

## Multilateral Approaches to Security: Choices for Defence

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### Future Defence Review Working Papers

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### *Issue*

Stronger multilateral security institutions are at the heart of the United Kingdom's international strategy, and require a specific focus of defence effort to shape the nation's military strategy.

### *Context*

The British military has played a major role in bolstering multilateral institutions. Overstretch and budgetary crunch, however, have already eroded the role that UK defence plays in these institutions, at a time when significant parts of the globe are in dire need of external intervention to stabilise and prevent conflict. The UK needs to consider carefully how best to structure its defence effort so as to strengthen the often ailing international security institutions.

### *Key Findings*

- An effective international security architecture, delivered via multilateral systems, is central to the achievement of the UK's national security and development objectives.
- The security deficit in large swathes of fragile and conflict-affected states points to continued high demand for the external provision of security.
- The international 'supply side' is under severe strain and disagreements over international norms stymie greater co-operation.
- As a status quo power interested in global stability, the UK is working to address these normative and capacity constraints but operational and budgetary overstretch have reduced our influence.
- Defence has an important role to play in addressing international norms, improving institutional collaboration and building more professional capabilities in key institutions such as the UN, the EU, NATO and regional organisations such as the African Union, as well as within individual members of these organisations.
- However, the Ministry of Defence will have to make some hard choices regarding priorities and capabilities if it wishes to play a role in bolstering the institutions.
- We should seriously consider a radical new model in which the UK transforms its defence sector so as to serve as an enabler of the multilateral security architecture.

## *Analysis*

Successive British governments have stressed the importance of strong multilateral institutions to preserve international peace and security. The Labour government's emphasis on bolstering a 'rules-based international system' is likely to endure at the heart of any future government's approach, albeit perhaps with differences of emphasis when it comes to the role to be played by European Union institutions or the transatlantic link.

Since the end of the Cold War, the global security architecture has played an increasingly important role in preventing conflicts and filling the security gap in fragile and conflict-affected states. The past two decades have seen an explosive growth in UN peace-keeping and peace-building missions, EU civil and military monitoring and peace-building activities, and the advent of major NATO or coalition stabilisation missions from the Balkans to Afghanistan.

The United Kingdom has been a keen advocate of these developments. It has pushed forward the normative boundaries of international action, for instance in relation to humanitarian intervention and the Responsibility to Protect, and the interlacing of the security and development agendas. London has been an enthusiastic supporter of efforts to build international capacity, ranging from Anglo-French work on European military capabilities, through strengthening of United Nations bodies such as the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Peacebuilding Support Office, to promotion of a comprehensive approach at NATO and the provision of military and other capacity-building support to the African Union and African and Asian troop contributing countries.

However, in recent years, the UK's credibility has been eroded by its own overstretch. Iraq and, more recently, Afghanistan have tested the UK defence establishment and sapped political will, making the UK a marginal player in the delivery of, for example, UN peacekeeping operations. The spring 2009 funding crisis that forced the UK to slash its support to civilian deployments has further undermined the UK's clout. As the UK begins to face up seriously to its looming fiscal crunch over the coming decade whilst heavily committed to delivering military and civilian effect in Afghanistan, the pressures will mount to reduce even further the UK's contributions to the multilateral conflict architecture.

If there are more cuts to such commitments, the UK will be left in the untenable position of sitting at the top tables in New York and Brussels preaching but not practising. Furthermore, without a strong UK lead in certain areas, many of the normative, institutional

and capability weaknesses that the system faces are unlikely to be resolved.

### **Increasing Demand for Security**

Conflict statisticians stress the difficulty of drawing out any useful trends from surveys of violent conflict. While the figures do seem to point to a rise and then fall in the incidence of armed conflict since the early 1990s, it remains one of the most pressing challenges facing the global peace and security architecture across a broad swathe of the developing world when combined with state fragility and human insecurity. Traditional inter-state conflict has certainly not gone away, but hybrid forms of internationalised intra-state conflicts are prevalent, often overlapping with organised crime and elements of international terrorism at times.

Across significant parts of Africa, on some of Russia's southern borders, in parts of the Middle East, South Asia and some pockets of Latin America and the Pacific, states and regional structures are failing to provide security and order, let alone legitimate governance and justice, for their peoples. This security deficit is being filled by a variety of international actors providing various combinations of political oversight, military and police capabilities, and social and economic development functions. The international provision ranges in scale from small EU or OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) monitoring missions in former Soviet republics, through UN peace-building missions in Africa, to large-scale UN or hybrid civil-military missions, such as in the Congo or Darfur, up to the sprawling international security and state-building apparatus in Afghanistan.

