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Tactics and Trade-Offs

The Evolution of Manoeuvre in the British Army

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Introduction

The future trajectory of land warfare in the United Kingdom stands at a crossroads. For decades, the British Army has striven to become a reliable and enthusiastic proponent of US-led digital transformation, quietly adapting expensive US concepts to suit British budgets and organizational preferences through its own 'manoeuvrist approach' to operations. In so doing, the UK has widely been seen as a bridge between the Pentagon and European armies, especially during the defining conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Indeed, the desire to maintain operational currency and tactical interoperability with the US military lies at the heart of British defence policy, even as the UK has increasingly struggled to afford the full spectrum of capabilities these doctrines necessitate. Now, with the character of warfare evolving once again, this old paradox presents new challenges as the British Army attempts to rejuvenate its warfighting capabilities in a fashion fit for the future.

On the one hand, the UK Ministry of Defence's new *Integrated Operating Concept* mirrors the essential contours of the USA's *Multi-Domain Operations*, aiming to buttress the utility of British military power through a shift in emphasis toward information and meaning, underpinned by broader and deeper cross-governmental operational integration. Such concepts are reflected in the British Army's *Land Operations* doctrine, which posits 'integrated action' as fundamental to land manoeuvre. On the other hand, the British Army's ageing fleet of conventional platforms—from main battle tanks and infantry fighting vehicles to artillery systems and communication suites—are now in urgent need of re-capitalization, raising profound questions about where the technological crux of future tactical capability should lie. This chapter reveals the complex trade-offs and path dependencies

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inherent in implementing the British Army's emergent approach to land warfare. It examines recent debates within the British profession of arms on doctrine and acquisitions to explore the ongoing development of British military tactical practice. At heart, these discussions illuminate an uncomfortable interaction between martial concepts and material realities, strategic ambition and financial constraint in the construction of British land power—with attendant implications for future tactical and operational realities.

The chapter proceeds in the following way. The first section examines the importation of manoeuvre warfare doctrines into the British Army from the USA, via NATO. The second section explores the subsequent development of these ideas in the early post-Cold War period and into the British Army's operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, focusing specifically on the development of the material capabilities associated with 'force transformation'—and the financial and organizational challenges these presented. The third section then turns to the British Army's efforts to regenerate manoeuvre doctrine and rationalize force structures for the post-Afghanistan era through the Army 2020 reforms, shaping present options for the future in so doing. Finally, the chapter turns to examine the opportunities and constraints for future manoeuvre presented by the path-dependent evolution of British military doctrine and capability. The chapter concludes that whilst the British Army's understanding of manoeuvre has been heavily shaped by its most significant ally, the USA, the implementation of these concepts has been defined by the unique politics of British defence—and above all, a particular blend of organizational preferences, cultural attitudes, and financial constraints. Moreover, these peculiarities of British defence now appear to be shaping the reality of British military manoeuvre more than ever, potentially leading to either a divergence between British and US constructions of manoeuvre—or else a gap between British doctrine on paper and British capabilities in practice.

Importing Manoeuvre into British Military Thought

Since the 1980s, the British Army has successively imported US concepts of land manoeuvre, progressively adapting American military ideas and practices to suit British budgets and cultural preferences. This emulation made good sense in the context of Britain's Cold War defence policy, which sought to tie the US into European defence whilst maintaining enough independent capability to safeguard British interests, hedging between the USA and the continent. Consequently, NATO operations in northern Europe became a central concern for British defence policy, especially during the later Cold

War after Britain had largely divested herself of Empire.[1] Accordingly, the British Army's current doctrinal thinking on manoeuvre has its roots in the organizational change undertaken by the US Army following the Vietnam War. In 1976, the US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) published a new operational doctrine called *Active Defense*, intended to refocus the US military on countering the Soviet threat in Europe. TRADOC itself had been established to help revitalize the US Army in the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the introduction of the All-Volunteer Force model, and its first commander General William DePuy viewed *Active Defense* first and foremost as a means to improve the US Army's collective training and professional education standards. However, the doctrine also advocated a firepower-heavy positional style of fighting which aroused significant controversy and professional debate, ultimately culminating in the development and adoption of an alternative concept of manoeuvre warfare in the publication of the US *AirLand Battle* doctrine in 1982.[2]

These debates chimed with reform-minded British officers on the other side of the Atlantic, themselves preoccupied with the British Army's own lack of preparedness to meet the forces of the Warsaw Pact. In particular, the British commander of NATO's Northern Army Group (NORTHAG), General Sir Nigel Bagnall, had become simultaneously concerned with the relative decline in the training and equipment of the British and allied divisions in northern Germany when compared with the much larger and increasingly modernized Soviet forces. Bagnall believed that a lightning Warsaw Pact campaign conducted in the style of the Soviet's Second World War Operational Manoeuvre Groups might rapidly overrun NORTHAG, creating a strategic *fait accompli* before NATO's civilian leadership could agree on an effective political response. Bagnall thus sought to bog down any prospective Soviet thrust, abandoning NORTHAG's previous positional 'forward defence' posture in favour of a new twin-track approach. This saw NORTHAG's air component tasked with targeting Soviet second echelon forces in depth to prevent them from reaching the battle area, whilst the British troops under Bagnall's command were restructured and re-equipped to undertake mobile counter-attacks against the Soviet first echelon, which would now have to fight alone.[3]

[1] Andrew Dorman, 'Reconciling Britain to Europe in the Next Millennium: The Evolution of British Defense Policy in the Post-Cold War Era', *Defense Analysis*, 17, 2 (2001): 188–91.

[2] Richard Lock-Pullan, 'How to Rethink War: Conceptual Innovation and AirLand Battle Doctrine', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 28, 4 (2005): 679–702.

[3] Andrew Dorman, 'A Peculiarly British Revolution: Missing the Point or Just Avoiding Change?' in *Reassessing the Revolution in Military Affairs: Transformation, Evolution and Lessons Learnt*, edited by Jeffrey Collins and Andrew Futter (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 33–50.

NORTHAG's focus on deep strike and operational manoeuvre developed into the NATO doctrine of *Follow-On Forces Attack*, which, despite some differences in detail, shared a common intellectual pedigree with US *AirLand Battle*. Moreover, Bagnall's elevation to Chief of the General Staff confirmed the British Army on the same developmental trajectory as its US interlocutor, leaving a lasting impression on British military practice. Indeed, manoeuvre warfare enthusiasts in the British Army leaned heavily on US doctrine in their own thinking throughout the late Cold War period, notwithstanding some of Bagnall's own reservations.[4] Brigadier Richard Simpkin's influential book *Race to the Swift*, for example, propounded the importance of concepts like tempo, momentum, and simultaneity for the British Army of the Rhine, underpinned by a recognition of the importance of information processing and rapid decision–action cycles to creating operational advantage.[5] As in the USA, the British adoption of manoeuvre warfare also provided the British Army with a template for organizational change and technological modernization, evident in the publication the UK's first higher military doctrine, initially called *British Military Doctrine* and subsequently *British Defence Doctrine* after its capstone concepts were adopted by the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. Importantly, the 1997 edition confirmed 'the Manoeuvrist Approach' as the cornerstone of this new British way in war, alongside 'Mission Command' as the British view on *Auftragstaktik*-style command and control (C2).[6]

The Manoeuvrist Approach broadly mirrored US ideas about manoeuvre warfare, but also reflected some uniquely British accommodations. Shortly after the publication of this new doctrine, Assistant Chief of the Defence Staff Major General John Kiszely observed how the prevailing NATO definition of manoeuvre as 'the employment of forces on the battlefield through movement in combination with fire, or fire potential, to achieve a position of advantage in respect to the enemy in order to accomplish the mission' sat uncomfortably between two divergent schools of thought: one which viewed manoeuvre as little more than the conduct of fire and movement, and its alternate, more abstract, understanding as the adroit creation and exploitation of leverage to produce a disproportionate effect on the enemy.[7] At least at first, the Manoeuvrist Approach sought to span both these poles whilst simultaneously leaning towards the latter. Defined as 'an attitude of mind' focused

[4] Ibid.: 38–44.
[5] Richard Simpkin, *Race to the Swift: Thoughts on Twenty-First Century Warfare* (London: Brassey's Defence, 1985).
[6] See John Kiszely, 'The Meaning of Manoeuvre', *RUSI Journal* 143, 6 (1998): 37.
[7] Ibid.: 36.

on the use of guile to shatter the enemy's will and cohesion (as opposed to simply eroding his fighting forces in the field), the Manoeuvrist Approach was presented as a manner of fighting favouring the quantitively weaker but qualitatively more capable belligerent, reliant on precision, flexibility, and joint and combined arms integration rather than mass. Although the British Army would now 'fight to move' rather than 'move to fight', Kiszely was nontheless quick to recognize the enduring importance of tactical attrition to British military operations—both for enabling operational manoeuvre and as a fall-back when manoeuvre was seen as too risky.[8]

If the British military's instinct, therefore, was to view the Manoeuvrist Approach as primarily an operational level concept with limited direct bearing on the messy tactical realities of combat, the end of the Cold War began to challenge this perspective. In principle, British defence policy continued to be guided by Cold War assumptions during the early 1990s, even despite the fall of the Berlin Wall. The acquisition of Challenger 2 main battle tanks for the British Army, for example, reflected a direct continuation of previous capability requirements. The British Army likewise traded command of NORTHAG on its disbandment for stewardship of the new Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC—initially ACE/RRC), which was seen as its spiritual successor in NATO. However, this conceptual stasis belied a significant upheaval in British defence policy. All three services were subjected to sweeping financial cuts and downsizings, described as 'traumatic' by one commentator, as the government of the day attempted to wring an economic dividend from the absence of a clear military threat. Moreover, neither the USA's growing distance from Europe, nor initial efforts to build an EU defence infrastructure in their absence, suited the UK's traditional preferences.[9]

Toward the end of the 1990s, British foreign policy gained a new sense of direction under Prime Minister Tony Blair, leading to a new emphasis on expeditionary capabilities. By the time of New Labour's new Strategic Defence Review (SDR) in 1998, the British Army's complement of main battle tanks had already been reduced by 45 per cent on Cold War levels. Although the SDR retained the ability to deploy heavy armour at divisional strength, increasing prominence was given to the development of rapidly deployable light and medium-weight brigades suitable for limited interventions and Peace Support Operations (PSOs).[10] This placed a renewed premium on the further adoption of joint operations, underpinned by greater digitization

[8] Ibid.: 37–39. See also, John Kiszely, 'The British Army and Approaches to Warfare since 1945', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 19, 4 (1996): 179–206

[9] Dorman, 'Reconciling Britain to Europe': 191–194.

