



EUROPE

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The Utility of Military Force and Public Understanding in Today's Britain

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Abbreviations

CDS	Chief of the Defence Staff
EU	European Union
INF	Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty
MPs	Members of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NSS	National Security Strategy
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute
SDR	UK Strategic Defence Review
SDSR	Strategic Defence and Security Review
SROs	Senior Responsible Officers
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations

Summary

This paper addresses the lack of engagement between the British government and the British people on defence policy. The effect of this communication gap is to undermine the potential for the development of strategy and for the coherent use of military force. The government seems to have convinced itself that the public is reluctant to support the cost of defence, particularly at the price of social spending, and that it is unpersuaded of the utility of military force. The Whitehall mindset towards the public on matters of defence tends to be one of distrust, and that suspicion of the very people whose national interests it is protecting renders it incapable of responding coherently to the changing character of war.

The government's preference is to see both strategy and defence policy as areas to be settled between it and the armed forces, as far as possible within the corridors of power. Ironically, the welcome and overdue innovations of the last decade – the National Security Council and the National Security Strategy, both introduced in 2010 – have reinforced the sense that national security is an elite activity. This does not mean that the government does not have a relationship with the public when it comes to the utility of force, but it is one which draws more on a mythologised memory of the Second World War than an appreciation of armed conflict as it is experienced and conducted today.

Several observers, in keeping with the effectiveness of multilateral organisations – particularly the United Nations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the European Union – have argued that the use of force should be contained by emerging global and cosmopolitan norms. The British government has played its part in reflecting that view. Since 2010, it has repeatedly stressed its commitment to a rules-based international order, and its use of force has been designed to shore up the idea of collective defence, not least by buttressing the United States' leadership of the western allies. Some argue that strategy can no longer be resolved at the national level but requires collective action, and others say, for pragmatic rather than normative reasons, that Britain, because it no longer has the capability, cannot now act alone even if it wants to.

Neither those norms nor that realism are fully borne out by the assumptions surrounding British defence or the public statements which accompany any British use of force. Britain's armed forces enjoy both a respect and admiration which currently exceeds that of any other profession in British society. Partly because its experience of the two world wars of the 20th century was neither as revolutionary nor as disruptive in political and social effects as for its European neighbours, Britain still luxuriates in a sense of its own continuity and self-identity. It produces statements on national strategy to be settled by a National Security Council, and its dependence on allies is more often implicit than explicit. It also still aspires to have a 'global' role, particularly since the 2016 Brexit referendum, at a time when many comparable states, for all the pressures of so-called 'globalisation', are describing their defence postures in regional terms. This report,

then, differs from the cosmopolitanism of some by arguing that in Britain strategy still has meaning at the national level; it does, however, require a new government mindset.

Strategy in a democracy is not set solely at an elite level, between government and its civil and armed services. Rather than being the product of a bilateral relationship, it is the fruit of a triangular one. The government has two conversations when it makes strategy: one with its civil service and armed forces, and the other with the electorate which returned it to office. Very often, these two conversations are conducted in different registers, with damaging effects for the coherence of national strategy. Nor is that the end of the matter, for the armed forces and the public also have a conversation, as another innovation of the 2010 government recognised when it introduced the Armed Forces Covenant. None of these three groups of actors is a hermetically sealed entity. One of the strengths of democracies is that they are porous. Above all, the so-called public is not a monolith, but a community which includes, among others, opinion formers, spouses of service personnel, and former members of the armed forces, all of them groups whose members can have as deep an engagement with the use of force as those in government. If Britain is to generate a mature attitude to the use of armed force and, if need be, to the utility of war itself, it also needs a more mature debate about defence – one that trusts and engages the public, allows the armed forces to take part in the discussion, and in which the government enables and enhances the structures to permit those conversations.

1. The problem: British doubts regarding the use of military force

The making of strategy in today's Britain is an elite activity, hammered out by ministers, civil servants and chiefs of staff. That in itself is not new, for at least two reasons. First, national security can rightly demand secrecy and confidentiality. Second, statesmen in war seek to lead and direct their people, often despite their personal doubts and fears, and so cannot be as candid about challenging realities at the time even if they profess to having wanted to do so in hindsight.

Strategy making is also increasingly decided less at national level than in multilateral forums, pre-eminently – in the case of western democracies – by NATO. The profile of the United States within the latter has grown since the end of the Cold War. Reflecting America's geopolitical involvements and its global ambition, the areas of security concern for western democracies have moved away from the core geographical focus on which NATO was originally based (the northern Atlantic and western Europe) to the Middle East, Central Asia and the western Pacific. It is also heavily focused on domestic security as a result of threats arising from international terrorism. Two consequences have followed for the security environment facing western democracies: first, the overlapping of international and domestic security; second, the threat of major war has diminished almost to vanishing point for many states and in the popular perceptions of their parent societies, not least in Europe. At the same time, the areas of possible threat have expanded beyond the effective reach of most individual NATO members, including the United States.

