intentions, in relation to a specific campaign, may be articulated as a national strategic aim or end-state, based upon the outcome required and accompanied by associated strategic objectives.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> P Curtis, 'Wikileaks cables on UK's Afghan role embarrassing, says Cameron' *The Guardian* 7 December 2010

<sup>13</sup> B Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2004), 86

<sup>14</sup> Paul Kennedy, 1991, p.5.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Biddle, *American Grand Strategy After 9/11: An Assessment* Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, April 2005, p.v.

<sup>16</sup> Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01, *British Defence Doctrine* (London: HMSO, 2008), para.111.

Within the context of the war on terror national strategic level actions are articulated through a framework called CONTEST.<sup>17</sup> This construct sets out the effects that a counter terrorist strategy must achieve if the threat is to be contained. CONTEST is divided into four areas: the prevention of terrorism by tackling radicalisation; pursuing terrorists and those who sponsor them; protecting the public and key services; and preparing for the consequences of a terrorist attack. Referred to as the Four Ps the armed forces contribute to the UK's national strategy for counter terrorism predominantly in Prevent and Pursue phases and in specialised elements of protect at home.<sup>18</sup> The national strategic aim set by the government is: 'to reduce the risk from international terrorism, so that people can go about their daily lives freely and with confidence.'<sup>19</sup> In truth, CONTEST is concerned mainly with the domestic aspect of the terrorist threat and is a strategy that is shaped and driven primarily by the Home Office. However:

Counter-insurgency work, including military, political engagement, development and reconstruction strands, is closely related to and coordinated with our counter-terrorism work. Although not formally part of CONTEST, counter-insurgency contributes to reducing the threat to the UK and its interests overseas from international terrorism. Like our counter-terrorism work counter-insurgency makes a vital contribution to our national security.<sup>20</sup>

As such the military has an important role to play in CONEST even though it is not formally linked to it. This brings us to then to the military strategic domain of Britain's grand strategy. For the British:

Military strategy links political aspiration, expressed in Government policy, and military feasibility. It is derived from national strategy and determines how the Armed Forces

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<sup>17</sup> HM Government. *CONTEST: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering International Terrorism* CM7547 (London: HMSO, 2009)

<sup>18</sup> HM Government, *Countering International Terrorism: The United Kingdom's Strategy* Cm 6888 (London: HMSO, 2006), p.28.

<sup>19</sup> Defence Concepts and Doctrine Centre *British Defence Doctrine* JDP0-001 (London: MOD, 2008), p.1-4.

<sup>20</sup> Home Office *Counter Terrorism Strategy* 59

should be configured and employed, in conjunction with other instruments of national power, to achieve favourable outcomes.<sup>21</sup>

UK military strategy operates within a conceptual framework that is designed to ensure it achieves strategic effects that support the political and economic dimensions of the campaign. To this end, military strategy and operations are guided by the following tenets. First, all military operations are sanctioned and under the control of the legitimate government. Second, the terrorist must be defeated within the existing rule of law which preserves the civil liberties of the UK population. Third, there must be a clear political aim and the military must be given clear political direction throughout. Fourth, the delivery of a successful strategy depends on a coordinated response between government departments and agencies. Fifth, both the government and the military need intelligence so that threats can be detected and acted upon and a discriminate military campaign can be conducted which limits innocent civilian casualties. Finally, strategy and operations must aim to isolate the terrorist from the civil population both physically and psychologically.<sup>22</sup>

Based on this framework UK military strategy is designed to achieve a range of effects that can be subsumed under the 4 Ps. These are to:

- prevent the conditions that give rise to terrorism by promoting stability and security within states and also to discourage state sponsorship of terrorism;
- to deter terrorist attacks;
- to actively coerce terrorists and state sponsors to stop their campaigns against the UK;
- to disrupt terrorist organisations and cut off their access to all forms of support
- to destroy terrorist cells and networks.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Defence Concepts and Doctrine Centre *British Defence Doctrine* JDP0-001 (London: MOD, 2008), p.1-4.

<sup>22</sup> Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre *Countering Terrorism; The UK Approach to the Military Contribution*, p.12.

<sup>23</sup> Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre *Countering Terrorism; The UK Approach to the Military Contribution* p.14



Clearly, terrorist attacks on the UK homeland since 2005 and problems experienced in the military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq suggest that current strategy is not working, but what is the source of the problem?

The implementation of Britain's grand strategy has been affected by four potential problems. The first and potentially most damaging problem is that the goal selected by the Government at the start of the war was incredibly ambitious. For example a Cabinet Office report listed the objectives of the UK as: first, to protect the United Kingdom and its overseas territories and prevent further terrorist attacks; and second, eliminating terrorism as a force in international affairs.<sup>24</sup> The same objectives were set out in more detail in the Government's Campaign Objectives document, which was published on 4 October 2001. The overall objective was to eliminate terrorism as a force in international affairs. This meant not only stopping terrorist movements but also deterring state sponsorship of terrorist groups.<sup>25</sup> However, in reality the need to eradicate the causes of terrorism has caused UK national strategy to open a Pandora's Box.

The most obvious way of suffocating terrorism is to remove the cause, which entailed dealing with perceived corrupt and nepotistic regimes and promoting the spread of better governance which is usually equated with democracy. As Biddle explains, the logic underlying this strategy is that action of this kind will remove authoritarian regimes that use economic surpluses to reward loyal clients, whilst denying access to basic social and economic amenities for the majority. In those countries with fast growing populations these problems compound the predicament of poor governance. Many of these regimes have been happy to redirect their anger against perceived external threats like Israel and the West. This process of state

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<sup>24</sup> The Cabinet Office, *The United Kingdom and the Campaign against International Terrorism Progress Report*, 9 September 2002, p.3.