[10] British Government, *Strategic Defence Review: Modern Forces for the Modern World* (London: HMSO, 1998).

and a general trend toward technological modernization. Here, New Labour actively sought to reconcile the US and European facets of British defence policy, arguing that modernized European forces would enable the EU to share the burden of regional security whilst remaining available to NATO (and thus subject to US veto) in the event of a major war—confirming Britain's own view of itself as a bridge between the USA and Europe in the process. Moreover, British experience in Bosnia and especially Kosovo—where European forces were forced to rely on US air power owing to a lack of modern capability—lent further credence to the need for more agile and technologically advanced forces.[11] Further adoption of the US-inspired Revolution in Military Affairs thus became a core feature of British efforts to balance NATO and the EU, whilst also enabling its own interventionist 'ethical foreign policy'.

Even so, manoeuvrism itself remained a somewhat contentious topic among some British officers, even at the cusp of the new millennium. On the one hand, the 1991 Gulf War confirmed to British officers the importance of maintaining interoperability with developing US warfighting concepts, especially given the relative prominence the Americans afforded the British Army compared with other less modernized allied contingents. Indeed, the *Follow-On Forces Attack* plan developed from NORTHAG's reforms had provided the building block for coalition planning in the Gulf.[12] On the other hand, some dogmatic officers were beginning to view the idea of manoeuvre as the antithesis of attrition, leading laggards to deride the Manoeuvrist Approach as a dangerous myth and lampoon reformers for ostensibly believing that a mastery of manoeuvre might prevent the need for bloodshed altogether.[13] Writing in 1998, Royal Marine Brigadier Robert Fry observed that the British military had traditionally been too small to bother much with grand operational concepts like manoeuvre, quipping that 'whilst we are all manoeuvrists now, we seem to have reached this position independently from our history in modern warfare'.[14] Fry himself concluded that whilst technological modernization made manoeuvre doctrine viable, and the need to remain compatible with US practices made it desirable, manoeuvre and attrition should not be seen as polar opposites, given that 'an element of attrition is a necessary precondition to successful manoeuvre'.[15] Moreover, state-on-state warfare continued to be seen as the Army's *raison d'être* by senior officers,

[11] Dorman, 'Reconciling Britain to Europe': 194–198.
[12] Dorman, 'A Peculiarly British Revolution': 44–45.
[13] Ibid.: 46; Kiszely, 'The Meaning of Manoeuvre': 38.
[14] Robert Fry, 'The Meaning of Manoeuvre', *RUSI Journal* 143, 6 (1998): 41.
[15] Ibid.: 42.

notwithstanding the new-found emphasis on PSOs. Although the 2001 edition of *British Defence Doctrine* confirmed the centrality of the Manoeuvrist Approach to *all* operations, the head of the UK's Joint Doctrine and Concepts Centre also reiterated that 'all those who wear the uniform of the UK's Armed Forces must be prepared to deliver lethal force and, if necessary, die for whatever legitimate cause the UK is fighting'—just in case there was any doubt as to what the Manoeuvrist Approach actually involved.[16]

Between Warfighting Capability and Counter-insurgency

The September of 2001 set in train two parallel and ultimately divergent processes, which would confirm the supremacy of manoeuvrist thinking in the British Army but also simultaneously undermine the technological and organizational foundations of the British military's conventional modernization efforts. That month marked both the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York, and also the publication of the US Department of Defense's *Quadrennial Defense Review* (QDR).[17] The latter document signalled a further evolution in US military thinking on manoeuvre, which, when combined with the geostrategic implications of 9/11, confirmed and accelerated the British Army's trajectory of reform. At the same time, however, the so-called Global War on Terror which followed the 9/11 attacks saw the British Army embroiled in a series of protracted counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, placing both the Army as an institution and wider British defence policy under significant pressure, ultimately calling into question the financial and organizational viability of US-inspired military modernization.

Admittedly, the publication of the US QDR in 2001 was far from the first move toward greater trans-Atlantic interoperability in military capabilities. The Americans, for their part, have been encouraging European military modernization since at least the 1999 NATO summit in Washington, and the UK's 1997 SDR had likewise begun to reorient the British Army's capabilities in line with US digitization agendas. The SDR had seen the creation of the UK's Joint Rapid Reaction Force, used to much effect in Sierra Leone in 2000. The British Army was similarly moving toward the acquisition of more transportable and expeditionary capabilities prior to the QDR, with

[16] Major General Anthony A. Milton, 'British Defence Doctrine and the British Approach to Military Operations', *RUSI Journal* 146, 6 (2001): 42.

[17] *Quadrennial Defense Review Report, September 30, 2001*, US Department of Defense (Washington, DC: DoD, 2001).

the initiation of the TRACER and MRAV programmes to acquire new reconnaissance and multi-role armoured vehicles via US and European consortia respectively. Nonetheless, profound acceptance of digitization in the British officer corps prior to the QDR has been described as lacklustre, and even some US officers continued to view the RMA as something of a fad.[18]

Importantly, the QDR—following shortly after both a change of US government and 9/11—introduced a new language of defence 'transformation' into military doctrine. Although still fundamentally manoeuvrist in character, the transformation agenda focused attention on the emerging material capabilities through which manoeuvrist principles could be applied to their fullest extent. Here, US transformation can be seen as the product of three intersecting elements: Network-Centric Warfare (NCW), Effects-Based Operations (EBO), and expeditionary force structures. The adoption of each of these in the British Army would require further doctrinal changes, but critically also material acquisitions.[19]

In the UK, this shift began immediately after 9/11, with the publication of the 'New Chapter' to the SDR focusing primarily on responding to international terrorism. Then, shortly after the 2003 Iraq War, the MoD published a further Defence White Paper entitled *Delivering Security in a Changing World*, which sought to significantly reshape the force structure of the British Army in line with the US model of digital transformation. This embedded a new brigade structure built around two heavy brigades, three medium-weight brigades, and a light brigade; enough to undertake two minor contingency tasks or one short major conflict.[20] This represented a conscious shift away from heavy armoured units toward medium-weight forces, to be equipped with a new vehicle system procured under the Future Rapid Effects System (or FRES). The FRES programme was intended to provide a family of medium-weight, air mobile armoured vehicles, equipped with modern sensors and digital connectivity. Not only would their medium weight make them much easier to deploy and support on expeditionary operations, but the use of a common chassis to produce various different specialist vehicles (where previously multiple entirely different platforms had been acquired) would simplify fleet management and generate cost savings. As such, the FRES programme replaced both the TRACER programme, which the US had lost interest in

[18] David Galbreath, 'Western European Armed Forces and the Modernisation Agenda: Following or Falling Behind?', *Defence Studies* 14, 4 (2014): 398–402.

[19] Theo Farrell, 'The Dynamics of British Military Transformation', *International Affairs* 84, 4 (2008): 777–779.