While the broad numbers of battle-deaths and conflicts may be showing some positive trends, there is little sign that the demand for external provision of conflict prevention, stabilisation and peace-building will decline anytime soon.

### **Supply under Strain**

While many of the developing world's conflicts may not be new, the international community's desire to 'do something' about them, whether for reasons of altruism or enlightened self-interest, has led to a surge in activism. In 2008, the numbers of military personnel deployed on UN missions reached record levels. Peacekeeping and peace-building agendas have become more ambitious as practitioners have recognised the need to build peace and state structures themselves to address the underlying causes of conflict. Hence the demand for police, judges, and other civilian experts has grown vastly. The accompanying paraphernalia of headquarters, co-ordination mechanisms, research, analysis and training have also grown. Leading Western powers, having become bogged

down in enormously ambitious stabilisation missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, have struggled to reconfigure their government systems and deploy the required military and civilian assets.

The sum of this increased activism has been extreme strain on the supply side. The bulk of UN peacekeeping troops come from a small number of South Asian and African countries. The UN and EU alike face serious challenges in deploying high-quality police and civilian personnel in the required numbers. The US and the UK have failed as of yet to find lasting solutions to the effective mobilisation of the whole of government to support these missions. The apparatus of command and control is also under severe strain. NATO and the various components of the EU duplicate functions but at the same time have been unable to build truly professional management capabilities. The various UN stovepipes struggle to co-ordinate effectively and often operate on a shoestring. The result is an increasing feeling that many of the missions launched, whether under a UN, EU or other flag, are intended as political tokens – not mandated, resourced or prepared to deliver the peace and stability that is their stated intent.

### **Geopolitical Challenges**

The current model for filling the security deficit is one in which the global north, represented by the UN Security Council's Permanent 3 and the wider G8 and OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) members, sets the agenda, provides some of the funding and, in some cases, provides personnel and equipment. Key 'southern' states, such as India, Bangladesh, Nigeria and Brazil, play vital roles in supplying personnel. The conceptual model on which much of this work now takes place is well expressed in recent Department for International Development (DfID) and Ministry of Defence (MoD) papers on state-building, peace-building and stabilisation. Although different terms are used, most such missions have an ambitious agenda that ultimately seeks to transform conflicts rather than just to freeze them.

However, both the conceptual and the delivery models are under challenge. At the conceptual level, critiques of the 'liberal peace' model abound. Furthermore there is, rightly, scepticism regarding the ability of international intervention to do more than 'nudge' evolutionary processes in conflict-affected countries. And even this nudging can involve a massive expenditure of resources and time.

At the level of geopolitics it is not yet clear how the shifting global balance of power will impact on the existing architecture. The optimistic scenario for which the UK has been working is that emerging economies and rising powers come to embrace the largely Western-constructed set of existing norms, procedures and

structures and so become 'responsible' partners in global security governance. This approach underpins efforts such as persuading the Chinese to be more involved in peacekeeping and giving the Indians a greater say in the design of UN peacekeeping missions. It is just as likely, however, that as they gain a greater say in the global system these powers will try to reshape it in ways that oppose the interventionist 'liberal peace' agenda. We see the rumbles of this important shift in the bitter debates at the UN over Responsibility to Protect and in the Chinese preference in Africa for authoritarian approaches to stability.

### **Fixing the System – Roles for Defence**

In 2008 Gordon Brown launched a grandiose drive for systemic reform of the international institutions, including in respect to conflict and security.<sup>1</sup> Although the financial crisis quickly came to dominate the international reform agenda, progress has been made on issues such as the UN approach to peacekeeping. Looking to the future, we need to think about reform on three levels, on all of which defence can play a major role. These are: promotion of international norms and standards; improved collaboration between institutions; and capability building.

#### *Normative Contribution*

First, we need to address international norms surrounding conflict and security. The UK and its partners have made progress in elaborating on a number of important norms in how the international community deals with insecurity and state fragility. These norms include high-level concepts such as 'responsible sovereignty', and the Responsibility to Protect; and principles and practices, laid out for instance in OECD guidelines, on the most appropriate ways to support peace-building in conflict-affected and fragile states. Norms also work at the operational level to guide the behaviour of international missions, for instance in respect of the use of force, approaches to comprehensive civil-military integration, and the protection of women's rights.