Most of the British public has no direct link to the armed forces. The latter's falling numbers reduce the sort of immediate familial contact typical of states with national service. The geographical footprint of military bases is increasingly localised, with defence in many areas reliant on Reservists or cadets to create a vestigial footprint. The press and media, broadly defined, therefore have a vitally important role in linking the armed forces to the people. Government recognises this in theory but fails in practice. The digital revolution has broken down barriers in communication and eroded the distinction between public and private. Government has responded by tightening controls just when technologically and culturally the reverse is occurring. Members of the armed forces are less free to speak to the press or the public than they were in the 1970s (when young subalterns fresh from Sandhurst spoke to camera on the streets of Northern Ireland), and the government issues statements that are formulaic, repetitive and unenlightening. The lessons of the Falklands War – as an example of potentially disastrous media management (Thornton 2015; or see more generally Carruthers 2000) – have been forgotten. In the 1990s the government responded to the lack of communication in 1982 by taking charge of media policy. In 1999 Alistair Campbell's coordination of NATO's messages to the press during the Kosovo crisis was successful and seemed to be the way forward. However, the ability to control the message, still there in 1982 and even in 1999, has now almost entirely disappeared. Democracy demands debate, and debate generates understanding.

1.1. The public and social effects of the post-9/11 wars

The prevailing conventional wisdom is that the wars in which Britain has engaged since 9/11 have created a public mood which respects the armed forces but doubts the utility of military force. Those British service personnel killed or wounded in Iraq or Afghanistan have been characterised (in part thanks to the well-intentioned efforts of organisations like Help for Heroes or communities like Royal Wootton Bassett) as victims, not victors, who have suffered in wars of ‘choice’, not wars of necessity. In the view of the public and the media those wars have been fought at a considerable distance from home, have not obviously enhanced British security, and have delivered uncertain outcomes.

When the 9/11 attacks were launched on New York and Washington in 2001, George Robertson was NATO’s Secretary General. He had been the British Secretary of State for Defence from 1997 to 1999, and was the principal architect of the 1998 UK Strategic Defence Review (SDR), which had put the creation of an expeditionary capability centred on air-maritime capabilities at the heart of British strategy. The 1998 SDR was the first such review since 1991, when Options for Change began to respond to the end of the Cold War, and it was the last until 2010, when the coalition government published both a national security strategy and a strategic defence and security review (SDSR). The response to the 9/11 attacks and ‘the global war on terror’ was limited to ‘A New Chapter’ to the 1998 review, published in July 2002. Formally speaking, therefore, Britain’s campaigning in Iraq and Afghanistan was conducted under the umbrella of expeditionary warfare, even if in 1998 such wars had been envisaged as quick, and primarily the business of the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, not of the Army.

Britain has been profoundly influenced by what happened between the 1998 and 2015 reviews. Robertson prompted NATO to invoke Article 5 of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty for the first time in its history. It enshrines the principle of collective defence by treating an attack on one Ally in Europe or North America as an attack on all. As a result, America’s European partners took over responsibilities for airborne surveillance, which released US aircraft for roles over Afghanistan. The United States was opposed to involving its allies in its ground operations, but the first British troops deployed to Afghanistan in 2001 and NATO took over the International Security Assistance Force in August 2003. By then Britain had, more controversially, taken part in the invasion of Iraq in March 2003. The latter did not fall within the remit of Article 5, and the United States formed a ‘coalition of the willing’.

Initially, both commitments commanded public support. Although there were demonstrations in opposition to the invasion of Iraq, approval rose when British troops embarked on active operations. That approval was not sustained. As both conflicts lengthened and British casualties mounted, successive prime ministers struggled to relate their objectives directly to national needs. Publicly they preferred to link them to the threat of domestic terrorism, rather than the Anglo–American relationship. However, they found it increasingly hard to convince the nation that its security was served by what the armed forces might achieve in either country. The result was that members of the British public lost faith in US foreign policy and it has yet to recover it; that mistrust was sustained even after the election of Barack Obama in 2008, and was renewed with the election of Donald Trump in 2016.

What united Britain’s policy in both wars was its determination to act as a good ally to the United States, and to fight for issues of collective, rather than national, security. This is not to say that it is not in British interests to have a close relationship with the United States, or even to wage war to further that aim.

However, fighting for the interests of the United States is not necessarily the same as fighting for the collective defence of NATO (as the debate over the invasion of Iraq in 2003 made clear), and both objectives are different from the direct defence of the United Kingdom. A fresh SDSR published in 2015 – the year following the formal withdrawal from combat operations in Afghanistan – made more of British domestic security, but also committed the United Kingdom to the creation of a Joint Task Force by 2025, thus reflecting an essential geopolitical continuity in British defence. Although there are doubts about its affordability, that commitment remains in place.

In sum, the widespread perception exists that the British public doubts the utility of force, which threatens the armed forces with an existential crisis. The government hesitates to deploy armed force, not least because it believes the public is averse to it doing so, and as a result it is reluctant to engage in open debate about the use of the military. Because the public is therefore told less, it also understands less. For the armed forces themselves, if they cannot be used, they ultimately have no purpose; they become no more than an expensive adornment of the state. As the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) remarked in his Christmas 2018 lecture at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), the armed forces need the government to make sure that its next war is a success.

1.2. Developments in British strategic behaviour since 2010

1.2.1. British national security: its institutions

In 2010 the incoming coalition government effected two major changes in the institutional structure of British defence. Both could be construed as consequences of the experience of the post-9/11 wars, and both had implications for the conduct of the national debate, not least by reinforcing (possibly inadvertently) its elitist tendencies.

The first restructured the Ministry of Defence. A Defence Board was created, effectively on business lines, with a Chief of Defence Procurement at the centre, and with a new Joint Forces Command. The chiefs of the individual armed forces do not sit on the Defence Board. The effect has been to elevate defence management over strategy, and to put an enormous burden on the CDS. The Chief of Staff Committee was resuscitated, but as its chairman the CDS serves as a *primus inter pares*, not an overall commander. This matters because, unlike other government departments, the Ministry of Defence is both a department of account and a command headquarters. The reforms described above have elevated the former over the latter. It remains to be seen how well they will function in time of war.