[20] Ibid.: 798–800.

by 2001, and MRAV, from which the UK unilaterally withdrew in 2003 over concerns about its weight.[21]

This shift toward medium forces represented a calculated risk, highlighting the extent to which the British Army had internalized the idea of expeditionary manoeuvre based around digitally modernized forces. The shift to medium armour was accompanied by the acquisition of both Apache attack helicopters and man-portable Javelin anti-tank missiles, which were considered to somewhat offset the reduction in heavy armour in a conventional war in both the deep and close battle.[22] Even so, the British Army recognized that by converting heavy brigades with Warrior IFV and Challenger 2 into medium-weight formations equipped with FRES it was, as Theo Farrell has argued, 'consciously sacrificing combat power for increased mobility'. Nonetheless, Farrell concluded that this 'move to medium weight was not forced on the army by civilian policy-makers', but instead reflected a considered judgement about the likely character of future conflict, notwithstanding the desire to maintain a minimal divisional capability to retain a degree of 'full-spectrum' credibility in the eyes of the US Army.[23]

That said, if the British Army embraced transformation as the latest evolution of operational manoeuvre, it also sought to adapt some of its core principles just as it had done with the translation of manoeuvre warfare into the Manoeuvrist Approach. This can be seen in the British response both to NCW and EBO. Although British officers recognized the importance of digital communications, ISTAR capabilities, and long-range fires, the acquisition of profound levels of digital communications equipment necessary for a network-*centric* doctrine was considered unaffordable—even if procured in an incremental fashion. Moreover, whilst the British experience of the 2003 invasion of Iraq confirmed the importance of force transformation, British officers remained somewhat sceptical about the cost-effectiveness of aspects of digitization. This was especially true of systems like the US blue-force tracker, intended to provide a real-time 'common operating picture' of friendly and enemy locations to assist with the planning and execution of integrated operations, but which had actually provided less than seamless situational awareness about friendly forces movements let alone enemy dispositions.[24] Moreover, the increasingly centralized and hierarchical command structure produced by high-levels of digitization sat ill at ease with

[21] Ibid.: 800–801; *Obsolescent and Outgunned: The British Army's Armoured Vehicle Capability, Fifth Report of Session 2019–21*, Defence Select Committee (London: House of Commons, 2021), 47–49.
[22] *Delivering Security in a Changing World: Future Capabilities* (London: Ministry of Defence, 2004), 8.
[23] Farrell, 'The Dynamics of British Military Transformation': 800–804.
[24] Ibid.: 784–787.

the doctrine of delegated Mission Command the British Army had already internalized as part of its Manoeuvrist Approach, ultimately leading to concern about the possibility of digitally-enabled micromanagement of tactical commanders.[25] Hence, although the UK invested in both tactical and operational/strategic digital communications, most notably in the Skynet 5 satellite communications system and the Bowman family of digital radios and tactical information systems, the result was nonetheless a watering-down of NCW into a more affordable and palatable hybrid of existing processes and digital change, described as Network Enabled Capability (NEC).[26]

If anything, the British adoption of EBO was even more limited, at least initially. The British military recognized the utility of planning in terms of capabilities and effects (and the more fluid planning and force structures this implied), but the British Army was nonetheless uncomfortable with the increasingly scientific, technocratic, and metricized approach to operational planning EBO had produced in the US Army. Instead, the British military chose to view its own 'effects-based approach to operations' (EBAO) as an opportunity to develop greater interdepartmental involvement in campaign design—especially in the context of the British Army's growing counterinsurgency commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan. EBAO thus morphed into the idea of a 'Comprehensive Approach' to operations, encompassing both kinetic and non-kinetic effects—although the concept initially struggled to gain traction beyond the MoD.[27] Although the British Army has undoubtedly continued to internalize elements of EBO, particularly around the routine assessment of the effect caused by its kinetic activities and in the idea of a synergistic relationship between violent and non-violent military activities in achieving desired end-states, the direct lineage of EBO is less visible in British military practice than with manoeuvre warfare or digitization. Even so, the combination of EBAO, NEC, and light- and medium-weight expeditionary force structures optimized for joint operations at brigade level represented a significant evolution of the British Army's understanding of warfare from the initial adoption of the Manoeuvrist Approach as an operational level concept dependent at least in part on localized tactical attrition.

Unfortunately, the generation of major capabilities for even this adapted version of transformation was significantly undermined by the British Army's parallel commitment to expeditionary operations in Iraq and Afghanistan,

[25] Ibid.: 788–789; see also Paul Cornish, *'Cry "Havoc!" and Let Slip the Managers of War': The Strategic, Military and Moral Hazards of Micro-Managed Warfare* (London: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 2006).
[26] Farrell, 'The Dynamics of British Military Transformation': 784–789.
[27] Ibid.: 790–798.

which placed all aspects of UK defence policy under considerable strain. In principle, the British commitment to counterinsurgency (COIN) in Iraq and Afghanistan was not inimical to the vision of warfare advanced by transformation. Indeed, much of the equipment procured specifically for expeditionary use in Afghanistan, in particular, relied heavily on digital networking and precision technology to identify and target insurgents, reflecting the core approach to warfighting at the heart of RMA and force transformation.[28] However, the rift between Europe and the USA generated by the 2003 Iraq War—and the British decision to follow the US trajectory—significantly undermined the balance between NATO and the EU in military modernization envisaged by New Labour at St Malo, with long-term implications for procurement.[29] Moreover, the British Army's lack of modern protected mobility vehicles saw light troops in Land Rovers suffer sustained casualties from IEDs in Iraq, leading to a domestic public reaction against MoD procurement policies and a further erosion of political support for the conflict.[30] The ensuing need to procure a spate of urgent operational requirements (UORs) to prosecute the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan—and allay political fallout from casualties—added further strain to the MoD equipment budget, at the expense of other long-term modernization programmes.

In normal circumstances, the cost of UORs were met from the treasury reserve rather than by the MoD, protecting core procurement programmes and in-year budgets. However, the extent of the UOR bill needed to equip the armed forces for COIN, combined with the scale of individual acquisition programmes such as protected mobility vehicles, created suspicions in the treasury that UORs were being used for routine procurement by stealth and the decision that UORs above a certain threshold must be met in part by the MoD's own funds.[31] Meanwhile, the cost of procuring the expected medium-weight FRES vehicle fleet had spiralled. Changes to the design (in part in response to greater force protection requirements arising from recent operational experience) also delayed the project, and resulted in a significant increase in the vehicle's weight—from 17 tonnes to somewhere in the region of 25–32 tonnes—leading to concern that the ensuing platform would be too heavy to be transported in the C-130 Hercules; the workhorse of the RAF air

[28] Jon R. Lindsay, 'Reinventing the Revolution: Technological Visions, Counterinsurgent Criticism, and the Rise of Special Operations', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 36, 3 (2013): 422–453.

[29] Jolyon Howarth, 'France, Britain and the Euro-Atlantic Crisis', *Survival* 45, 4 (2003): 173–192.

[30] On the so-called 'Wootton Bassett Phenomenon', see K. Neil Jenkings, Nick Megoran, Rachel Woodward, and Daniel Bos, 'Wootton Bassett and the Political Spaces of Remembrance and Mourning', *Area* 44, 3 (2012): 356–363; Michael Freeden, 'The Politics of Ceremony: The Wootton Bassett Phenomenon', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 16, 1 (2011): 1–10.

[31] Paul Cornish and Andrew Dorman, 'Blair's Wars and Brown's Budgets: From Strategic Defence Review to Strategic Decay in Less than a Decade', *International Affairs* 85, 2 (2009): 259–260.

mobility fleet at the time. By 2008, the MoD's equipment budget deficit sat at around £2 billion, leading to fears of further personnel cuts as the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) loomed. Against this backdrop, FRES became the stone cast aside to stem the tide. The bulk of the programme was effectively cancelled in 2008, leaving the Army without an obvious medium-weight capability despite its centrality to emerging force structure and doctrine.[32]

By then, the British Army had moved from its threat-focused structure and doctrine of the late Cold War, through a period of 'capability'-focused transformation, to become almost by default an army overwhelmingly preoccupied with campaigning in Afghanistan. A schism in the officer corps was also becoming apparent between those advocating for the adoption of COIN-type interventions as the armed forces' primary mission-set, and those who wanted to retain a semblance of so-called 'full-spectrum' warfighting capabilities. This debate had both intra- and inter-service dynamics, encompassing genuine professional disagreement over the future trajectory of warfare alongside organizational politics over resource allocations in the face of national austerity. Advocates of the 'New Wars', influenced by senior officers such as General Sir Rupert Smith, viewed the sort of interventions witnessed since the end of the Cold War and culminating in the protracted insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan as *the* template for future 'wars amongst the people'. Accordingly, they argued for a permanent realignment of force structures, training, doctrine, and equipment toward COIN, PSOs, and 'small war' at the expense of heavy armoured forces. This vision seemed to better reflect the reality of recent campaign experience, but would also safeguard the Army at the expense of the Royal Navy and RAF, which, as little more than adjuncts for the Army's force projection, would no longer require expensive high-end warfighting platforms.[33]

Within the Army and beyond, however, a rival school of thought continued to view COIN as an aberration rather than the rule, and maintained that all three services must retain the ability to conduct high-intensity manoeuvre against the armed forces of a rival peer state. Importantly, this was seen as essential not just to protecting the UK's national interests in the future, but also to maintaining credibility and relevance with key allies and alliances—most notably, the USA.[34] Certainly, whilst the experience of campaigning in

[32] *Obsolescent and Outgunned*, 48–9; Farrell, 'The Dynamics of British Military Transformation': 800–801; Galbreath, 'Following or Falling Behind?': 407; Cornish and Dorman, 'Blair's Wars and Brown's Budgets': 258.

[33] Cornish & Dorman, 'Blair's Wars and Brown's Budgets': 255–258; see also Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Penguin, 2006).

[34] David Blagden, 'Strategic Thinking for the Age of Austerity', *RUSI Journal* 154, 6 (2009): 60–66.