<sup>25</sup> International Coalition Against Terrorism, Campaign Objectives:  
[http://www.fco.gov.uk/text\\_only?news/keythemehome.asp](http://www.fco.gov.uk/text_only?news/keythemehome.asp).

sponsored radicalisation became something of a problem when bin Laden began to channel this into a general anti Western campaign.<sup>26</sup>

It is important to note that this is not just an American dream, but was also at the heart of British policy. Thus, when asked in 2006 whether the insurgency in Iraq represented a distraction from the war on terror, the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, argued that a military commitment was justified on the grounds that the only long term solution to the problems of the Middle East lay in the creation of democracy, which was precisely what they were trying to do in Iraq.<sup>27</sup> As he explained: ‘what I am saying is we are seeing the beginnings of a movement for democracy which I believe is the only sure way of eliminating terror.’<sup>28</sup> Although the British had reined in their political ambitions in Afghanistan by summer 2007, aiming instead for good enough governance, the logic of the war on terror meant that. As the Foreign Office Minister, Lord Malloch Brown explained in 2009, if Afghanistan is to be a state free from the influence of terrorism then it is important to create economic and political conditions that prevent the return of the Taliban which means something that at least approximates democratic government.<sup>29</sup>

The second problem is that the British system of government has proved ineffective in articulating its grand strategy. In theory at least, the process of combining various policy streams seems relatively straightforward. At the pinnacle of this process are the Cabinet and its plethora of subcommittees. Directly beneath are the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), which takes the lead on the international fight against terrorism and the Home Office which leads on domestic protection against terrorism. In the UK policy is formulated by these

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<sup>26</sup> Stephen Biddle, *American Grand Strategy After 9/11: An Assessment* Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, April 2005, pp.21-24.

<sup>27</sup> HCFAC, (note 37) HC 573-I, Q 63.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Q 64

<sup>29</sup> Foreign Affairs Committee, *Global Security: Afghanistan and Pakistan* 8<sup>th</sup> Report 2008-09 HC 302 (London: HMSO, 2009) Q 174

lead Departments under the political direction of the Cabinet. Within this framework MOD liaises with these Departments of State and is to some extent subordinate to them.<sup>30</sup>

However, in reality competition rather than cooperation are the order of the day in this triad. This reflects the fact that structural and political drivers make meaningful cooperation extremely difficult. In terms of structure it is clear that each department of state guards its domain jealously and resents any encroachment by another government department in its affairs; a problem that is even more complicated because the Department for International Development (DfID) was originally part of the FCO. A classic illustration of such a ‘turf war’ concerns the introduction of what is now known as the Comprehensive Approach; a strategy which was intended to achieve greater coordination between government departments in the stabilization and reconstruction of failed states. This was originally an MOD construct, but when they had the temerity to suggest that the FCO and DfID adopt this strategy their proposal was rejected. What became clear was that each department had its own vision of how prosecute this conflict and resented MOD trying to take the lead. The result was a strange bureaucratic battle over what this construct should be called and precisely what role each department was to play within it.<sup>31</sup> This divisiveness between departments is compounded because there is little institutional incentive to cooperate, especially when funding flows directly from the Treasury to each of department of state and cooperation could mean loss of money to another department’s activities. An additional complication is that the political fortunes of secretaries of state and their ministers are inextricably linked to the performance of their respective government departments and this undermines the spirit of cooperation between senior politicians within the Cabinet.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Defence Joint Doctrine and Concept Centre, *Countering Terrorism: The UK Approach* p.19.

<sup>31</sup> Personal Interview

<sup>32</sup> Patrick Dunleavy and Brendan O’Leary, *Prime Minister, Cabinet and Core Executive* (London: St Martin’s Press, 1995), p.64.

The Prime Minister has the power to enforce cooperation through the Cabinet Office, but political conditions and the need to maintain a broad base of support for his or her policies sometimes means tolerating dissent even within Cabinet. For example, Tony Blair was forced to accept Claire Short's refusal to allow DfID to cooperate with MOD and the FCO in developing a Phase IV reconstruction plan for Iraq once hostilities ended, and this is believed to have hampered British efforts to quell the insurgency that arose in their area of operations after the war.<sup>33</sup> This happened because Short's support for the Prime Minister was vital in presenting a united front to the wider public on the decision to invade Iraq in 2003.

Lack of coordination between government departments at the national strategic level extended into Iraq and Afghanistan and this had a profound impact on reconstruction and development. In the case of Iraq getting British agencies to deploy and then coordinate with the military proved challenging. To succeed it was imperative that government departments were willing to support the army in its efforts to stabilize Iraq. Although in theory these departments of state should have been directed and controlled by a Cabinet subcommittee under the chairmanship of the Foreign Secretary, in reality no leadership was forthcoming. The committee met infrequently and was therefore unable to build a cross-departmental consensus on how to approach problems being faced in southern Iraq.<sup>34</sup> The experience of Iraq led to a series of new doctrinal, procedural and organisational initiatives to promote greater coordination on the ground in post conflict states, but this came too late to make a real difference in Iraq. For example, the UK Stabilisation Unit, which coordinates post conflict reconstruction, began operating in Iraq only in 2006 and the first Provisional Reconstruction Team was set up later that year. <sup>35</sup> Hilary Synott, who was appointed by Blair to take charge of development and reconstruction in the British area of control in southern Iraq in 2003, made the observation that the British system of government made it impossible to have the effect needed on the ground in Iraq in 2003-04. Although the cabinet subcommittee drew together all the principal departments of state its chair did not have any real power and could not force

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<sup>33</sup> HCDC *Lessons From Iraq* HC 57, (London: HMSO, 2004), Ev 440

<sup>34</sup> Sir Hilary Synott, *Bad Days in Basra* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), p.10.

<sup>35</sup> Stabilisation Unit, Brief Details of main Stabilisation Unit work by country, p.1.

government ministers to comply with proposals and recommendations made. In his view Blair should have appointed a senior minister and placed him or her in charge of reconstruction in Iraq.<sup>36</sup>

Ironically, in spite of the best efforts of the British to address this breakdown in cooperation, exactly the same problems erupted in Helmand in 2006. In spite of the existence of a comprehensive strategy involving all departments this aspiration failed to materialize once the operation was underway and as a result promised reconstruction and development in the province did not happen. This failure was blamed on the military which it is argued deviated from the plan and failed to liaise with the other government agencies.<sup>37</sup>

On paper at least the institutional structure was in place to ensure a coordinated response which predated the deployment to Helmand. For example, in 2004 MOD, FCO and DFID provided tri departmental funding for the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit. The deployment of UK forces to Iraq and Afghanistan encouraged MOD to codify this practice of increasing cooperation in a document called the Comprehensive Approach.<sup>38</sup> This was not a prescriptive document but explained why the departments of state needed to cooperate more effectively in post conflict scenarios. It explained:

The realisation of national strategic objectives inevitably relies on a combination of diplomatic, military and economic instruments of power, together with an independent package of developmental and humanitarian activity and a customised, agile and sensitive influence and information effort.<sup>39</sup>

The Army, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Department of International Development (DFID) made a considerable effort to construct a comprehensive plan that tied all