The status of the Ministry of Defence was itself reduced in importance by the second and even more significant change, the establishment of the National Security Council. The CDS, with the heads of the intelligence services, also attends its meetings. The professional case for the utility of force therefore depends on a single figure amid a body on which only the politicians have a vote. The National Security Council is chaired – almost invariably – by the prime minister, and is technically a sub-committee of cabinet, but its decisions do not in practice seem to be referred to the cabinet, thus making the National Security Council an executive body, not an advisory one.

The potentially dominant voice in the national security architecture since 2010 has therefore become the National Security Adviser, who has so far invariably been drawn from the Foreign and Commonwealth

Office. By chairing the National Security Council (Officials), the National Security Adviser can both shape the agenda of the National Security Council itself and also influence how the principal departments of state adapt their work to meet the collective needs of national security. Over the last decade, therefore, while it can be legitimately argued that the role of the CDS has been enhanced, that of the other chiefs of staff has been reduced, and collectively all have lost ground to the civil servants, even in matters of directly professional competence. **It could be argued that this has the potential to make the defence debate less diverse and possibly less open.** The process surrounding the drafting of the 2015 National Security Strategy did involve external consultation, more so than in 2010, but that for the 2018 National Security Capability Review effectively did not. The latter and its offshoot, the Modernising Defence Programme, were dubbed a ‘refresh’, required by the changes in Britain’s international situation (most obviously Brexit and the election of Trump) since 2015. However, neither document directly addressed those new circumstances and so failed to provide the obvious entry point for public understanding. **The changes since 9/11 have – in sum – reinforced the idea of defence policy as an elite activity. By widening the definitions of security, not least in response to the changing character of war, and by making government departments other than the Ministry of Defence key agents in its delivery, recent institutional developments have made the circumstances surrounding the use of force more opaque.**

1.2.2. The levels of force and their uses

Not all use of force is war, and not all wars are major wars. Armed force, for all that it can be blunt and brutal, is not a monolith. It can be used with varying degrees of destructiveness, to influence, to coerce, to contain, to deter, to rescue, to limit, as well as to defeat or to annihilate. Governments, aspiring to use it as an instrument of policy, with measurable political outcomes, frequently plan to use it with restraint. Moreover, many of its uses are designed to achieve effects that states themselves do not characterise as war, even where there is loss of life. If ‘major’ war does occur, current technologies – some of them unmanned, and with precision guidance and fed by satellite intelligence – can achieve more targeted effects. However, the temptation to use more ordnance just because targeting can be more accurate, and so cause less collateral damage, can be hard to resist, especially if it reduces risk for one’s own side.

For a modern democracy, what determines not just the use of force, but also its level, is normally the policy that is guiding its objective. If war is not discretionary, that may escalate the use of force, just as a discretionary war may prompt restraint. But this relationship is not set, because the use of armed force itself provokes a reaction from the enemy. So war can create its own dynamic and trump the rationality and restraint which prompted its initiation. This trend, as the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan demonstrate, can also work in reverse. The United States has retired from its ‘global war on terror’, and is today prepared to negotiate with the Taleban, as it was not in 2001. It has done so because of the complexity and duration of the war itself. The decision to escalate or de-escalate does not necessarily follow policy in a straight line.

For many, particularly those born since the end of the Cold War or the 9/11 attacks, the use of force has become separated from conventional understandings of war itself. In Britain, many see the main threat faced by contemporary society as that of terrorism, not of national defence against an external state actor. By contrast, for the Baltic states, the reverse applies. The potential use of force determines the structures of armed forces. States which have prioritised peacekeeping have optimised their forces to that end, and so made them less ready for war itself; those which have needed their armed forces for internal policing have

different capabilities and equipment from those which have not. Even within the same operation, as in Afghanistan, different state actors can describe the purposes of their deployments in different terms, as they struggle to adapt their forces – and their concepts for their use – to the situation on the ground.

British forces are optimised for expeditionary warfare, but under that structure different force components can serve different objectives. The navy can be better suited to influence and coerce, and its deployment can lessen the risk of escalation. Current thinking has moved against 'boots on the ground' in favour of airpower, both manned and unmanned, and from 'hearts and minds' in wars among the people to the targeted killing of insurgents. In other words, the use of air forces rather than armies carries different implications for the utility of force, at least while western air forces are comparatively invulnerable. Moreover, when ground forces are used, their numbers (and any consequent casualties) can be kept lower than might have been the case in the past by the use of private contractors and the outsourcing of support functions.

The public rhetoric surrounding war can miss these differences, but they carry profound implications for strategy. The current preoccupation with 'cyberwar' is in large part a reflection of its capacity to achieve comparable effects to war but without the lethality of armed force. The choice of instruments can shape policy, and so set its ends according to its means; the strategic task is to select means commensurate with its objectives.

1.2.3. Current use of British military force

Since 9/11 the effectiveness of British strategy has been progressively judged in terms of casualties. Britain's armed forces are professional, and by enlisting have voluntarily entered into an 'unlimited liability', which requires them both to kill and wound others and run the risk of being killed and wounded themselves. The public gaze is focused overwhelmingly on the losses to Britain's own forces rather than on those inflicted on the enemy or suffered by the non-combatant populations in conflict zones. Although in comparative and historical terms the number of casualties in the post-9/11 wars has been extraordinarily light, they have had two strategic consequences. First, they have become a measure of success or failure. Ultimately they trumped the original objectives in Iraq or Afghanistan: getting out became an end in itself. Second, when in theatre, force security became an objective in its own right. It has shaped operations and tactics on the ground, and it has dominated the preoccupations of politicians as they answered to their electorates.