Afghanistan continues to loom large in the British Army's collective memory, the ideal of 'conventional' warfare against another state military remains the 'gold-standard' of professional military practice within the British Army's organizational culture. Despite the significant tactical adjustments made in response to COIN, for instance, the values against which promotions, appointments, training, and doctrine operated continued to be rooted in the Manoeuvrist Approach and the pre-requisites of manoeuvre warfare.[35]

In the event, the resultant outcome in the 2010 SDSR was something of a fudge. On the one hand, state failure and the increasingly 'hybrid' merger of state and non-state threats were identified as the likely character of future conflict. On the other, core capabilities highlighted by the transformation agenda as necessary for modern manoeuvre warfare, such as ISTAR, were advanced as essential for meeting these hybrid threats—over and above population-centric manpower. The size of the expeditionary forces the UK would expect to deploy were also scaled down, although defence planning assumptions maintained the ability to deploy a small division of three brigades in extremis. The primary building block of the Army would become the multi-role brigade, the centrepiece of which would be two medium-weight armoured vehicles rescued from the ruins of the FRES programme—the Scout Specialist Vehicle and the FRES Utility Vehicle. Concomitantly, however, heavy armour, armoured infantry, and self-propelled artillery would be dramatically reduced.[36]

Indeed, it is clear that the difficulties of transformation were themselves the product of path dependent processes rooted in the impact of short-term contingencies on the British Army's long-term decision-making. Farrell, for example, has argued that the British Army's efforts at emulating US transformation were conditioned by a mixture of operational exigency, pre-existing organizational culture, domestic politics, and limited means. Of these factors, however, budget appears to have been by far the most constraining, exacerbated by the cost of campaigning. Writing in 2008, for example, Farrell argued that 'budget problems are unlikely significantly to affect the direction of, let alone derail, British military transformation'.[37] Inasmuch as the further reorganization of the British Army precipitated by the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review maintained the focus on the medium-weight forces first

[35] Sergio Catignani, '"Getting COIN" at the Tactical Level in Afghanistan: Reassessing Counter-Insurgency Adaptation in the British Army', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35, 4 (2012): 513–539; Sergio Catignani, 'Coping with Knowledge: Organizational Learning in the British Army?', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, 1 (2014): 30–64.

[36] *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, British Government (London: HMSO, 2010).

[37] Farrell, 'The Dynamics of British Military Transformation': 807.

selected in the late 1990s, and continued within the vision of digitization, he was right. Even so, as Cornish and Dorman have argued, austerity has meant that the treasury has become the ultimate arbiter of defence policy, shaping both the force structure of the British Army, and with it, the doctrinal understandings of manoeuvre that can reasonably be achieved.[38]

Reinventing Manoeuvre after Afghanistan: Army 2020 and Organizational Change

The programme of reforms initiated by the 2010 SDSR was known as Future Force 2020, with the direction of change for land forces set by the Army 2020 programme released in 2012 and further updated in 2013.[39] Army 2020 was primarily intended to reorient the British Army away from counterinsurgency in anticipation of the eventual drawdown of British forces in Afghanistan, against a backdrop of significant fiscal austerity and the need to make further cost savings across defence. Army 2020 was therefore a concerted attempt to reshape the force in the light of immediate challenges, but the trajectory of this programme has fundamentally shaped the options for, and understanding of, future manoeuvre presently being grappled with in the British Army today.

Organizationally, Army 2020 envisaged a new model for force generation, in part driven by the significant strain that had been placed on the Army during the recent surge in operational tempo. This saw the Army divided into a Reactive Force, intended to provide a high readiness capability for deterrence and contingency tasks where the Army's main conventional warfighting assets would be held, and a reactive force, which was to provide troops for follow-on roulements in a major intervention as well as other enduring overseas tasks and standing domestic commitments. The reactive force was to be comprised of three armoured infantry brigades, together with 16 Air Assault Brigade, which would rotate through a three-phase readiness cycle to provide one armoured infantry brigade and one air assault battlegroup at high readiness at any given time, whilst still retaining the ability to deploy a divisional sized force in extremis. In so doing, the Army 2020 plan maintained the Army's previous heavy–light split, but sought to provide greater flexibility by including medium-weight forces alongside existing formations.[40]

[38] Cornish and Dorman, 'Blair's Wars and Brown's Budgets': 248–249.

[39] *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty*; *Transforming the British Army: Modernising to Face an Unpredictable Future* (Andover: British Army, 2012); *Transforming the British Army: An Update* (Andover: British Army, 2013).

[40] *Transforming the British Army*: 4–6; *Transforming the British Army: An Update*: 6–13.

In the Reactive Force, each armoured infantry brigade was restructured to include a 'heavy protected mobility' battalion equipped initially with Mastiff, a mine resistant protected patrol vehicle acquired as a UOR for Afghanistan, until replaced with the medium-weight Utility Vehicle to be procured from the ruins of the FRES programme. Armoured reconnaissance regiments would likewise be equipped with the Scout Specialist Vehicle, procurement of which remained funded after the closure of FRES. Light infantry brigades would retain various protected mobility and patrol vehicles initially procured for counterinsurgency operations. Army 2020 also continued to emphasize the importance of digitization, ISTAR, precision fires, and joint interoperability, which had featured prominently in US concepts of force transformation. Indeed, the Army 2020 plan was initially released in 2012 under the title of 'Transforming the British Army'.[41] Moreover, the re-organization of the Army's structure into reactive and adaptable forces optimized for action at brigade level was in continuity with earlier British thinking on contingency operations, and Army 2020 explicitly emphasized the importance of using the adaptable force to conduct capacity building and post-conflict reconstruction activities 'upstream' and 'downstream' of any major expeditionary intervention.[42]

It is clear, however, that much of this planning was a compromise driven by the need for austerity savings. The SDSR itself described the previous equipment plan as 'unaffordable', carrying an estimated unfunded liability of £38 billion across defence out to 2020, and Army 2020 documents themselves noted 'the financial imperatives facing the Army to play its part in bringing the Ministry of Defence's budget back into balance'.[43] The Army 2020 plan was accompanied by a further downsizing of the Army's regular establishment by 12,000 troops, to be offset by a major investment in reserve forces through the accompanying Army Reserve 2020 plan. This latter element was intended to make reserve forces more deployable and usable by improving their training, equipment, and size, integrating them more closely into the regular force. In many respects, this reflected the recent experience of counterinsurgency operations, where extensive use had been made of reservists to augment regular units as a tactical reserve, as opposed to their traditional Cold War role as a strategic reserve. Nonetheless, the combination of downsizing and investment in reserves was not universally welcomed by senior

[41] *Transforming the British Army*: 4–5.

[42] *Transforming the British Army*, 2; *Transforming the British Army: An Update*, 21. See also, Robert Johnson, 'Upstream Engagement and Downstream Entanglements: The Assumptions, Opportunities, and Threats of Partnering', *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 25, 3 (2014): 647–668.

[43] *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty*: 15; *Transforming the British Army: An Update*: 2.

officers, with the incumbent Chief of the General Staff describing it as a risky 'finger in the wind thing' imposed by politicians bent on cuts.[44]

Consequently, this structure was revised in important ways following the 2015 SDSR, under what became known as Army 2020 Refine. By 2015, the UK's strategic environment was perceived quite differently from that faced by the 2010 SDSR. Russia's unexpected seizure of Crimea and the ensuing conflict in Eastern Ukraine, in particular, focused attention on Russia as a renewed concern for European security and the pacing threat for UK defence assumptions to plan against. Moreover, the US pivot to Asia driven by China's growing bullishness in the Indo-Pacific, although somewhat abated by Russian revanchism, also served to focus British attention on the rejuvenation of its military capabilities for high-intensity inter-state warfare.[45] Indeed, the USA had itself begun to embark on a further programme of military 'offset', aimed at developing the next-generation of technological capabilities in the face of an increasingly modernized Russia and China. Here, a particular emphasis was placed on unmanned systems and the military applications of artificial intelligence and machine learning software, together with the doctrinal concepts required to effectively deploy such technologies.[46] This clearer conventional threat not only provided a planning focus for land capabilities and doctrine, but was enough to stabilize the defence budget and create expectations in the British Army of a future funding uplift to support greater digital modernization and major equipment acquisitions.[47]

Importantly, Army 2020 Refine aimed at regenerating the Army's capabilities for divisional warfighting. The deployment of a division to a US-led coalition during a major warfighting campaign was now seen by the British Army as the minimum amount required to retain command of the ARRC, the smallest capability considered to be of credible independent value to the USA, and simultaneously also the maximum size of force the British Army could hope to deploy and maintain in the field for any sustained length of time. Importantly, this division was primarily expected to be drawn from two armoured infantry brigades (down from three) and two new medium-weight 'Strike Brigades', which were to be equipped with a mixture of Ajax—the turreted, tracked, medium-weight 'light tank' equipped with a 40 mm cannon

[44] Patrick Bury and Sergio Catignani, 'Future Reserves 2020, the British Army and the Politics of Military Innovation During the Cameron Era', *International Affairs* 95, 3 (2019): 696 and passim.

[45] *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom*, British Government (London: HMSO, 2015).

[46] See Gian Gentile, Michael Shurkin, Alexandra T. Evans, Michelle Grisé, Mark Hvizda, and Rebecca Jensen, *A History of the Third Offset, 2014–2018* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2021).

[47] Ewen MacAskill, 'Does the UK Really Need to Increase its Defence Spending?', *The Guardian*, 22 January 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/jan/22/does-the-uk-really-need-to-increase-its-defence-spending-russia/.

developed under Scout SV programme—and a new Mechanised Infantry Vehicle (MIV)—the conceptual inheritor of the Utility Vehicle requirement. The platform selected to fulfil this role was Boxer, a medium-weight wheeled armoured personnel carrier, which had been developed from the MRAV programme the UK had originally withdrawn from in 2003.[48] Here, this vision for Army modernization can be seen as a logical extension of many of the core ideas about the evolution of manoeuvre initially adopted in the UK versions of EBAO, network enablement, and force transformation, continuing the same emphasis on expeditionary deployment, flexible force structures, and digital connectivity.