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<sup>36</sup> Synott 2010 27

<sup>37</sup> James Ferguson, *A Million Bullets* (London: Bantam Press, 2008), p.153

<sup>38</sup> The Comprehensive Approach, Joint Discussion Note 4/05, January 2006, MOD

<sup>39</sup> The Comprehensive Approach, Joint Discussion Note 4/05, January 2006, MOD pp1-2

the national levers of power political, economic and military into a coordinated process which was designed to deliver security, reconstruction and governance. The Joint UK Plan for Helmand was formed over a six week timeframe, involved hundreds of people and was finalised in December 2005.<sup>40</sup> However, this plan became one of the first casualties of war as the British struggled to get to grips with the challenge of the Taliban in summer 2006. What the British learned very quickly was that ‘you cannot have sustainable development without security, nor maintain security without development.’<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the absence of a secure environment in 2006 played an important role in DFID’s decision not to deploy its staff until well into the deployment. There was not even basic accommodation that offered sufficient protection to British civil servants in Helmand. The job had been given to the military but they did not have the time and so gave it to the Afghans and they took longer than expected to complete the project.<sup>42</sup> The lack of security in Helmand in 2007 continued to impact on the ability of DFID to carry out its tasks. Its mission was complicated further as the original plan to focus development and reconstruction in the area of Lashkar Gar was extended to Gereshk, Sangin and Garmsir. This expansion was caused by the demands of the UK COIN campaign, but also the need to support the Kajaki Dam project. Quite often it was difficult for DFID staff to leave the PRT base and the number of locations in which their staff could operate was limited. The cost of providing security also limited the range and number of charities willing to deploy in the province and in 2008 there were only four NGOs all based in Lashkar Gar. Apparently even the Provincial Governor Wafa, rarely ventured beyond Lashkar Gar.<sup>43</sup>

In spite of the growth in structures and processes to promote greater coordination this capacity was undermined by a perceived philosophical difference between the military and DFID surrounding the allocation of money to reconstruction and development. In basic terms DFID

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<sup>40</sup> Author discussion with MOD civil servant in 2007

<sup>41</sup> International Development Committee, HC 65-II Ev 56

<sup>42</sup> James Ferguson, *A Million Bullets* (London: Bantam Press, 2008), p.175

<sup>43</sup> International Development Committee *Reconstructing Afghanistan* 4<sup>th</sup> Report HC 65-II 2007-08, (London: HMSO, 2008) Ev 53

was perceived to be failing to support the British campaign in Helmand. Between May 2006 and March 2007, the British spent over a £1 billion on military operations, but only £102 million on reconstruction and development for Afghanistan as a whole.<sup>44</sup> This imbalance between military operations and aid was even more striking in Helmand where, in 2006-07, DFID provided a meagre £4 million in quick impact projects<sup>45</sup>. The ratio of funding for aid or war improved when on 12 December 2007 the Prime Minister announced stabilisation assistance of £450 million for the period 2009-12 for Afghanistan as a whole.<sup>46</sup> £345 million was development money and £105 million was for quick impact projects, but it is not clear how much of this was to be invested in Helmand.

However, from the perspective of the military DFID still was not doing enough. For example, an article written by an army major on DFID's support to the wider campaign in Helmand in 2008 was scathing. Based on an analysis of reconstruction and development spending across Afghanistan's thirty four provinces he noted that the funding in Helmand was second to last, in the list of completed, ongoing and planned projects; only Zabul fared worse. In his view this failure is the responsibility of DFID which chose to ignore quick impact projects in favour of more ambitious and loftier development goals.<sup>47</sup>

This view has some basis. It is important to note that DfID channels 80 percent of its funding through the Afghan government. Although the British are the second largest aid donors most Afghans are not aware of this. When asked they refer to the French, Germans, and American efforts.<sup>48</sup> However, channelling assistance in this way was believed to increase the capacity and legitimacy of the Afghan government. These funds were mainly channelled through Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. Currently 27 nations contribute to the fund and the UK is the largest donor. The fund has two main strands payment of government salaries and

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<sup>44</sup> HCDC 13<sup>th</sup> Report, *UK Operations in Afghanistan* HC 408 (London: HMSO: 2007), Q 30

<sup>45</sup> International Development Committee, HC 65II Ev.54

<sup>46</sup> Hansard Col 303-307 12 December 2007

<sup>47</sup> Major SN Miller 'A Comprehensive Failure in British Civil Military Strategy in Helmand Province', *RUSI Journal* no.146 p.36-37

<sup>48</sup> International Development Committee *Reconstructing Afghanistan* 4<sup>th</sup> Report HC 65-I 2007-08, (London: HMSO, 2008) Ev 53

investment in development programmes.<sup>49</sup> Within the context of Helmand DFID money flows through its support to the Helmand Agriculture and Rural Development Programme and the financial support it gives to QIPs. Thus, institutional weaknesses have made it extremely difficult for the UK not just to realise and implement an effective grand strategy, but equally important, an effective strategic and even operational plan.

The third potential problem is that current strategy assumes that failed states or 'ungoverned' spaces are ripe for exploitation for the purposes of training and preparation of terrorist attacks against targets in the West.<sup>50</sup> As the then Secretary of State for Defence, Geoff Hoon, explained in 2003:

Afghanistan demonstrates that a failed state, providing a harbour for terrorist organisations, means that the threat can strike us or our close allies from huge distances. Therefore we need to recognise that global environment in which we accept in almost every other respect that we have to face up to dealing with threats as far afield as they can come.<sup>51</sup>

If the threat of failed states is accepted then contesting control of these ungoverned spaces is a resource and labour intensive process; by the end of 2008 the UK had spent over £13 billion on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.<sup>52</sup> Not only does it require forces to be deployed over the long term, equally important it also requires the UK to sustain a military capability that can operate on a global rather than regional scale, which is so costly that only a handful of nations

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<sup>49</sup> International Development Committee *Reconstructing Afghanistan* 4<sup>th</sup> Report HC 65-I 2007-08, (London: HMSO, 2008) Ev 53

<sup>50</sup> MOD, *Defence White Paper 2003: Delivering Security in a Changing World* Cm 6041, (London: HMSO, 2003), para. 2.7.