British strategy has changed in consequence, partly following the example of the United States. In 2009 President Obama put a time limit on the US 'surge' in Afghanistan. Rather than 'boots on the ground', he favoured the use of weaponised drones to execute terrorists and the deployment of special forces in preference to regular formations. The latter, operating outside the glare of public attention and accustomed to secrecy, could both engage in offensive operations without excessive accountability and train indigenous forces to act as proxies. The shift has made the burdens of America's post-9/11 wars more acceptable to the American people. British strategy in Libya in 2011 followed similar principles. It used air power and relied on Libyans themselves to topple Gaddafi. Its operations in Libya since 2011 have gone largely unreported, even to NATO, despite the fact that the alliance provided the operational headquarters in the initial campaign.

What were essentially tactical and operational assets were thus elevated into a way of doing business which itself became a strategy. This strategy has emerged without any formal articulation, and confronts a

paradox as a result. Its use is reinforcing the trend in government not to engage the public on matters of strategy, and so leaves ministers even less able to handle the discussion as and when its consequences become subject to public debate, particularly if there are casualties. Political scientists are seeking fresh but collective labels for tasks which run the gamut from security assistance (or defence engagement in British defence parlance) to 'light footprint' operations. The Oxford Research Group has adopted the label 'remote warfare', with its connotations of distance from home despite the much trumpeted effects of globalisation. 'Remote warfare' is designed to capture both the opportunities provided by its principal enablers (drones supported by special forces and proxies) and the lack of accountability to domestic audiences, the public at large and Parliament specifically (Thornberry and Watson 2018a, 2018b).¹

While the cost of such operations remains low and the commitment in terms of 'boots on the ground' minimal, this relative invisibility makes for a viable strategy. However, there are consequences in this approach to strategy which foreshadow problems, not least in undermining its public acceptability:

- In the United States this strategy has made interventions domestically more acceptable, and the use of drones popular. Other countries, including the United Kingdom, have fallen in behind the United States without the same political pressure to account for their actions. Will it work in situations where the United States is not in the lead? In 2018 the All Party Parliamentary Group on Drones published a report in which the foreword observed that 'the UK's good record on the employment of drones has been compromised by a lack of accountability and transparency'; the report sought public clarification of protocols and policies (Clarke 2018: 1).
- Some countries (Germany pre-eminent among them) have come to see weaponised drones less as assets and more as a method of extra-judicial killing, whose use is inappropriate for a democratic state and incompatible with international law.²
- The reliance on proxies on the ground forfeits political control over the eventual outcomes, as Libya has made abundantly clear. The proxies are likely to be actors who lack independent capacity, which may increase the pressure on the UK to contribute in order to save either them or the UK's face. They could be regimes whose behaviour does not accord with international humanitarian law, and as a result UK armed forces could find themselves implicated in breaches of international law.
- If the armed forces which are of true utility are confined to air assets (both manned and unmanned) and to special forces, what are the rest for? The answer may be that the intention is to free them to prepare for operations 'at scale', or 'major war', but that is not made explicit.

In sum, the responses of the nation to the potential use of force by the British government can be understandably confused and short term. Public opinion can recognise and respond to a humanitarian disaster, for example in Syria or Yemen. **But in its demand for action, the public doubts whether the deliberate use of force can be part of the solution. It looks to government for answers, but the executive can be wary of guiding and educating public opinion, and so seems to reflect public confusion rather than**

¹ See also the conference of Oxford Research Group's Remote Warfare Programme: Conceptualising Remote Warfare: The Past, Present and Future, University of Kent, 28 February – 1 March 2019.

² Franke (2018) contrasts the responses of Britain, Germany and the United States.

seek to resolve it. Meanwhile those professionals charged with the delivery of armed force for the nation are discouraged, according to the current conventions surrounding civil–military relations, from contributing to the national debate. The growing response to these issues – namely, to keep overseas deployments as far from public awareness as is compatible with the law and parliamentary obligations – only deepens the challenges by postponing them. The consequence is that the public do not fully understand what the armed forces do in their name, while the government can struggle to articulate a national strategy when the nation is not told exactly what that strategy is. During the Cold War, the elite solution to real war was to avoid public scrutiny by using proxies and special forces (Mumford 2013; Westad 2005). Leaders then confronted a challenge with contemporary resonances: the need to respond to challenges while ‘adhering to the constraints of peace and keeping the war at the lowest possible level’. However, what resulted is also familiar today: ‘policies of bold commitment but compromised means’ (Destler et al. 1984, cited in Russett 1990: 48–49). History does not repeat itself, but change can also contain elements that look familiar, and change back as well as change forward.

1.3. Is the public doubt regarding the utility of military force temporary, or has there been a more permanent shift in attitudes?