In particular, the renewed shift toward a medium-weight armoured force can be seen as a direct response to the expanding depth of the battlespace resulting from the profusion of modern sensor and precision fires capabilities, especially when augmented by UAVs. The diffusion of these capabilities to Russia, together with Russian bastions in Kaliningrad and on the eastern borders of Poland, potentially allowed Russian firepower to reach across northwest Europe.[49] In an Article 5 scenario, this reach could render the pre-positioning of heavy armour in forward-mounted locations in Europe immediately vulnerable, simultaneously placing at risk the limited rail and road routes able to transport heavy tracked armour east, thereby degrading or slowing the UK's theatre-entry capabilities with heavy equipment. Wheeled armour, in contrast, might be able to self-drive significant distances across western Europe using a plethora of more dispersed minor routes, in order to rapidly congregate in the theatre of operations with greater security and survivability. In this vein, the French intervention in Mali in 2013 aroused significant interest and admiration in the British Army, in part because of the apparent deployability of medium-weight wheeled armoured vehicles such as the French VBCI. Indeed, some French force elements had been re-deployed to Mali from operations in the Ivory Coast, driving some 1,300 km in convoy from Abidjan to Bamako to enter their new theatre of operations, ostensibly confirming the utility of medium-weight capabilities.[50] The creation of a dedicated medium-weight force thus represented a culmination of the British Army's longstanding ambition to develop a more expeditionary armoured capability and still maintain the Army's focus on force transformation.

[48] *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015* (London: HM Government, 2015), 31; *Obsolescent and Outgunned*: 44–52.

[49] Stephan Frühling and Guillaume Lasconjarias, 'NATO, A2/AD and the Kaliningrad Challenge', *Survival* 58, 2 (2016): 95–116.

[50] Jack Watling and Justin Bronk, 'Strike: From Concept to Force', RUSI Occasional Paper, June 2019, https://static.rusi.org/201906_op_strike_web.pdf.

Although wheeled armour tends to have less tactical mobility in difficult going than tracked armour, the operational mobility of wheeled medium armour may also provide greater tactical flexibility on an expanded and more dispersed future battlespace. The profusion of UAVs, electro-magnetic, and space-based sensors is expected to render the future battlefield far more transparent, whilst the extended range of such systems will concomitantly expand the physical scale of tactical space. Simultaneously, the diffusion of long-range precision strike technologies (including loitering munitions capable of selecting their own targets fired by conventional tube artillery), combined with the rapidity of identification-to-firing cycles enabled by modern digital communications, could make the prospect of being targeted by enemy forces much more fatal—even at far greater ranges. Much of future manoeuvre is therefore expected to take place 'in the deep', as each side attempts to use its long-range target acquisition and fires capabilities to 'shape' the enemy's ability to mass forces to their own advantage in the close battle. This idea has been likened by one senior German officer to age-of-sail naval battlefleets trading shots and jockeying for position before coming to quarters.[51]

The combined impact of these developments is to place a far higher premium on deception (physical and electronic) and on unmanned systems in order to reduce the risk to friendly forces and conceal intent, but also on tactical dispersion. By dispersing forces into smaller packets over much greater distances, Western armies hope to keep most force elements below the size threshold at which targeting by enemy artillery is worthwhile, given that doing so involves unmasking valuable guns or missile launchers and thereby exposing them to counter-battery fire. Dispersion might also allow commanders to hide high-value or 'signature' equipment amid the 'noise' of widely distributed small force elements, thereby concealing their true intentions. Even so, the ultimate defeat of determined enemy units and the seizure and holding of ground is still expected to require close combat at some point—which in turn will likely require these dispersed forces to concentrate mass against the enemy at a critical point. Moreover, this must be done very swiftly in order to prevent any remaining enemy indirect fire assets from destroying vulnerable densely packed formations, or the enemy similarly massing his dispersed forces to respond, and will likely require rapid dispersal after tactical engagements in order to protect friendly forces from enemy defensive fires.[52]

[51] Frank Leidenberger, 'How Allies Will Manoeuvre Beyond 2025', RUSI Land Warfare Conference presentation, 21 June 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMCdP8UYL_g/.

[52] See for example, *Joint Concept Note 1/17: Future Force Concept*, Ministry of Defence (Shrivenham: Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, 2017).

In this future dispersed battlespace, therefore, small units must be capable both of hiding statically for long periods and sustaining themselves, before undertaking very rapid movement over extended distances in order to survive and fight. Such a situation can be likened to atoms of a fixed amount of gas spreading out to fill a container. As the volume of the container expands—analogous to the expansion of tactical space—each atom, or dispersed force element, must move more rapidly to fill the available space. Consequently, wheeled medium armour might offer significant benefits over heavy tracked armour in this future environment. Not only are wheeled vehicles capable of travelling longer distances at higher speeds than tracked vehicles (particularly but not exclusively on roads or tracks), they tend to have a much lower breakdown rate, therefore requiring a smaller logistic footprint than tracked vehicles for a given milage—further improving their discreteness and survivability in a future high-intensity battlefield.[53] Moreover, the British Army's Strike Brigade concept was also explicitly advanced as a vehicle for further digitization, facilitating the profound levels of rapid and secure information exchange at the distance required to enable a more dispersed operating concept. Boxer, for example, has been described as a digitally-enabled 'node' hosting the Army's new digital 'backbone'—to be acquired via the Land Environment Tactical Communication and Information Systems (LE TacCIS) programme, known as Project Morpheus, that will replace Bowman—with sufficient power and space to enable incremental future upgrades, including the incorporation of future unmanned vehicles.[54]

More broadly, the British Army's capstone operational doctrine also developed in line with this information-centric vision of warfare, as has its supporting force structures. In the latest version of Army Doctrine Publication *Land Operations*, the Manoeuvrist Approach remains the central construct guiding land operations, but the management of information and the utility of non-kinetic effects (that is, non-violent actions, or actions that threaten but fall short of actual violence) are now portrayed as central to manoeuvrism. The Manoeuvrist Approach, for example, is still seen as an attitude of mind, but its execution requires a detailed understanding of the enemy's vulnerabilities, which in turn enables the commander to manipulate the enemy's understanding, perception, and behaviour in favourable ways.

[53] For a discussion, see Watling and Bronk, 'Strike: From Concept to Force': 15–20; John Matsumura, John Gordon IV, Randall Steeb, Scott Boston, Caitlin Lee, Phillip Padilla, and John Parmentola, *Assessing Tracked and Wheeled Vehicles for Australian Mounted Combat Operations* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2017), 27.

[54] 'Written Evidence Submitted by the Ministry of Defence', House of Commons Defence Committee Inquiry: Progress in Delivering the British Army's Armoured Vehicle Capability, AVF0016, 28 September 2020, https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/12523/pdf/; 'Guidance: LE TacCIS Programme', Ministry of Defence, 1 October 2020, https://www.gov.uk/guidance/le-taccis-programme/.

Although warfare is still seen as inherently violent, the concept of behavioural change and the use of information and narrative to shape 'audience' perception is increasingly central to the British Army's doctrinal understanding of manoeuvre, reflecting both the experience of 'winning hearts and minds' in COIN and a growing concern about the use of online media to manipulate domestic public opinion. This concept is epitomized by the idea of Integrated Action, which now sits alongside the Manoeuvrist Approach and Mission Command as a fundamental tenet of land doctrine.[55]

Integrated Action is defined as 'the application of the full range of lethal and non-lethal capabilities to change and maintain the understanding and behaviour of audiences to achieve a successful outcome'.[56] This concept is therefore a response to the perceived importance of information to manoeuvre on the digitally enabled battlefield, as the Chief of the General Staff's introduction to Integrated Action makes clear:

> in this complex and dynamic environment manoeuvre has to take account of a much broader audience than simply the 'enemy'. A new idea is therefore required—this is called Integrated Action. It is a unifying doctrine that requires commanders first to identify their outcome; second to study all of the audiences that are relevant to the attainment of the outcome; third to analyse the effects that need to be imparted on the relevant audience; before determining the best mix of capabilities, from soft through to hard power, required to impart effect onto those audiences to achieve the outcome.[57]

The concept thus reflects both the longstanding drive toward both joint (i.e. inter-service) integration first advocated in *AirLand Battle*, and the holistic cross-government involvement in the use of military forces advocated by the Comprehensive Approach—subsequently renamed the Integrated Approach and reflected in the scope and titling of the 2021 Integrated Review and in the accompanying Integrated Operating Concept—but also the effects-based approach to military campaign planning originating in US EBO.[58]

It has also been mirrored in the development of the British Army's force structure. From the beginning, Army 2020 sought to draw together and expand the Army's capabilities for information and intelligence gathering and

[55] *Army Doctrine Publication AC 71940: Land Operations*, British Army (Warminster: Land Warfare Development Centre, 2017), 4–1–5–4.
[56] *Army Doctrine Publication AC* 71940: 2.
[57] *Army Doctrine Publication AC* 71940: i.
[58] *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, British Government (London: HMSO, 2021); *Integrated Operating Concept*, Ministry of Defence (Shrivenham: Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, 2021).

exploitation, creating a dedicated Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Brigade and a Security Assistance Group containing media and psychological operations specialists.[59] This latter formation subsequently grew to become 77th Brigade, with expanded 'cyber' capabilities for 'behavioural change'. More recently, both brigades have been subordinated to the newly formed 6th Division alongside 1 Signal Brigade, bringing together the bulk of the Army's capabilities for 'Information Manoeuvre and Unconventional Warfare'.[60] However, these changes in force structure and doctrine have not been universally welcomed among the British officer corps, and the procurement of sufficient capabilities to make them work *in budget* has presented a significant challenge to this future vision of manoeuvre—as the recent Integrated Review has highlighted.