<sup>51</sup> HCDC, *Defence White Paper 2003* HC 465-I, 2003-04, (London: HMSO, 2003), Q113.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Norton Taylor, MOD bill for Afghan and Iraq conflict tops £13bn *The Guardian* 26 November 2008.



possess such a capability.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore it undermined the Government's previous efforts to impose a limit on the scale and scope of UK military operations. When the Government first came to power in 1997, their manifesto on defence declared a commitment to deal with a perceived fiscal crisis in this area of public policy, to tackle the problem of overstretch as units rotated in and out of conflicts without sufficient time for rest, recuperation and training, and bring about a new equilibrium in the ends and means of strategy. To this end the *Government's Strategic Defence Review* imposed a geographical boundary on where UK forces would deploy and a limit on the size and number of military operations the UK's armed forces would undertake concurrently.<sup>54</sup> Prosecution of the war on terror made it necessary to breach all these self imposed restrictions.

Regime change and nation building also required a temporal adjustment in UK strategy in that forces were committed to operations extending over years and potentially decades, which is perhaps why in 2007 the British Army's Chief of the General Staff described the war on terror as a 'generational conflict'.<sup>55</sup> The military play a central role in the process of nation building, as Freedman explains, whilst the military cannot resolve the problem of failing states on their own, they are vital in terms of generating the security needed for this process to take place. How long they remain will depend on a political resolution between the various factions within the state concerned. However, conflict resolution is typically be a protracted affair.<sup>56</sup> Not only does this activity require a prolonged deployment of forces, ideally it also requires a force structure that is manpower intensive so that security can be provided to the population.

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<sup>53</sup> James Dunnigan *How to Make War: The Comprehensive Guide to Modern Warfare for the Post-Cold War Era*, New York: William and Morrow, 1993) p.291.

<sup>54</sup> MOD, *The Strategic Defence Review* Cm 3999 1997-98, (London: HMSO, 1998).

<sup>55</sup> See US National Security Strategy and Allan Mallinson, 'How much longer can the Army Fight? *The Daily Telegraph* 7 August 2007.

<sup>56</sup> See Lawrence Freedman, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs* International Institute of Strategic Studies, Adelphi Paper 379, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p.9.

The final problem facing national strategy relates to the constraints imposed on defence spending. During the Cold War, Britain's ailing economy was perceived to have imposed a significant limit on defence spending.<sup>57</sup> In contrast, during the war on terror, the UK's improved economic fortunes created the capacity to spend more on defence, but political circumstances imposed a different, but equally effective limit on defence spending. Before the credit crunch in 2008 the UK experienced 15 years of consecutive economic growth, which was an unprecedented achievement in the UK's economic history. GDP for the first half of 2007 was 3.25 percent, inflation was low, falling to 1.8 percent in August 2007, and employment reached a new high of over 29 million.<sup>58</sup>

But whilst there has been a sustained increase in defence spending since 2002, the sums involved have not been generous and defence spending since 9/11 increased on average by 1.4 percent in real terms per annum.<sup>59</sup> To put this in context, inflation in the equipment programme, which consumes 44 percent of the budget, is on average between seven and eleven percent per annum.<sup>60</sup> In the wider context of public spending, current government expenditure for 2007-08 was £589 billion with investment in the NHS standing at £90 billion.<sup>61</sup> Today, the UK now commits only 2.2 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) to defence compared with 2.8 percent in 1996-97 and approximately 5 percent of GDP during the Cold War, which means defence spending as a proportion of GDP is now at its lowest since the 1930s.<sup>62</sup> By mid 2008, the UK economy had moved into recession. The Government's response was to launch an ambitious programme of public spending in an effort to prevent the economic down turn becoming a depression. However, it is interesting to note that defence did not

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<sup>57</sup> See Richard Rosencrance, *The Defence of the Realm* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968).

<sup>58</sup> The Treasury The 2007 Pre-Budget Report and Comprehensive Spending Review, [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/8/Apbr\\_csr07\\_asnnexa\\_380.pdf](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/8/Apbr_csr07_asnnexa_380.pdf) p.133.

<sup>59</sup> *The Government's Expenditure Plans 2006-07 to 2007-08* Cmnd 6822 (London: HMSO, 2004).

<sup>60</sup> See Phillip Pugh, *The Procurement Nexus* Defense and Peace Economics, Vol.4, No 2, 1993

<sup>61</sup> The Treasury, The 2007 Pre-Budget Report and Comprehensive Spending Review, p.9. [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/6/7/pbr\\_csr07\\_chapter1\\_207.pdf](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/6/7/pbr_csr07_chapter1_207.pdf)

<sup>62</sup> Christopher Hope, 'Defence spending lowest since the 1930s', *The Daily Telegraph* 24 January 2007.

benefit from the government's support for public works and public capital projects. Instead, big capital projects such as the £3.5 billion aircraft carrier programme were delayed and the army's planned £7 billion acquisition of a new fleet of armoured vehicles was cancelled, producing a technical saving of £20 billion to fill a hole created in MOD's budget, caused in part by a 50 percent increase in the cost of operations in 2007.<sup>63</sup> However, this brief flirtation with Keynesian demand management was put into reverse with the advent of a Conservative and Liberal Coalition Government in May 2010 which was firmly committed to reducing Government borrowing. Inevitably this had a big impact on defence and the ability of the UK to prosecute the war on terror.

According to the Treasury, in 2009 the UK borrowed one pound for every four it spent and currently has over £43 billion in debt interest which is more than the defence budget of £34 billion. The Coalition Government's first priority was tackling the debt crisis and reducing the deficit as soon as possible. This was seen as vital if the UK economic recovery was not to be jeopardised and long term economic growth was not sacrificed because of unsustainable debt. In an effort to tackle the deficit the Government implemented a 19% cut in public spending between 2010 and 2014; only health and the overseas aid budget were protected from these cuts. Although defence fared reasonably well in this spending review; defence spending is due to fall in real terms by 7.5% over the next four years from.<sup>64</sup> However, MOD has also been tasked to find an additional £38 billion saving to deal with a separate hole in its budget incurred because of poor financial planning and management, which means that the actual cut in defence over the next four years is closer to 20 percent.