Even if Britain were to deliver an unalloyed victory in war, social, legal and cultural changes suggest that the problems cannot simply be corrected. At least five elements are at work here, which confuse the message to the public when force is used, and are not easily disentangled:

- Dissatisfaction with a particular prime minister or government (most obviously Tony Blair and the Iraq War; David Cameron has by and large escaped comparable censure over the unsatisfactory outcome to the war in Libya).
- The tendency of prime ministers in wartime to use the vocabulary of total war, and specifically in the British case to evoke the parallel of appeasement, in order to mobilise the public. The analogy is inexact, as the wars fought by Britain since 1990 have been limited, in their commitment and their direct implications for the defence of the United Kingdom. As a result the rhetorical summons to major war has not been followed by the national mobilisation which such vocabulary suggests. There is a paradox here: engaging the public in national defence implies that the threat which Britain faces is existential, but what should then follow would be a major war. That is not the intent: the government wants to contain the conflict, not magnify it, but has yet to find a way to best express that.
- Dissatisfaction with British government in general, of which the management of Brexit is taken to be the most obvious example; and the failure to be open about the use of force – most recently in Syria – breeds distrust for central government as a whole. This more general ‘crisis’ for democratic government will be returned to in the conclusion to this paper.
- Dependence on service charities for the public portrayal of the work of the armed forces on operations. The function of service charities is to raise money and provide support for service personnel and veterans. This gives them a public profile in Britain which is not matched elsewhere, where the state plays the principal part in providing such support. Since 1997 the profile of the

charities has grown for two reasons. First, Help for Heroes has taken the focus of charitable giving from the needs of those who fought in the Second World War to those who have fought in operations since the end of the Cold War, and especially since 9/11. Second, the government, although providing much more fully for those needs (e.g. in the revision of the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme), has also deepened its relationship with service charities through partnerships (for example at Tedworth House, and in the establishment of the Armed Forces Covenant and its offshoots). **During the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the charities – for entirely understandable reasons – advertised the needs of veterans more than the achievements and utility of the armed forces, but in the process they portrayed them as ‘victims’, not ‘victors’.**

- The small size of British forces today and their status as professionals separate them from most of society. By past standards, their losses in Iraq and Afghanistan before 2014 were light given the intensity of the fighting, and since 2014 have fallen close to vanishing point. But they become hard to justify when the message as to the strategy which Britain is pursuing is not clear, and is particularly hard to relate to the national interest. Moreover, the absence of other reporting on what the armed forces are achieving means that their casualties take up a disproportionate amount of bandwidth. Losses stand in their own right, without much context as to the purposes they are serving. The focus on casualties may have expanded to fill the space available.

Of course each of these five elements could also be transient. The hope expressed by the CDS in his Christmas 2018 lecture – that the next war to which the government commits Britain must be a success – implies that he sees the issue as temporary: a short sharp war which can be accounted a victory could restore the situation. There are precedents for his hope. America’s faith in the utility of force was weakened by Vietnam, but recovered by subsequent successes, most obviously in the First Gulf War. More recently, Canada positioned its armed forces as UN peacekeepers, but a scandal in Somalia in 1993 called into question their leadership, morale and reputation. When the Canadians deployed to Kandahar in Afghanistan in 2006, they suffered proportionately the highest losses of any of the coalition forces, and did so in ways which proved both that they had recovered from Somalia and that they enjoyed public respect and support. Britain’s own belief in the utility of force was boosted in 1982 by the Falklands War and survived intact thanks to Kosovo and Sierra Leone.

All the voices mentioned above, whether of government or the third sector, can adjust their messages. Governments can opt to under-promise and over-deliver, to their benefit in the eyes of the public; politicians can ramp down their rhetoric and so contain, not inflame, expectations; and charities can stress the security benefits delivered by the British armed forces (‘a force for good’ in the now abandoned strap-line of the Ministry of Defence), rather than highlight the social needs of veterans. Even casualty aversion could diminish, if the cause in which those losses were incurred was judged important enough in relation to the national interest.³

However, a longer lasting shift in attitudes to war may have occurred since 1990, particularly in Britain and Europe. In the first half of the 20th century, Europe was the fulcrum for two world wars, and for much

³ Gelpi et al. (2009) make this point for the United States; Parr (2018) brings out how much the British approach to armed conflict has changed since the Falklands War in 1982.

of the second half it was a principal theatre for the tensions of the Cold War. So far in the 21st century, Europe has been characterised by such high levels of security that its younger generation has taken that security for granted, seeing it as permanent and not conditional, and consigning the horrors confronted by their grandparents and great-grandparents to history (Sheehan 2008). History does not repeat itself, but it provides context for the present and a means for understanding current dilemmas. In Britain it seems to have lost these connections, either because of historical ignorance or because of selective and myth-making interpretations of national history. The wars of the 20th century have been particularly prey to this last trend. The First World War, fresher in the minds of many after the centenary, still focuses disproportionately on the dead and the western front; it is seen as an act of folly which strips out empathy and replaces it with the arrogance of hindsight. By comparison, following the United States, Britain has recalibrated the Second World War as the 'good war' fought by the 'greatest generation', in ways that neglect its much greater losses for the rest of the world than those sustained in 1914–18, and overplay the moment when Britain 'stood alone', using the Battle of Britain or El Alamein to gloss over less convenient narratives. Too many politicians and members of the public seem to believe that Britain could not now be so stupid or naïve as to engage in major war again, and as a result downplay the pressures of contingency or the imperatives of moral necessity.