From Army 2020 to Integrated Manoeuvre

The idea of information manoeuvre and the incorporation of Integrated Action represents a radical departure from the original concept of the Manoeuvrist Approach as developed in the 1990s, in which manoeuvre remained an essentially enemy-focused activity reliant at least in part on bloody attrition. This shift away from a conventional platform and battle-centric understanding of warfare has elicited significant resistance both within and beyond the British officer corps—not least because of the MoD's inability to actually generate the medium armour and advanced technological capabilities required to enact it. In the run up to the (delayed) 2021 Integrated Review (and in subsequent reactions to its conclusions), much of this debate has centred around the ongoing utility of heavy armour in high-intensity warfare, based largely in observations of the fighting in the Donbass (prior to 2022) and Nagorno-Karabakh.

The dramatic and widely reported use of Turkish-supplied UAVs by Azerbaijan to destroy Armenian armoured forces during that conflict has frequently been described as a harbinger of the end of heavy armour on the battlefield. Equally, the employment of UAVs, electronic sensors, and modern ISTAR equipment to direct long-range fires was also a defining feature of the conflict in the Donbass in the years prior to the 2022 invaison, where Russian-backed separatists made extensive use of UAVs for

[59] *Transforming the British Army: Modernising to Face an Unpredictable Future*: 4; *Transforming the British Army: An Update*: 10–13.

[60] See Simon Goldstein, 'A British Perspective on Information Manoeuvre', *DefStrat Magazine*, 28 July 2020, https://www.defstrat.com/magazine_articles/a-british-perspective-on-information-manoeuvre/.

reconnaissance, artillery spotting, and electronic warfare. In one notorious incident, Russian-backed forces were able to rapidly defeat elements of two Ukrainian Army mechanized brigades massing in an assembly area near Zelenopillya, using UAVs to jam Ukrainian tactical communications systems before cuing a strike by multiple-launch rocket systems that purportedly destroyed two battalions' worth of combat vehicles in the space of a few minutes.[61] In many respects, however, Azerbaijani success owed as much to the modern sensor suites Azerbaijan was able to employ, together with their ability to effectively link them to various types of 'shooter' in a timely fashion, as to the decisive use of UAVs themselves.[62] In a similar fashion, the wider experience of fighting in Eastern Ukraine during the years before Russia's 2022 invasion appeared far more equivocal with regard to the utility of conventional armour than might first appear. Both sides made extensive use of upgraded and obsolescent heavy and medium armour to conduct offensive manoeuvre in open country, and to support more attritional fighting in urban centres. Indeed, in the latter environment, armoured vehicles appeared to retain significant utility—providing they were not subject to conventional aerial attack from attack helicopters or ground attack aircraft.[63] Moreover, this attritional type of street fighting seems likely to become the dominant form of urban warfare in the future, notwithstanding wishful thinking to the contrary.[64]

Consequently, the shift to a medium-weight capability at the expense of traditional heavy armour elicited significant criticism—especially after the 2021 Integrated Review confirmed the effective demise of the British Army's conventional armoured capability without an immediately serviceable medium-weight alternative. The UK's existing armoured brigades are built around the combination of the Challenger 2 main battle tank and the

[61] Amos Fox, 'The Russian-Ukrainian War: Understanding the Dust Clouds on the Battlefield', *Modern War Institute*, 17 January 2017, https://mwi.usma.edu/russian-ukrainian-war-understanding-dust-clouds-battlefield/.

[62] Jack Watling, 'The Key to Armenia's Tank Losses: The Sensors, Not the Shooters', *RUSI Defence Systems*, 6 October 2020, https://rusieurope.eu/publication/rusi-defence-systems/key-armenia-tank-losses-sensors-not-shooters/.

[63] See Amos Fox, '"Cyborgs at Little Stalingrad": A Brief History of the Battles of the Donetsk Airport, 26 May 2014 to 21 January 2015', Land warfare paper 125 (Arlington: Association of the United States Army, Institute of Land Warfare, May 2019), https://www.ausa.org/sites/default/files/publications/LWP-125-Cyborgs-at-Little-Stalingrad-A-Brief-History-of-the-Battle-of-the-Donetsk-Airport.pdf; Oksana Kovalenko and Galina Titish, 'Brigade Commander Yevgeny Moysyuk about Airport, Raid and Features of Enemy Action', *Ukrainian Pravda*, 12 February 2016, https://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2016/02/12/7098744/; Amos C. Fox and Andrew J. Rossow, *Making Sense of Russian Hybrid Warfare: A Brief Assessment of the Russo–Ukrainian War*, Land Warfare Paper 112 (Arlington: Association of the United States Army, Institute of Land Warfare, March 2017), https://www.ausa.org/sites/default/files/publications/LWP-112-Making-Sense-of-Russian-Hybrid-Warfare-A-Brief-Assessment-of-the-Russo-Ukrainian-War.pdf; John M. Cantin, H. David Pendleton, and Jon Moilanen, 'Threat Tactics Report: Russia', TRADOC G-2 ACE Threats Integration, version 1.1, October 2015, https://info.publicintelligence.net/USArmy-RussiaTactics.pdf.

[64] Anthony King, *Urban Warfare in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2021).

Warrior infantry fighting vehicle (IFV), both of which have barely been upgraded since they entered service in the late 1980s/early 1990s and are bordering on obsolescence. The Challenger Life Extension Programme (LEP) was intended to modernize the tank's turret to create 'Challenger 3', including an upgraded 120 mm smoothbore gun capable of firing more modern and penetrating types of ammunition, alongside new digital communication and battle management systems. Critically, new sight systems will provide separate day and night sights for commander and gunner, improving the rapidity of target acquisition. However, under the Defence Command Paper which followed the Integrated Review, only 148 Challenger 3 upgrades will be funded, resulting the retirement of approximately 35 per cent of the current Main Battle Tank fleet.[65]

Simultaneously, the Integrated Review also cut funding for the Warrior Capability Sustainment Programme (CSP), resulting in the planned withdrawal of this tracked IFV by the middle of the coming decade. Like the LEP, the CSP had been expected to upgrade the turret, optics, and main armament of the Warrior, including a new 40 mm cannon.[66] In theory, Ajax will by then be in service. However, Ajax is not intended as a direct replacement for Warrior in armoured infantry brigades, but was instead destined to equip armoured cavalry regiments of the new Strike Brigades as a 'light tank', alongside a turretless reconnaissance variant called Ares. Instead, mechanized infantry in these Strike brigades were to be equipped with the wheeled and turretless Boxer armoured personnel carrier procured under the MIV programme.[67] Commenting on the withdrawal of Warrior, Brigadier John Clark, the British Army's head of strategy, said that the Army was 'under no illusions' as to the difference between Boxer and Warrior, 'but there are other ways in which you can deliver the overall effects of the suite that we have at the moment'. Nonetheless, Clark also admitted that the Army was simultaneously 'working out what more we might be able to do in order to make [Boxer] more IFV-like', suggesting that the draw-down in heavy armour is already expected to produce a capability gap.[68]

[65] *Obsolescent and Outgunned*; 'Challenger 3 vs Challenger 2: How Does the Upgraded Tank Compare to its Predecessor?', British Forces Broadcasting Service, Forces Net, 13 May 2021, https://www.forces.net/news/challenger-3-vs-challenger-2-how-does-upgraded-tank-compare-its/; CP 411: Defence in a Competitive Age, *Ministry of Defence* (London: HMSO, 2021), 54.

[66] Ibid; Harry Lye, 'Lockheed Martin UK Cuts 158 Jobs as Warrior Decision Bites', *Army Technology*, 12 April 2021, https://www.army-technology.com/news/lockheed-martin-warrior-jobs/.

[67] 'Written Evidence Submitted by the Ministry of Defence': 5; 'First Ares Armoured Vehicles Delivered to the Army', British Army, Army press release, 27 July 2020, https://www.army.mod.uk/news-and-events/news/2020/07/first-ares-armoured-vehicles-delivered-to-the-army/.

[68] Harry Lye, 'British Army Outlines How Boxer Will Fill Warrior Capability Gap', *Army Technology*, 7 May 2021, https://www.army-technology.com/features/british-army-outlines-how-boxer-will-fill-warrior-capability-gap/.