As a result, British national strategy demonstrates a fundamental mismatch between the object of the war and the means available to achieve the stated aim. The fundamental explanation for this classic error in higher strategy is that in the UK defence is not a national priority. Even the newly elected Labour Government, which came to power in 1997 with a declared

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<sup>63</sup> HCDC 8<sup>th</sup> Report, *Operational Costs in Afghanistan and Iraq: Spring Supplementary Estimate 2007-2008* HC 400 (London: HMSO, 2008), p.8

<sup>64</sup> HM Treasury, *Spending Review 2010* Cm 7942 (London: HMSO, 2010) 5-10

commitment to strong defence, recognised that defence spending was not a vote winner. As such, they were content to impose tough spending limits which resulted in defence expenditure falling in real terms by £917 million between 1997 and 2000.<sup>65</sup> In theory at least 9/11 changed this mindset and suddenly defence became important once more. For example according to the Foreign Affairs Committee:

‘The events of 11 September demonstrated clearly that a narrow definition of “national interest” is no longer sufficient. The international terrorist threat from organizations such as al Qaeda may be directed most immediately against the United States, but such attacks affect British interests and security, and may in future be directed against the United Kingdom.’<sup>66</sup>

The war against terrorism is an unplanned and unsought conflict. But when the first hijacked airliner struck the World Trade Center, war became necessary and, once entered upon, war must be pursued vigorously and with all appropriate means.’<sup>67</sup>

However, it is not clear the electorate ever shared this enthusiasm, especially once the UK and United States invaded Iraq. According to one poll, Blair’s support for Iraq cost him dearly and his popularity fell to 20 percent in some surveys, his lowest poll rating ever. Similarly, support for the Labour Party also fell to a new low in 2003. Overall fifty-two percent of people surveyed declared their opposition the war in Iraq.<sup>68</sup> Equally important, In 2005, a survey organised by Chatham House found that 75 percent of respondents believed that the UK’s frontline position in the war on terror and its decision to invade Iraq increased the chances of a terrorist attack against the UK and played a direct role in causing the attacks in London 7/7.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Strategic Defence Review*

<sup>66</sup> HCFAC, *Foreign Policy Aspects of the War Against Terrorism 2001-2002*, (London: HMSO, 2002), p.16.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.58.

<sup>68</sup> Rosemary Bennett, ‘Blair pleads with doubters to listen to case for action’, *The Times* 19 February 2003.

<sup>69</sup> Julian Glover, ‘Two-thirds believe London bombings are linked to Iraq War’, *The Guardian*, 19 July 2005

The absence of strong public support for the war and the government's own political priorities which focused on maintaining a stable economy, health, education and effective welfare provision served to ensure that the war on terror operated within a tight budget. This problem has not been explicitly addressed by the current Coalition Government's defence and security review. Instead it has attempt to ensure that Britain's forces will in the future be employed more carefully and will be deployed 'only where key national interests are at stake; where we have a clear strategic aim; where the likely political, economic and human costs are in proportion to the likely benefits; where we have a viable exit strategy and where justifiable under international law.<sup>70</sup> Whilst this might be helpful in future interventions it does little to deal with the immediate crisis facing the UK in Afghanistan and the current Government's strategy differs little from that of its predecessor in that it is relying on the ability of the Afghan Government to develop the capacity to provide security and stability to its people, a capability that many doubt the Afghans will acquire in the timeframe set by the international community.

An important symptom of the failure to balance ends and means has been a pronounced increase in over stretch of forces deployed on operations. In January 2007, General Dannatt, the Chief of the General Staff, urged the government to reduce the Army's commitments. Fighting two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan had almost exhausted the army, which was configured to fight only one medium and one small conflict simultaneously.<sup>71</sup> According to Major General Ritchie, the Army was being asked to do almost double what was anticipated in the defence planning assumptions.<sup>72</sup> In practical terms this meant that many units were not having the recommended two year break between operations, but current tour intervals are under 10 months on average and in some cases this is as little as two months.<sup>73</sup> When asked,

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<sup>70</sup> MOD, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review* Cm 7948 (London: HMSO, 2010), 17.

<sup>71</sup> Stephen Fiddler, 'PM faces barrage from top brass' *Financial Times* 12 January 2007.

<sup>72</sup> HCDC HC 381 uncorrected evidence, Q175

<sup>73</sup> HCDC, *The Defence White Paper 2003* HC 465,(London: HMSO, 2004) p.45.

two former service chiefs expressed the view that unless commitments were reduced in 2008 hard choices in the defence budget would have to be made.<sup>74</sup> The delay in the carrier programme and the cancellation of the army's armoured vehicle fleet at the end of 2008 demonstrate how prescient these comments were. Lack of domestic support, financial stringency, and poor planning at the national strategic level had a profound impact on the conduct of British military strategy and operations.

### **Problems with the UK's military Strategy and Operations**

Military strategy is the creative application of resources (means) to achieve the political object of the war (ends), which means that the most basic parameters of military strategy are in fact set at the level of national strategy. As the history of warfare demonstrates, establishing the correct balance between ends and means is vital if victory is to be achieved. Obviously, a cunning strategy can compensate where resources are lacking as demonstrated by the victories achieved by smaller and weaker forces against great military powers, which has become a more pronounced phenomenon since 1945.<sup>75</sup>

In the case of the war on terror American military strategy has been heavily criticised. This debate has focused on two related themes. The first is a generic problem confronting regular armed forces fighting irregular wars. As Gray explains:

Most of the world's armed forces are not well designed, doctrinally prepared, trained and equipped to wage war against elusive handfuls of religious fanatics. Rather, they are raised and maintained to fight regular enemies who would be approximate facsimiles of themselves.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ivan Arreguin-Toft, 'How the Weak Win Wars', *International Security* Vol.26, No.1, Summer 2001, p.98.

<sup>76</sup> Colin Gray *War, Peace and International Relations: An Introduction to Strategic Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007) p.236

The early efforts of the United States to deal with the insurgency in Iraq have been cited as proof that conventional military forces struggle to deal with irregular opponents.<sup>77</sup> This failure to adapt was attributed to the institutional culture of the organisation and its preference for regular warfare.<sup>78</sup>

The second criticism made of US military strategy was that it failed to understand that Al Qaeda was not just conducting a terrorist campaign, but is also fighting a global insurgency.<sup>79</sup> The distinction between such forms of irregular war is important because each requires a different counter strategy. As Morris explains, terrorism, irrespective of how powerful it is in a destructive sense, does not command extensive support and so in political terms terrorist groups are generally weak because they are not connected with the society of which they are a part and negotiation is rarely desirable or necessary. In these circumstances, military action should focus on protecting the population and hunting the terrorists down using national and international police resources, the military, diplomatic and economic actions.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Brigadier Nigel Aylwin-Foster, 'Changing the Army for Counter Insurgency Operations', *Military Review* November-December 2005, p.3