Instead of a realism based on possible threats, fresh norms have emerged. Although many of them remain direct products of the two world wars, they have created a presumption against the use of force. They include the following:

- Liberal democracies, despite their success in waging two world wars, have come to doubt the utility of force as a general principle. One extreme example of this argument is John Mueller's contention that they did indeed conclude that 'the war to end all wars' had been fought in 1914–18, and that it was only because of an aberration, the rise of Hitler in Germany, that the Second World War occurred. Since 1945, on this reading, the post-First World War assumption has reasserted itself, with Mueller arguing that major war is over (Mueller 2004).
- The roots of a second norm lie even further back, in the mid-19th century, with the sustained development of international law, not simply as a mechanism for regulating war's conduct but also as a means for preventing its initiation. Its current standing has become a conditioning factor in the making of strategy, both nationally and internationally. Nationally, the judiciary exercises a role independent of government, and can itself shape the conditions under which armed force is used. In the two world wars, the dead were buried where they fell. In 1982, the prime minister permitted the repatriation of bodies from the Falklands, and since 9/11 this has become the norm. Each military death in action therefore requires a coroner's court to determine its cause: the context of the death is frequently confused and the accounts of what happened can conflict. More serious still, the legal regime under which serving personnel use lethal force can generate murder charges when rules of engagement are not followed. The public rarely approve of such trials, and nor do politicians, but they affirm the legitimacy of British military action.
- Internationally, the law's role in the public justification for the resort to war can reinforce the presumption against war's utility in the first place. The Kellogg–Briand pact of 1928 and the UN Charter of 1945 created a presumption against the state's use of force, except in cases of national self-defence. Two indirect and largely unintended side-effects followed. First, the only national

wars which were condoned were wars of national survival, and so were likely to be ‘major’, rather than ‘minor’. Second, since 1945 such wars have been more evident by their absence than their occurrence, a phenomenon for which the UN may take some credit, but which in turn boosts complacency about their possibility in the future. Wars at lower scale remain frequent although they are not wars of national self-defence, and are not always sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council (as that with Iraq in 2003 was not). Not least for these reasons, the United States has not declared war on another nation (an action which requires the president to secure the approval of Congress) since 1945.

- Powers engaged in such limited wars have needed allies, not least if they are to have any chance of gaining the imprimatur of a United Nations Security Council resolution, in order to legitimate their recourse to war. So they have sought to widen limited conflicts by bringing in other partners. The latter’s participation can be so demarcated by caveats as to render their involvement more symbolic than militarily effective, thus reinforcing the doubts about the utility of force in the first place.
- The rise of non-governmental organisations in war zones affects the public debate. They have become increasingly involved in conflict zones, bringing relief to the displaced, succour to the wounded and sick, and preparing the ground for peace through stabilisation and reconstruction. However, they cannot afford to be identified with either party to a conflict, and so strive to remain neutral. That stance may be essential, legally and morally on the one hand, and politically and practically on the other. But it too can serve to obscure the utility of military force.
- The reluctance to give ‘value’ to defence. The notion that defence is a cost which holds back development and economic growth is not new. However, even in the heyday of Victorian liberalism it was accepted that defence costs could go up as well as down, according to need. That cyclical effect seems to have been replaced, even within government and the Ministry of Defence, by a belief that the cost of defence will be continuously reduced, and that trend has begun to seem irreversible. Defence is relegated below domestic spending on social goods like education, health and social care, and as a result there is no thought given as to how the armed forces could be expanded if required. The effect is to devalue defence itself.

We shall not know how permanent these norms are until they are next challenged by a direct threat to the United Kingdom.

2. The supposed 'fickleness' of democracy

In a modern democracy like Britain, the government and the electorate are engaged in a continuous dialogue which reaches a climax at the ballot box. That exchange is mediated by the press, by broadcasters, and increasingly by social media (the latter not least in the hands of ministers and politicians themselves). **Part 1 of this paper puts this debate, as much commentary does, in terms of a binary division between the government and the people. That is simplistic and probably wrong, even if commonplace.** Each citizen has multiple identities, and many of them are transitory. Members of parliament (MPs) who lose their seat may no longer have a formal standing in the processes of government but do not then lose the understanding acquired through political experience. The populist narrative, which sees those at Westminster as a remote elite, underestimates their backgrounds in (for example) local government. A governmental narrative which sees criticism of its policy as the manifestation of public ignorance can be equally misguided. What is presented as the opinion of the 'public' may actually be the views of other elites and opinion formers, including the political opposition and the media.

2.1. The complex relationship between public opinion and British government

British government has long been fearful of public opinion, and even public engagement, on matters to do with the defence of the realm. Legislation like the Official Secrets Act of 1911 and the Defence of the Realm Act of 1914 bear testimony to the antiquity of this concern. One possible response to the post-9/11 wars can conclude that engagement with the public on national security is inherently dangerous. The doubt about democracy's staying power and its capacity for refined thinking on complex issues persists in Britain, and may have been reinforced by the shifts in public opinion on the Iraq and Afghan wars. **Public responses are seen as too fickle to be reliable guides for the formation of strategy. This section is designed to counter that view, and to point up its own inherent dangers.**

In 1922, Walter Lippmann, the great American political commentator, reviewed the state of democracy in the United States and the effects of President Wilson's First World War propaganda organisation, the Committee on Public Information. He wrote:

The individual man does not have opinions on all public affairs. He does not know what is happening, why it is happening, what ought to happen. I cannot imagine how he could know, and there is not the least reason for thinking, as

mystical democrats have thought, that the compounding of individual ignorance in masses of people can produce a continuing directing voice in public affairs.⁴

Lippmann's is an elite reason why western governments are uneasy about the role of democracy in the conduct of war. According to this argument, insufficient public understanding can have two untoward consequences. They are different in their natures but convergent in their effects.

2.2. Potential consequences of insufficient public understanding

First, there is the Athenian problem. In the 5th century BC, Athens developed a form of direct democracy, which underpinned both the composition of its fighting forces and the decisions to use them in war (Pritchard 2019, chapter 2; Hanson 1989).⁵ **The most striking aspect of Athenian democracy was that the same citizens who served took the decisions both to go to war and to approve the aims for which the armed forces were used** (Thucydides 1954., bk I:145). As the Peloponnesian War pursued its nearly 30-year course, many Greeks concluded that Athens was not best served by a fully participatory democracy. Its citizens were too easily wooed by the latest orator and too inconsistent in their judgements, especially in a war which lasted nearly three decades. They became more dependent on oligarchs themselves, and were in due course defeated by Sparta, which some have characterised (somewhat simplistically) as also an oligarchy.