Importantly, advocates of the retention of conventional heavy armour have argued that whilst these heavy tracked vehicles are undoubtedly less operationally mobile than a (wheeled) medium-weight capability, they also have significant advantages in the ability to defeat modernized Soviet-era tanks, which both Russia and many other states retain in service in significant numbers. Moreover, the extensive use of both applique explosive reactive armour and active protection systems retro-fitted to ageing Soviet-era tanks has improved the survivability of Russian armour. These defensive aids were felt to be particularly effective against anti-tank missiles and other man-portable anti-armour projectiles, but far less so against modern high-calibre tank ammunition.[69]

To add insult to injury, it appears that the acquisition of both Ajax and Boxer are not without issue. Boxer is a mature platform already in service with a number of other nations, but the projected delivery schedule is very slow, and does not currently match the rate of withdrawal of existing armoured vehicles.[70] Meanwhile, it has recently emerged that Ajax—although already in production—suffers from a major design flaw which produces excessive noise and vibration in the turreted version. This issue is sufficiently bad that it had begun to cause deafness in soldiers assigned to trial the vehicle, resulting first in significant time and speed limits being placed on vehicle operations to protect the crews, and latterly the MoD's refusal to accept the vehicle into service. To date, only fourteen of the Ares variant have been accepted into service, and ministers have been forced to deny rumours that the project will be cancelled.[71]

Critics of the shift to medium armour—including the chair of the Defence Select Committee—have complained that even if serviceable, Ajax is effectively too heavy to be considered a medium-weight vehicle. At 43 tonnes, Ajax is both heavier than Warrior and too heavy to be easily transported by air at scale.[72] This raised significant questions about the strategic mobility of the planned Strike Brigade concept, as the tracked Ajax and Ares vehicles intended to equip the forward recce and close support elements of the force would have significantly less operational mobility than the mechanized

[69] 'Written Evidence Submitted by the Ministry of Defence': 10; Ben Barry, 'British Army Heavy Division Comes Up Light', *IISS Military Balance Blog*, 8 January 2021, https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2021/01/british-army-heavy-division/.

[70] Andrew Chuter, 'British Army Wants More Punch in its Boxer Vehicle Fleet', *DefenceNews*, 6 April 2021, https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2021/04/06/british-army-wants-more-punch-in-its-boxer-vehicle-fleet/.

[71] Helen Warrell, 'Defects with UK Army's New Tank go back to 2019, Minister Admits', *Financial Times*, 16 June 2021, https://www.ft.com/content/8be0a6e5-f75c-4ef8-9b44-2c2950c1a6f9/.

[72] Ibid.; Mark Hookham and John Collingridge, 'Tanks Too Heavy to Fly in One Piece', *The Times*, 5 February 2017, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/tanks-too-heavy-to-fly-in-one-piece-3nbc5m2jw/.

infantry they were expected to operate with, and would still need to be moved into theatre by modified Light Equipment Transporters, Heavy Equipment Transporters, rail, or (with difficulty) by air, just as with heavy armour. To complicate matters further, Boxer is not presently equipped with any under-armour anti-tank capability (although the infantry dismounts it carries are, and in principle such a capability might be added on later), raising fears that the Army will be significantly under-equipped to meet a Russian tank division.[73]

To address these issues, the Integrated Review heralded a number of further structural changes, outlined in the subsequent Defence Command Paper.[74] First, the Army will group together its attack aviation to create a combat aviation brigade comprised of Apache and Wildcat Lynx helicopters. Like the evolution of the strike concept, this can also be seen as a response to the threat of heavy armour, and in many regards is the conceptual inheritor of the late Cold War Follow-On Forces Attack concept, in which aviation was used to break up enemy armoured formations deep in their rear areas. This may in principle go some way to improve the Army's anti-tank capabilities in the deep, but it will likely come at the expense of the close fight, as attack helicopters will no longer be available to support manoeuvre brigades directly. It also reflects the growing air threat to military helicopters posed by layered air defence systems and A2/AD capabilities, necessitating their massing in order to plan operations in greater detail and ensure survivability through the use of other assets. Traditionally, attack helicopters have avoided enemy air defences by low 'nap-of-earth' flying where 'ground clutter' and terrain masking conceals them from hostile radar tracking. However, by flying low helicopters become highly vulnerable to ground fire from small-arms, anti-aircraft artillery, and man-portable air defence weapons, which have all proliferated in recent years.[75] Moreover, the British Army has very limited amounts of its own air defence systems, and so would likely rely heavily on allies and the RAF to protect both its ground troops and attack helicopters from enemy air attack in the event of a major war.

Even with the new combat aviation brigade combat team, however, the future force will only be able to call on two armoured ground manoeuvre brigades; a single armoured infantry brigade (redesignated as a 'heavy brigade combat team') and an 'interim manoeuvre support brigade' which

[73] Barry, 'Heavy Division Comes Up Light'; Watling and Bronk, 'Strike: From Concept to Force': 16–19.
[74] *Defence in a Competitive Age*: 51–54.
[75] Jack Watling and Justin Bronk, 'Maximising the Utility of the British Army's Combat Aviation', RUSI Occasional Paper, April 2021, https://rusieurope.eu/sites/default/files/236_op_uk_aviation_capabilities_final_web_version.pdf, 11–32.

will eventually develop into a 'deep recce strike brigade combat team' combining Ajax with artillery and multiple launch missile systems. In the 'heavy brigade', Challenger 3 will be accompanied by Warrior until replaced by some combination of either Ajax or Boxer, once in service.[76] The interim manoeuvre support brigade initially appeared to reflect the much-criticized Strike Brigade concept, equipped with Ajax, Boxer, and Foxhound (a protected mobility patrol vehicle); its title likely an indication of the difficulty the Army has faced in developing the Strike concept absent the vehicles with which to staff it. Although its predecessor concept—the Joint Medium Weight Capability concept—was touted as 'platform agnostic', delays to the creation of Strike Brigades prior to the Integrated Review appear to have been caused by a lack of actual vehicles, and the doctrine remains unconfirmed.[77] Instead, the successor deep recce strike brigade combat team appears orientated toward the conduct of long-range precision fires rather than close combat, and may lack any organic mechanized infantry. It will also rely on the modernization or replacement of the Army's existing GMLRS and self-propelled 155 mm artillery (the tracked AS-90), both of which are now ageing, against a backdrop of wider concern at the Army's significant lack of conventional artillery.[78]

This reduction will potentially call into question the validity of the UK's divisional capability in the eyes of key allies. As a single division, moreover, it is unlikely that the British Army would be able to sustain its armoured divisional capability in the field for a protracted period of time, as follow-on roulements would not be trained or equipped with the same vehicle platforms or doctrinal concepts. The extent to which a British Government would be willing to risk the country's solitary warfighting capability in a conflagration short of existential threat to the UK also remains an open question. Indeed, even the ability to field this limited capability depends on the continuation of a series of troubled acquisition programmes and promised future procurement, without which, in the words of one commentator, the 'UK will have to write a sick note to Nato explaining the problem'.[79]

[76] 'Written Evidence Submitted by the Ministry of Defence': 5–6; *Defence in a Competitive Age*: 51–54.

[77] Farrell, 'Dynamics of British Military Transformation': 801; Written answer to Question UIN 27961 by James Heappey MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary (Ministry of Defence), 16 March 2020, https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-03-11/27961/.

[78] Jack Watling, 'The Future of Fires: Maximising the UK's Tactical and Operational Firepower', RUSI Occasional Paper, November 2019, https://static.rusi.org/op_201911_future_of_fires_watling_web_0.pdf.

[79] Barry, 'Heavy Division Comes Up Light'; Warrell, 'Defects with UK Army's New Tank'. See also, 'How the British Army will Fight in the Future', British Army, British Army media video, 3 June 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kedBlURaRaE.

Whilst these changes do continue the Army's focus on deeper, ISTAR-led manoeuvre enabled by digitization and long-range strike capabilities, the extent to which its medium-weight expeditionary vision remains intact is unclear. This latest restructuring might yet herald a return to the British Army's previous heavy–light split and the conceptual abandonment of medium manoeuvre, notwithstanding current procurement programmes, or instead lead to a gradual blending of both into something entirely new. Historically, the background of key decision-makers has provided an important indicator in the future trajectory of British Army reforms, with cap-badge and career experience going some way to accounting for senior commanders' organizational inclinations.[80] The medium-weight concept was heavily associated with the incumbent Chief of the Defence Staff between 2018–2021, General Sir Nicholas Carter, whose command experience has been shaped by operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan. Following a period in command of NATO forces in southern Afghanistan in 2009–2010, Cater went on to serve as Director General Land Warfare as Army 2020 was developed in 2011. His subsequent elevation to Chief of the General Staff and then Chief of Defence Staff confirmed the Army's direction of travel during the last decade.[81] In contrast, his immediate successor as head of the British Army, General Sir Mark Carleton-Smith, rose to prominence serving with British Special Forces.

Carter and Carleton-Smith both outwardly described the need to modernize the Army in broadly similar terms, talking of the need to create an 'agile manoeuvre division' and withdraw 'sunset' capabilities to make space for new 'sunrise' capabilities. Carleton-Smith similarly argued that the Army is on the cusp of a 'Midway moment', witnessing the greatest shift in warfare since the move from 'hay nets to fuel cans'. Both officers also suggested that whilst heavy armour is not yet obsolete, its days are numbered.[82] At the same time, however, the Integrated Review precipitated a major re-organization of the Army's capabilities toward 'sub-threshold' hybrid threats. The review precipitated the creation a new Ranger Regiment to train and accompany partners and proxies overseas, alongside the creation of a new Security Force

[80] Keith Macdonald, 'Black Mafia, Loggies and Going for the Stars: The Military Elite Revisited', *Sociological Review* 52, 1 (2004): 106–135.