<sup>78</sup> Robert M. Cassidy *Counter Insurgency and the Global War on Terror: military culture and irregular warfare* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), p.8. See J. Bowyer Bell, *Dragon Wars: Armed Struggle and the Conventions of Modern War* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers 1999) pp. 234-236. See also R.H. Scales, *Firepower in Limited War* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University 1990), pp.3-23 and S.C. Sarkesian, *Unconventional Conflicts in a New Security Era* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishers 1993) pp.9-23

<sup>79</sup> Robert Cassidy, 'Feeding Bread to the Luddites: The Radical Fundamentalist Islamic Revolution in Guerrilla Warfare' *Small Wars and Insurgencies* Vol.16, No.3, December 2005, p.336. See also Michael Scheuer, 'A'Qaeda's Insurgency Doctrine: Aiming for a "long War"' *Terrorism Focus* February 2006, <http://www.jamestown/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2369915> Accessed on 23 February 2007, Michael Scheuer, *Imperial Hubris: Why the West is Losing the War on Terror* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2005).

<sup>80</sup> Michael Morris, 'Al Qaeda as Insurgency', *Joint Forces Quarterly* Issue 39 2006, p 45



A very different strategy is required to deal with an insurgency, because it represents both a political and a military challenge. In this context the war of ideas is just as important as the war between forces. However, ideology alone, no matter how persuasive the message, will not result in victory by itself. Most important, when making an assessment of the effectiveness of an insurgent group are the means available to them and the strategy they use to coordinate and orchestrate their resources to achieve their political goals. In practical terms, this means engaging and mobilising the population to support a group's political agenda, institutionalising that base of support through the creation of a shadow government and initiating a campaign of violence, which may also embrace terrorism, in an effort to erode the will of the opponent through a protracted guerrilla war. According to Morris, Al Qaeda appears to be tapping into two insurgent strategies. The first is based on a Maoist based model of revolutionary war and the second relies on Che Guevara's concept of Foco theory.<sup>81</sup>

However, in the case of the UK, problems in military strategy had little to do with the philosophical failings of the UK military and or a failure to understand the nature of the enemy. In truth, it is clear that the British possess a good understanding of the demands of irregular warfare. It is also clear that the UK military do not see counter terrorism and counter insurgency in such stark and opposing terms as critics of US strategy. For example, in the case of Northern Ireland the British exploited techniques from both domains in what was essentially a counter terrorist campaign. Most important however was the fact that the British maintained a security force that was in excess of 30,000 soldiers and police to secure control over a population of just over a million people and approximately 300 IRA terrorists. An important lesson learned is that force to population ratios do matter.<sup>82</sup>

Instead, British military strategy has been shaped by fragile domestic political support for the war, a lack of money and manpower and a lack capability in campaigns such as Iraq and

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 46

<sup>82</sup> W Chin, 'The Army Takes Control: Northern Ireland 1972-1976', in US Department of Defense, Office of Transformation *Network Centric Operations and the British Approach to Low Intensity Operations Part 2*, (Washington, D.C.: DoD, 2007), p.109.



Afghanistan. These constraints created an imbalance between ends and means, and in an effort to address this deficiency, a great deal of emphasis has been placed on the exploitation of technology as a substitute. In essence, British military operations shifted from a labour intensive model of irregular warfare to a capital intensive model. Thus, although the initial response of MOD to 9/11 was sold in terms of a mere extension or enhancement of existing policy,<sup>83</sup> in reality, *The New Chapter* was to have a profound impact on the size, scale, deployment, cost and endurance of the UK's armed forces. It declared that the full spectrum of military capabilities would be required to deter terrorist attacks. Interestingly, this included the retention of Trident nuclear weapons. Although designed to deal with a major strategic threat to the UK, it was believed that the possession of this weapon could deter rogue states from either using or providing chemical, biological, radioactive or nuclear (CBRN) materials to terrorists determined to make a weapon of mass destruction (WMD).<sup>84</sup>

*The New Chapter* also reaffirmed a commitment to create and sustain an expensive capability to project military power on a global basis which had been made originally in SDR.<sup>85</sup> It was also deemed important for MOD to invest in the development of a range of new technologies that provided UK forces with an extensive surveillance capability over potentially vast areas of land and sea, and the ability to conduct rapid and decisive attacks against fleeting targets using a variety of new weaponry.<sup>86</sup> Substituting manpower with technology was intended to save money by ensuring that a small force could punch above its weight.<sup>87</sup> The importance of technology to future defence capability was noted by the Defence Committee:

UK forces have the advantage of extensive experience in handling low intensity operations, where networking can be highly effective. It can help relatively small numbers of troops or

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<sup>83</sup> MOD, *The Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter* Cm 556-I, 2001-02 (London: HMSO, 2002), p.29.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>85</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p.17

<sup>87</sup> MOD, *Defence White Paper 2003: Delivering Security in a Changing World* Cm 6041, (London: HMSO, 2003), para. 3.4.

platforms to cover large tasks or geographical areas through rapid and flexible deployments.<sup>88</sup>

Of critical importance here was the investment made in Networked Enabled Capability (NEC):

NEC is crucial to the rapid delivery of military effect. The SDR New Chapter recognised NEC as being fundamental in countering terrorism abroad, with its ability to deliver precise and decisive military effects, with unparalleled speed and accuracy through linking sensors, decision makers and weapons systems. Clearly, its applicability and utility is much broader than that and will involve effective integration of military capability. When implemented, it will allow us to prosecute the full range of contingent operations with greater awareness, confidence and control.<sup>89</sup>

In general, current military strategy operates on the assumption that the introduction of new technology will allow smaller forces to do more in terms of: 'responding quickly and decisively to achieve maximum effect and should also act as a force multiplier, allowing the same military effect to be achieved with less.'<sup>90</sup> In essence, we appear to be moving towards the Toffler's vision of a 'demassified' battle space.<sup>91</sup> However, the Defence Committee was sceptical of the merits of this approach. In their view, the obsession with the mass effects being produced via non mass forces was going to limit what the military could do.

The Committee suggested a rather cynical reasoning for these changes:

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<sup>88</sup> HCDC, 6<sup>th</sup> Report, *A New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review* HC 93-II (London: HMSO, 2003), p.35

<sup>89</sup> MOD, *Defence White Paper 2003: Delivering Security in a Changing World* Cm 6041, (London: HMSO, 2003), para.4.7.