At the broadest level, the logical approach for the UK is to combine promotion of these norms through all available channels, with an active effort to give a real voice to non-Western states, not just at the UN Security Council top table but also through lower-level operational activities. This process will involve some 'compromising' of the norms and principles that the UK has tried so hard to promulgate but the norms that emerge will have far greater traction if they are negotiated rather than imposed.

Defence has an important role to play in supporting this normative agenda. The military establishment has a very long history of transmitting its norms and values to other militaries and hence

other societies. Indeed, historically it has often been military establishments that have been the vectors for the introduction of Western practices and approaches into other cultures. The UK military retains considerable soft power influence with its allies, the Commonwealth and other regional partners. The apparatus of military education and training enables the transmission of values. The more the UK military can play an active role in the enabling functions of multilateral organisations, for instance providing staff officers and planners or providing doctrinal, training and exercise facilities, the greater the impact it will have in fostering the norms that the UK wishes to promote in the international system.

#### *Streamlining Institutional Responses*

If promoting norms seems rather a woolly task for the UK's armed forces, addressing institutional overlaps and dysfunctions may appeal more to the military's sense of order. The UK and its partners have built a mosaic of sometimes overlapping and often dysfunctional institutions and systems. There seems no rational reason, for example, why there should be both an EU and a NATO maritime force operating off Somalia or why the European Commission, European Council and various UN agencies should be running parallel security sector reform missions in certain countries. Diplomats will argue, rightly, that there is value in having an overlapping set of institutional architectures since the politics of any individual crisis will determine which nations wish to play a part and under which flag. In a time of relative plenty, we were able to afford this redundancy and inefficiency within the international peace and security architecture. No longer. With the system under severe strain and the fiscal tsunami about to hit the UK and other developed nations' budgets, we need to concentrate on squeezing inefficiencies out of the system.

This will be a difficult task. It is far easier to focus on building up one element of the system, such as training an African army, than it is to address the frictions in the architecture. There is a laundry list of steps that need to be taken. These range from harmonising concepts, such as the European Security Strategy and the NATO Strategic Concept, through enactment of collaborative frameworks, such as between the UN and NATO, to operational collaboration, improved funding arrangements, and more routine sharing of assets.

While some of this work can be left to the diplomats and the aid agencies, defence plays a vital role in lubricating the system and providing a practical, operational network that can bridge many of these gaps and make the system work. Opportunities on which defence can build include the promotion of interoperable standards between, for example the UN, EU and NATO; joint

capacity-building initiatives, for instance to produce a global cadre of trained civil-military planners and staff officers; and the provision of enabling assets, both people and equipment, notably to AU and UN missions.

### *Increasing Capability*

Finally, we come to the most obvious role for the military – capability-building. This goes beyond what the MoD currently labels Security Co-operation. The US term of Building Partner Capacity is possibly a more precise description of what is needed. Using a combination of Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) expertise, DfID funding and MoD assets, the UK has been quite successful in recent years in this area. Its work has ranged from strengthening DPKO's staff functions, through exercising NATO's civil-military capabilities, bolstering African and South Asian peacekeepers, and supporting the AU's peace-making capabilities.

In the future, this work will be even more important but will need to be carefully targeted. As the UK becomes ever less able to deliver security effect unilaterally, the case for aggregating effect via multilateral institutions grows stronger. But the trick in the future will be to adopt two principles – focus on quality and use leverage. Quality means that we should focus upon professionalising key assets and multipliers, for example concentrating on strengthening headquarters and educational establishments rather than training junior ranks. Leverage means that we should look to use UK assets to leverage others. For instance, by bolstering EU or NATO military educational establishments with a modest input of UK resources, we can use these establishments to boost the capability of UN, AU or individual partner nations. By helping to professionalise how the EU or UN design and deliver integrated stabilisation missions, the UK will need to invest less itself in deploying military assets on such missions.

### **What Does This Mean?**

What may a greater MoD investment in supporting multilateralism mean in practice? First, and most importantly, it requires a clear view from Whitehall of the effect that the UK is seeking to achieve, and how defence can form part of the underpinning influence strategy. For instance, one objective is to promote the norms of protection of civilians and gender awareness within international peacekeeping missions. Operational level defence work with partners needs to reinforce these messages in training and doctrine. Another objective may be to encourage greater NATO support for the AU and its members; UK defence can help to enable this through further investment in training, exchanges and provision of enablers.