The second problem is the corollary of participative democracy: **the public's susceptibility to a demagogue in such circumstances, and particularly in war.** Excessive veneration of military values, and especially of the form more than the substance, can subvert the very democracy they were kindled to defend. Demagogues can become dictators, not least because the suppression of individual freedoms in the name of the common good is a trend which war both amplifies and legitimises. Totalitarian states may be more effective in waging war because they can suppress dissent, but they do so very often because they claim to act with the backing of the majority. For some immigrant communities in Britain, armed forces are agents of oppression, not defenders of democratic values.

2.3. The nuance and rationality of public attitudes to the utility of force

Writing in the United States at the end of the Cold War in 1990, and in a context shaped by nuclear deterrence, Bruce Russett pointed out that the most divergent views and the biggest swings in opinion were manifestations of elite divisions, and in particular of responses from the political opposition, not of views held by the wider public. In other words democratic government by its nature promotes debate and difference, particularly among politicians and other opinion formers. In this market for ideas, public views are slow to change, remarkably consistent and for the most part entirely rational. According to Russett, opinion polling during the Cold War showed that 'most Americans are neither hawks nor doves, but ... owls', and that 'opinion stability is the rule and that when change does occur it happens in logical patterns in relation to world circumstances'. He characterised as 'myths' the ideas 'that the general public is too

⁴ Lippmann (1922), quoted in Manicas (1989), 371.

⁵ For the foundations of an argument which Hanson has extended to the contemporary world see Hanson (2001).

ignorant of and confused about national security issues to deserve influence over policy, that the public is too easily manipulated, [and] that public opinion is volatile, swinging irrationally between indifference and hysteria, or between the postures of hawk and chicken' (Russett 1990; 2, 85, 92–93, 157).

His conclusion **was that public opinion was wary of war in the abstract**, a position which reflected both the association of democracy with peace and the political interdependence of democratic states, **but that it was fully capable of 'rallying round the flag', and indeed prone to do so** (Russett 1990; 17, 37, 45–48). In other words, democracies tend to support the use of force at the outset of a real conflict, as Britons did in relation to Iraq and Afghanistan. Their enthusiasm wanes as the costs, especially in blood, mount and the war becomes protracted. Even in the Second World War, 'the good war' of current myth, Roosevelt lost votes between 1940 and 1944, and Churchill lost an election in 1945. There is nothing inherently irrational in any of this. The more important point is that both the United States and Britain emerged victorious, and that in major war democracy plays a central role in national mobilisation. It can underpin a unity which, while imperfect and vulnerable, gives energy to the nation's war effort.

The issue, as Russett saw it, is not the difficulty which democracy generates, but 'the possibility and necessity, of involving the public in erecting and sustaining a sensible national security policy for a democratic country'. During the Cold War nuclear deterrence became an elite activity for experts, who developed a jargon of their own, although they were dealing with some very straightforward concepts. The threat to use nuclear weapons made hostages not just of the state, but of the whole population and its survival. Democracy lay at its heart, and that in turn raised an existential question: 'if something so central to the lives of individuals is to be alienated from popular control, does "democracy" any longer have much meaning?' (Russett 1990; 2, 146).

The most recent opinion polling in Britain corroborates Russett's findings for the United States 30 years ago. Fully 76 per cent of a poll of 1,900 people supported the proposition that the world needs NATO to ensure an enduring peace, with only 3 per cent disagreeing, and 73 per cent supported the proposal that the United Kingdom should use its armed forces to help a NATO ally if it were attacked, with 5 per cent disagreeing. A similar proportion – 76 per cent – endorsed the statement that the UK needs strong armed forces; 72 per cent believed that they keep Britain safe at home and abroad, 70 per cent that they help counter terrorism around the world, 68 per cent that they are doing a good job, and 67 per cent that they contribute to peace across the world. The percentages disagreeing with any of these propositions are small: respectively 8, 7, 8, 6 and 11 per cent.

Two points are immediately striking here. The first concerns the changing character of war. The levels of endorsement are high for both major war and the use of the armed forces in support of humanitarian operations (66 per cent in the latter case). They also endorse the commitment to collective defence; indeed, they do so with more enthusiasm than that for national self-defence (perhaps because an external attack on the UK is seen as less probable). In other words, the public is not locked in a single conception of war, and appreciates the varied reasons for which British armed forces might be used.