<sup>90</sup> MOD, *Defence White Paper 2003: Delivering Security in a Changing World* Cm 6041, (London: HMSO, 2003), para.4.7

<sup>91</sup> Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti War: Survival at the Dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (London: Little Brown and Company, 1994), p.73.

The suspicion has grown that the focus on agility without mass and the move away from a platform focus has less to do with an intellectually coherent strategy of effects based warfare than with a need to 'cut our cloth' as best we can.<sup>92</sup>

They were also rather concerned that cut back on the numbers of systems already in service whilst waiting to acquire new, but unproven capabilities, was a risky strategy. There was no guarantee that those capabilities would be provided or that they would work.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, in their view, the demands of the changing strategic environment seemed to suggest that more manpower and equipment rather than less needed.<sup>94</sup> Most important is the fear that whilst Al Qaeda is fighting an insurgency which aims to wear down the forces ranged against it in a war of attrition, British forces are not configured so that they can endure significant casualties and the relatively small pool of infantry in the British Army has proved vulnerable to attrition inflicted by insurgent groups. In the case of Afghanistan, it is estimated that infantry battalions have suffered casualty rates of almost 11 percent, which is comparable to the casualty rates experienced during the Second World War.<sup>95</sup>

Lack of troops and or resources has made it very difficult for the UK to achieve its goals in either Iraq or Afghanistan. In the case of Iraq it was clear that the UK did not have sufficient force to control the six million Iraqis under its control. Overall, troop levels fell drastically during the summer of 2003 from 26,000 to 9,000 to cover four provinces and in 2005 there were only 7,200 British troops in the region. This meant that forces were stretched thinly on the ground. In 2003 the British deployed a force of 1,000 men to provide security in Maysan, an area the size of Northern Ireland which included the city of Ammara with a population of over 400,000. This also entailed deploying a force of just seventy soldiers to secure a 200 mile border with Iran.<sup>96</sup> In contrast, in Northern Ireland the ratio of soldiers to civilians was

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<sup>92</sup> HCDC, *Defence White Paper 2003* HC 465-I, 2003-04, (London: HMSO, 2003), p. 27.

<sup>93</sup> HCDC, *Defence White Paper 2003* HC 465-I, 2003-04, (London: HMSO, 2003), p. 28.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Thomas Harding, 'Concern mounts over rising casualty rate', *The Daily Telegraph* 20 August 2007.

<sup>96</sup> Rory Stewart, *Occupational Hazards My Time Governing in Iraq* (London: Picador, 2006), P.14

approximately 1:50, in the case of Iraq that ratio was 1:370.<sup>97</sup> Similar problems arose in Afghanistan when the British took control of Helmand province. Although there were over 3000 troops in the brigade only a single battalion of 600 troops was available to secure control over a population of one million people. Since then the UK's military commitment to Afghanistan has increased to over 8,000 troops, but this is still not enough to secure control in area strongly contested by the Taliban. So badly overstretched were UK forces that the Chief of the General Staff warned the Government in July 2007 that the Army had only a reserve of a single battalion of 500 men to respond to a national emergency such as a terrorist strike in the UK.<sup>98</sup>

It is important to note that under resourcing of UK stabilisation operations extended beyond the military realm and compounded the UK's difficulties in terms of containing the insurgencies it faced in both Iraq and Afghanistan. In the case of Iraq even though the British made promises to support reconstruction in the south east (Multi National Division South East [MND SE]) of the country it proved reluctant to provide the money needed to achieve this goal. Sadly it was the riots on 9-10 August 2003, caused by the failure of the British to restore basic services to the population, which made the British government realise how tenuous their hold on the region was and how desperate was the plight of the people. As a result the government accepted that it was going to be responsible orchestrating the reconstruction and stabilisation in their area and equally important provide significant funding to facilitate this process. In response, the UK finally approved £500 million for reconstruction, but five months were lost before this money became available. Moreover, although that sum was subsequently increased in 2007 to £700 million<sup>99</sup> it was still short of the estimated \$7.2 billion engineers

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<sup>97</sup> Michael Knight and Ed Williams, *The Calm Before the Storm: The British Experience in Iraq Policy* Focus no. 66 February 2007, p.7.

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Harding, 'Britain almost out of troops, memo reveals', *The Daily Telegraph* 23 July 2007.

<sup>99</sup> MOD Defence Fact Sheet Operations in Iraq Facts and Figures

<http://www.mod.uk/Defenceinternet/Templates/factsheet.aspx?NRMODE=Published> Accessed 6 May 2008

believed was needed to repair the region's physical infrastructure in 2003.<sup>100</sup> Similar problems also arose in Afghanistan. In this case the British prepared a detailed plan for its intervention in Helmand in December 2005, but the plan was extremely ambitious and was shaped by more by the aspirations of Tony Blair rather than the reality on the ground. Although the Post Conflict Reconstruction Unit believed the concept needed to be scaled back, the political pressure from the Cabinet ensured that the scale and ambition of the plan remained intact. However no additional resources were allocated and government departments remained concerned about the feasibility of the operation.<sup>101</sup>

But even if more soldiers were available for operations this would not necessarily result in a reduction in the UK's dependence on a capital intensive mode of warfare. In part this is because some of this technology is actually very useful. For example, all Taliban communications via mobile phone or radio are monitored by NATO forces which means the Taliban have to rely on more basic forms of communication which has made their efforts to coordinate large scale attacks above the size of a company almost impossible. Similarly aerial surveillance systems have played a critical role in protecting UK forces from ambushes and booby traps, which has kept military casualties to a minimum. It is this last goal which makes technology such an important force multiplier for the British. As a result, operations and tactics have been shaped by a heavy reliance on modern firepower to kill the enemy at a distance so that they cannot engage British forces. A good illustration of this is the deployment of the Multiple Launch Rocket System to Afghanistan in 2007. This weapon can fire salvoes of twelve rockets up to a distance of 70 km with each rocket delivering death and destruction over an area the size of an American football pitch. Similarly when fighting in villages and district centres it has not been uncommon for British soldiers to use Javelin surface to air missiles against Taliban snipers hiding in mud brick buildings. The British have also demonstrated a great reliance on air

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<sup>100</sup> Col. N Baveystock, 'Has the UK Government's decisionmaking process since 2002 enabled effective delivery of reconstruction and sustainable development in Iraq?' *Royal College of Defence Studies Seaford House Papers 2007*

<sup>101</sup> James Ferguson, *A Million Bullets* (London: Bantam Press, 2008), pp.147-148.