Some of the particular implications for defence may include:

*The European Union*

Use MoD facilities and experts to support a European-wide, cross-institutional initiative to generate a cadre of civil-military mission planners and conflict experts. Focus EU military capability development on enablers that could be used by the EU to support UN and/or AU missions.

*NATO*

Support the creation of an expeditionary military advisory capability within NATO able to manage professional military reform programmes. Encourage further role specialisation among NATO and EU members. This area would be a particular priority in relation to Afghanistan.

*The United Nations*

Provide, directly and via EU and NATO, expertise and resources to professionalise DPKO HQ and field operations and provide enablers into selected missions to boost performance. Transition Troop Contributing Country capacity-building programmes to an EU or NATO lead and focus bilateral UK efforts higher up the value chain, for instance in defence reform.

*The African Union*

Move from current military capacity-building initiatives to focus on a higher level (defence reform) and multilateralise support where feasible, for instance through the EU, NATO or with the US.

*The Commonwealth*

While not an operational peace and security organisation in the same manner, it does provide considerable scope for the exercise of the UK military's soft power. Defence can make greater use of Commonwealth channels to promote norms and standards.

*The United States*

One of the UK's objectives has to be to build on the Obama administration's increased respect for multilateralism. UK defence has a crucial role to play in encouraging the US defence establishment to see the benefits of expanding its efforts to bolster the multilateral mechanisms. The US Defence Department already does a great deal in terms of military capacity-building worldwide and in support of missions such as UNAMID (the African Union/ United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur). Continued nudging by the UK defence establishment will help advocates within the US system to allocate additional effort towards strengthening the multilateral security mechanisms.

### **Choices for Defence**

Some variant of this strategy will inevitably be followed by the UK, given its position in the world and its interest in bolstering multilateral security mechanisms. The Labour government has been pursuing many of these tracks over the past decade and the emerging defence green paper is likely to point to the importance of soft power and security co-operation. Conservative Party thinking on foreign affairs, defence and development is developing broadly along similar lines. However, the logic of such a strategy leads to conclusions that some may find disturbing when it comes to improving delivery mechanisms and balance of priorities.

On delivery mechanisms, while the UK government has gone some way towards implementing a joined up approach to policy-making and delivery, for example through pooled funds, it can only ensure true efficiency through a much tighter degree of integration. For instance, if it is important to build the capability of a developing country to contribute to UN or AU peacekeeping missions, it is a waste of time to deploy a military training team unless DfID and the FCO are also supporting wider programmes of defence and security sector reform. As in East Africa, training soldiers can be a waste of effort if the broader institutional context is not addressed. Integrated planning and delivery is therefore crucial to ensure that objectives are met efficiently. This does not just involve re-engineering Whitehall management and budgeting systems but also serious consideration of the respective roles of the departments in delivering the required effects.

The discussion of balance of priorities becomes even more difficult. Following the logic of this argument, a case could be made for the UK military to transform itself so as to become a 'multilateral spine'. Barring some residual capabilities for national territorial defence, the UK could focus on building enablers and framework capabilities so as to bolster the multilateral institutions rather than deploying major formed units of its own. This 'contributory option' sounds like a radical proposal as it would put at risk the UK's ability to deploy significant combat power unilaterally or as part of a coalition. Conceptually, however, it would not be dissimilar to the model adopted by the UK throughout its imperial history. UK forces were able to police large parts of the world quite cheaply through providing military frameworks, an officer corps, and enabling technologies. Some variant of this approach may serve the UK well in the future.

Before rejecting this approach out of hand, we need to decide whether to make hard choices or to muddle through. In theory the UK is committed to 'muddling through' - adopting a mixed model in which it retains the capability to project significant quantities

of combat capability in coalition operations, while providing enough enabling activities to push forward the process of reform and development in the multilateral organisations. In practice, however, the pressures of Iraq and Afghanistan, combined with financial crises, have forced the slashing of security co-operation activities such as secondments, training and defence attachés. As the fiscal pressures on the MoD grow and as the multilateral system comes under ever greater strain, there is a real risk that UK defence will in fact fail on all counts. It will be unable to retain its own capabilities at a significant enough levels and it will fail to bolster the multilateral institutions to the extent required for them to take the strain. Refocusing UK defence around serious, integrated and long-term attempts to reform and revitalise the multilateral security architecture would require some radical shifts in priorities and slaughter many service sacred cows but may in fact do more for the UK's national security interests in the longer term. 🌐

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 'PM calls for world institutions shake-up', Monday 21 January 2008, <<http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page14319>>.