[81] 'Chief of the Defence Staff: General Sir Nick Carter GCB CBE DSO ADC Gen', official biography, n.d., Ministry of Defence, https://www.gov.uk/government/people/nicholas-patrick-carter.

[82] Con Coughlin, 'Tanks Risk Becoming "Difficult and Dangerous" on Battlefield, Warns Head of British Army', *The Telegraph*, 1 June 2021, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/06/01/exclusive-tanks-risk-becoming-difficult-dangerous-battlefield/; Nick Carter, 'Chief of Defence Staff Speech: RUSI Annual Lecture', Ministry of Defence press release, 17 December 2020, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chief-of-defence-staff-at-rusi-annual-lecture; 'Transforming the British Army: A conversation with General Sir Mark Carleton-Smith', Public interview, Atlantic Council, 14 May 2021, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/event/transforming-the-british-army-a-conversation-with-general-sir-mark-carleton-smith/.

Assistance Brigade.[83] This development is in part a logical extension of the Army's focus on overseas capacity building and 'upstream' conflict prevention in evidence since the 2010 SDSR and the release of the first Building Stability Overseas Strategy. Equally, though, the explicit modelling of the new Ranger force on the US Green Berets extends a wider process of so-called 'special forcification' underway in a number of Western armies, and likely reflected Carleton-Smith's own personal background as well as continuation of the doctrinal shift toward Integrated Action and information manoeuvre.[84]

Here, the accompanying Integrated Operating Concept has also adopted a new typology in which British forces will no longer be 'deployed on operations' or at home (and therefore in a state of relative peace), but instead constantly 'operating' short of war, creating a new binary between 'operating' and 'warfighting'. Such a change reflects the more neo-realist language of constant 'strategic competition' presented in the Integrated Review, and in principle creates an escalatory spectrum between a hypothetical non-operational peacetime, competitive 'operating' (at home or abroad), and full-scale 'warfighting'.[85] To a certain extent, the British Army has little choice but to find ways of making its light infantry more useful, given the prohibitive costs of modern (armoured) mechanization, and 'operating' reflects this reality. Indeed, it is now possible to envision a future in which the British Army's combat units all become increasingly functionally specialized in some way, even its ubiquitous light-role infantry. On the other hand, this latest evolution may transpire to be little more than a fillip to conceal the real degradation of British military power at the harder end of the spectrum of conflict. Either way, the expanded focus on 'operators' and 'constant operating' will likely place additional pressure on the Army's reducing number of personnel. In any eventuality, the ongoing modernization of the British Army will experience an uncomfortable hiatus in the coming decade, as the force attempts to compensate for the promise of 'jam tomorrow' contained in the Integrated Review, even as it consumes the last of yesterday's ration—with significant attendant consequences for the vision of manoeuvre that the British Army can practically employ.

Russia's renewed invasion of Ukriane in early 2022 has only served to underline the tensions in British capabilities and doctrine, potentially serving as a further inflection point. The initial fighting appears to have confirmed the

[83] *Defence in a Competitive Age*: 52–53; 'Transforming the British Army'.

[84] *Building Stability Overseas Strategy*, Ministry of Defence (London: MOD/DFID/FCO, 2011); *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty*: 44–45; Anthony C. King, 'Close Quarters Battle: Urban Combat and "Special Forcification"', *Armed Forces & Society* 42, 2 (2016): 276–300.

[85] *Integrated Operating Concept*: passim; 'Transforming the British Army'; *Defence in a Competitive Age*: passim.

importance of long-range fires, digital information gathering and targeting, but also the enduring possibilities for tactical manoeuvre, giving succour to advocates of both traditional heavy armour and lighter modernized forces. Importantly, the war has also been presented both as a clarion call for renewing the UK's conventional land manouevre capabilities, and simultaneously also as a justification for allowing such capabilities to atrophy further. On the one hand, the conflict has focused attention in defence ministries across Europe on the threat posed by Russian revanchism, underscoring the argument for British military recapitalization. On the other hand, the conflict may also serve to erode Russia's warfighting capacity, perhaps for decades to come, potentially enabling a shift in UK strategic focus east of Suez and away from continental defence.

Conclusion

Since its inception in the 1980s, the development of manoeuvre doctrine in the British Army has been heavily influenced by US military thought. Simultaneously, though, its evolution has also been shaped by a series of unique British peculiarities, rooted in the British Army's distinct organizational culture, strategic environment, and financial means. This has resulted in significant adaptation and alteration of US concepts to suit the British context and preferences; a process of translation that can be seen from the very inception of manoeuvre warfare principles in British military doctrine with the conversion of *AirLand Battle* ideas into the *Manoeuvreist Approach* via NATO. It can also be seen in the subsequent internalization of the salient features of US 'transformation', with some non-trivial watering down, in the British Army's language and practices of network-enabled operations, the effects-based approach to operations, and a focus on (at first, brigade-level) expeditionary force structures.

Importantly, whilst the parallel development of manoeuvreist thinking in the UK demonstrates the continued importance placed on the trans-Atlantic alliance by successive generations of senior British officers, it also highlights some of the fundamental differences between British and American military practice—and the underlying constraints that explain them. Undoubtedly, where British adoption of US ideas about manoeuvre has been limited, this can partly be attributed to differences in British and US professional military culture and wider institutional processes—as with British hesitancy over the centralization and scientification of C2 and planning promulgated by US doctrine in the early 2000s. Increasingly, though, these differences can be

attributed to the more limited financial means available to the British Army compared with its US cousin, which has placed some aspects of capability beyond British reach (certainly at scale), thereby necessitating either adaptation or partial adoption of US military practice. Arguably, moreover, this divergence has grown more acute in recent years—perhaps hastened, or at least laid bare by, recent campaigning—as the British military has struggled to adapt both to the demands of counterinsurgency *and* longer-term force modernization focused on inter-state conflicts.

Since the end of the Cold War, British conceptions of manoeuvre have gradually shifted emphasis away from the centrality of platform-dependent, heavily armoured tactical attrition to place a greater premium on the role of information, organizational interconnectedness and speed of action. Such a change mirrors wider shifts in the understanding of conflict itself, now typically perceived as something holistic and by nature complex, and therefore requiring equally holistic responses. This is reflected in the importance placed on narrative, audience perceptions, and behavioural change in the vision of manoeuvre put forward by the recent *Integrated Operating Concept* and the idea of 'Integrated Action' embedded in UK Land Operations doctrine. Here, emerging British practices match the emphasis on interconnectivity and informational networking seen in US *Multi-Domain Operations*, but appear to place less weight on the hard coercive aspects of the military instrument than in some allies' understanding of future manoeuvre. This shift can also be seen in the British Army's longstanding efforts to develop more flexible and expeditionary medium armoured forces in lieu of its Cold War heavy armour, which might have simultaneously allowed the British Army to realize cost efficiencies from modernization—the holy grail of having-your-cake-and-eating it.

However, this latest evolution of manoeuvre thinking in British concepts and doctrine has revealed significant tensions in the British officer corps, which have been especially apparent in debates over the procurement of the material capabilities required to practically enact them. In many respects, recent efforts to acquire new medium-weight armoured vehicles represent the culmination of a long process of digitization and structural decentralization, with roots at least as far back as the turn of the new millennium. However, the challenges first of FRES and then of Ajax and Boxer procurement have called aspects of this vision of manoeuvre into question, leading first to the demise of Strike Brigades as a doctrinal concept, and more recently for calls to re-invest in heavy armour. Indeed, the agonies of capability procurement have only served to exacerbate discomfort in elements of the British establishment at the relegation of 'traditional' combined-arms manoeuvreist

ideas, leading to a series of power struggles between the first generation manoeuvre advocates of the 1990s, and the proponents of a further digital shift. The roots of this schism can arguably be seen as early as the 2010 defence review in debates over the importance of conventional 'full-spectrum' capabilities versus more limited 'wars amongst the people' and the associated rasion d'être of the British Army.

The recent emphasis placed on 'hybrid' conflict and sub-threshold 'operating' is a product of this evolutionary dialogue, if one that seems likely to bring these contradictions to a head. Undoubtedly, the vision of the British Army stemming from the Integrated Review stands in continuity with the force's longstanding trajectory of professionalization, digitization, and specialization. Equally, the emphasis placed on operations in the 'grey zone' between peace and declared war provides a rationale for British military employment that is achievable with modestly sized and lighter-weight forces, allowing the Army to bridge the conceptual gap as new platforms and capabilities are brought into service. Yet the implicit refocus toward 'traditional' inter-state adversaries this latest policy embraces sits ill at ease with the trials and tribulations of recent British efforts to rejuvenate 'conventional' warfighting capabilities at the divisional level. With the simultaneous demise of Strike Brigades as originally envisaged, and reduced funding for existing heavy armour life-extensions, the growing centrality of digital information to espoused doctrines of manoeuvre rather than large numbers of armoured platforms seems likely to add fuel to sceptics' fire at a perceived decline in British military hard power. Even so, these changes may yet provide the foundation for the next evolution in British military manoeuvre, creating Donald Rumsfeld's proverbial leaner, faster, meaner (and cheaper) force, fit to meet the next evolution in the character of warfare. Whether the British Army's physical manoeuvre capabilities will be perceived in that light by her allies and adversaries, however, remains to be seen.