support to defend its positions and assist in offensive operations. This has entailed a cocktail of munitions ranging from 540 pound unguided bombs, 1000 pound guided bombs and occasionally Maverick guided anti tank missiles. The combined effect of this 'kinetic effect' has saved the lives of British military personnel, but tragically it has become a principal cause of death for innocent civilians in Afghanistan. The UN estimate nearly 400 civilians were killed by air strikes alone in the first eight months of 2008 a 21 percent increase compared to the same period in 2007, and accounted for nearly two thirds of 577 non combatant deaths attributed to pro Government forces.<sup>102</sup> Such action, whilst limiting the UK government's exposure to the domestic political fallout caused by casualties, has produced political problems for the Afghan government. Not only does this demonstrate its inability to control its western allies, which undermines its credibility in the eyes of ordinary Afghans, the use of air power in this way also demonstrates that NATO/ISAF care more about its military personnel than the people of Afghanistan. As a result Hamid Karzai has been extremely critical of the counter insurgency campaign being waged by the West in Afghanistan.<sup>103</sup> Not surprisingly, the Taliban's media machine has exploited the civilian casualties caused by bombing in an effort to turn the population against the Afghan government and western intervention.<sup>104</sup>

Finally the UK's military campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan have fed Al Qaeda's propaganda machine and this is impacting on the domain of British national strategy. As one analyst observed:

Al Qaeda videotapes and websites demonstrate the great importance they attach to propaganda. Recently they have expanded into broadcasting their own news programme

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<sup>102</sup> United Nations Mission in Afghanistan *Armed Conflict and Civilian Casualties, Afghanistan 01 January 31 August 2008* p.4

<sup>103</sup> Seumus Milne, 'Civilian dead are trade-off in Nato's war of barbarity' *The Guardian* 16 October 2008

<sup>104</sup> International Crisis Group, *Taliban Propaganda: Winning the War of Words?* Asia Report 158 July 2008, p19.

called the Voice of the Caliphate which attempts to use world events to put over their movements' perverted doctrines.<sup>105</sup>

Iraq plays a very important part in the propaganda war. As TV journalist Peter Taylor explained in 2006:

I am very worried about Iraq. I see it as a potential Vietnam. They use the situation there to recruit, to propagandise, to fund raise, to train and also to plan and operate.<sup>106</sup> Apparently, the Americans are only spending 3 percent of their defence budget on public diplomacy, which is much less than was spent on the production of information during the Cold War.<sup>107</sup> The British Government currently spends £10 million funding a programme called Engaging the Islamic World.<sup>108</sup>

Most ironic is the view that British military strategy and operations have played a critical role in increasing the threat posed by the Muslim community in the UK. Perceived wars of aggression fought by the UK and US are supposedly radicalising the British Muslim population to the extent that members of the British Muslim community are willing to conduct attacks within the UK.<sup>109</sup> It is estimated by MI5 that there are currently more than thirty terrorist plots in the UK involving as many as 2,000 people under surveillance for their suspected involvement.<sup>110</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The British have always understood that the solution to the problem of terrorism lies not in

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<sup>105</sup> HCFAC, (note 37), Evidence, p.1.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.,Q 14.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., Q 14

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., Q 58.

<sup>109</sup> HM Government, *Countering International Terrorism; The United Kingdom's Strategy* Cm 6888, (London: HMSO, 2006), p.10.

<sup>110</sup> Jamie Doward, 'Extremists train young convicts for terror plots', *The Observer* 15 July 2007.

military but rather political action that addresses the social and economic ills that are feeding the conflict. On a paper at least, the UK's national strategy operated entirely on this premise. However, whilst the broad principles underlying the British approach to the war on terror remain sound, national and military strategy have been undermined by a series of problems, some of which stem from its allies, important flaws also exist within the British polity which has undermined the creation and implementation of an effective grand strategy and military strategy. First and foremost has been the lack of a rigorous analysis concerning the aims and objectives of this conflict and what is particularly striking is the tension that has emerged in the government's relations with the military over the failure to relate ends and means. As a result of poor decision making and sometimes poor advice given by elements of the military the UK has become committed to a series of wars that have proved costly and which ironically have played to the strengths of the opponent who is committed to a long and protracted struggle. Even more frustrating has been the inability of the government, because of a lack of coordination within the system, to exploit the national levers of power, political, economic and military to concentrate the UK's national power and influence in this war. Instead conflicts like Afghanistan and Iraq became weeping sores, which exacerbated the drain on scarce resources. Additional investment has been made, but only reluctantly which reveals a more deep rooted problem caused by the government's failure to persuade the domestic population that the war on terror is necessary. Unfortunately, as the current recession bites, the pressure to limit defence spending looks set to create new challenges in the ends and means debate. This failure to relate ends and means has also impacted on the military strategic domain. In an effort to redress the ends means gap, the UK military has had to place a greater reliance on technology acting as force multiplier than was desirable in a war of this kind and it is clear that the British have experienced significant problems in Afghanistan and Iraq because of their reliance on technology. Lack of money for wider development has also been a problem. In the case of Iraq the lack of financial support to all the levers of power: political, economic and military, meant that the British failed to stabilise the south east of the country. In the case of Afghanistan, whilst a coordinated plan and money were available, the lack of an effective military capability made it impossible to create a secure environment in which development could begin and as a result the campaign became dominated by 'kinetic' as opposed to 'hearts



and minds' operations. Indeed a profound and unintended consequence of the war so far has been the way that military operations have come to dominate the public's perception of the war on terror. In 2007, Tony Blair claimed that: 'we could have chosen security as the battleground. But we did not. We chose values.'<sup>111</sup> That may well have been the intention, but ironically the UK's military strategy caused the security battlefield to dominate British and global perceptions of this war, so much so that it has given Al Qaeda the chance to open a new front in this war within the UK itself. Sadly the current Coalition Government's Defence and Security Review (SDSR) has done little to address these problems. In fact, the commitment to capital intensive force structures remains very much to the fore; a fact amply demonstrated by the Government's commitment to procure two large aircraft carriers and the Joint Strike Fighter, the combined cost of which is likely to exceed £10 billion over the next decade.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Tony Blair, A Battle for Global Values *Foreign Affairs* January/February 20027  
<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20070101faessay86106/tony-blair/a-battle-for-global-v> accessed  
6/05/08

<sup>112</sup> MOD, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review* Cm 7948  
(London: HMSO, 2010), 23