The second concerns the changing character of society. Britain is ethnically and religiously diverse; overtly too it seems increasingly differentiated by class, region, age and gender. However, the polling does not show any clear major differences of view on the use of force between any of these groups. Women show less understanding than men of the armed forces as institutions, and Northern Ireland knows much more about

them (no doubt because of its recent past) than does Scotland. One clear political problem in assessing public opinion in relation to the utility of force is that it does not necessarily divide along neat party lines. Some Conservatives can be isolationist and some on the left internationalist; some can see the use of force in national terms and others in humanitarian terms. Perhaps more challenging for the public is the foreign policy that underpins the use of force, rather than the use of force itself. The latter is much better reported than the former, as newspapers reduce their numbers of foreign correspondents and broadcasters chase daily headlines rather than persistent and ongoing stories. Significantly, 74 per cent of those polled knew little or nothing of the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.⁶

The government's problem in the use of force may not be democracy, but itself. It may have learnt the wrong lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan, in that it believes that the public is averse to the use of armed force, when the real public concern is with its inept use in a strategy which proved inconsistent and ill-considered. Government may have a stronger sense of what it does not want to do, as opposed to what it might want to do and what it ought to do. It may be more risk averse than the public, but it may also be less realistic in consequence. The government relies on a body of trained experts to steer it through the thickets of national security, but in their work the latter have to recognise the role of popular opinion as well as of political guidance. Conflicts short of major war require more nuanced explanations than major wars, and by the same token demand more careful exposition and more space for debate. The tendency is to duck the problem – especially given the proliferation in types and forms of media – not surmount it, but that merely multiplies the risk that the country will be exposed when the crisis deepens and the public is alerted to what is being done in its name.

⁶ YouGov polling for the Ministry of Defence, February 2019: fieldwork dates 31 May 2018 to 27 February 2019.

3. The problem's formulation: the Clausewitzian trinity and the importance of the people to effectiveness in war

Ministers in today's democratic states are accountable to their electorates, and have to explain their decisions to use armed force to parliaments and the press. In the United States and the United Kingdom the elite forms of strategy making have – particularly since 9/11 – created a tension between what presidents or prime ministers say privately and what they declare publicly. Both George W. Bush and Tony Blair used examples from the Second World War to explain the need to invade Iraq when speaking publicly, and yet decided to fight a more limited war privately. The failure to treat strategy as just another policy – as a matter involving open dialogue between government and people – has created a form of 'democratic deficit'. The effect has been that governments have struggled to win the public debate on the need to use force.

3.1. Clausewitz's trinity

In his book *Vom Kriege* (*On War*, published posthumously in 1832–34), Carl von Clausewitz described war as made up of three elements: passion, the play of probability and chance, and reason ('the primary trinity'). In a brief and succinct passage, Clausewitz linked these three qualities with the three groups of state actors – passion with the people, the play of probability and chance with the armed forces, and reason with the government ('the secondary trinity').

Clausewitz's so-called 'trinity' has been subject to much debate (Bassford 2007),⁷ three aspects of which matter here. In all three the original German is more open to nuance and ambiguity than the currently accepted English translation suggests. Given the importance of the text for contemporary understandings of warfare, these are not simply matters of concern for scholars but can and do inform debates on public policy today. They can also potentially help to re-engage the public with the use of force (Aron 1976, 1:117–22; Fleming 2013; Powell and Persico 1995: 207–08, 303; Summers 1982: 5; Waldman 2013).

The first goes to the heart of Clausewitz's best known aphorism, that war is the continuation of policy by other means. Clausewitz may have seen this as normatively desirable, but the passage on the 'trinity' makes clear – as did other references in *On War* – that he knew perfectly well that practice was not always the same as theory. Specifically, passion might trump reason or military logic usurp policy. In other words, the

⁷ The version of the relevant text most often cited today is that of Howard and Paret in their translation of *On War*: see Clausewitz (1976, book I:89, chapter 1, para. 28).

‘trinity’ is not necessarily arguing that ‘reason’ and government will dominate the other two elements in war; they are just one of the three elements, not a superior force for coherence and coordination.

The second area of contention is how fixed the relationships between the qualities of ‘the primary trinity’ and the actors of ‘the secondary trinity’ might be. Could the people employ reason and the government passion? Might the public be wary of war, while the government was keen? And, in that case, who has the monopoly of passion and who of reason? The British public demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq in 2003, justified as rational in hindsight, also reflected a more visceral rejection of the use of war on principle. On its side, the government’s commitment to the invasion reflected a coherent political objective – its determination to tie the United States to Europe – but it failed to articulate its reasoning to the public.

Finally, what is the significance of the distinction between ‘the primary trinity’ of attributes and ‘the secondary trinity’, which is made up of actors? The former is more a characterisation of war, which evokes in all its participants passion, the play of probability and chance, and reasoning, albeit in varying degrees. War is a reciprocal act, whose course is not determined unilaterally but in the space between two opposing sides. On the other hand the triumvirate of actors – the people, the armed forces and the government – are the components of a nation that goes to war, and how that nation makes its strategy. Whether that strategy is successful or not depends on the war itself, not on the strategy’s unilateral merits.

A key point for this study emerges from the secondary ‘trinity’ in particular. As a soldier who fought the armies of revolutionary France off and on for more than 20 years (1792–1815), Clausewitz embraced the role of the people in generating effectiveness in war. Clearly his understanding of the ‘people’ and ours are different: in the early 19th century many of them were illiterate, poorly educated and politically unaware in ways which they are not today. But Clausewitz and other reformers thought that, if these social ills were righted, Prussia would be militarily stronger. His mentor, Gerhard von Scharnhorst, recognised that popular mobilisation, more than narrow military skills, underpinned the fighting power of the armies of France, even if his king, Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia, was reluctant to emulate France’s example because of its democratising effects.⁸ This tension between the Prussian monarchy and the German nation, and its implications for resistance to Napoleon’s dominance of Europe, reached its crisis in February 1812. Clausewitz was so incensed by the king’s acquiescence in France’s demand that Prussia supply a contingent of troops for the invasion of Russia that he resigned from the Prussian army and joined the Russian. He sent a three-part memorandum to another more senior officer, August Neidhart von Gneisenau, in which he set out beliefs which were effectively revolutionary, and which placed the needs of Germany, a nation which did not yet exist as a state, over Prussia, a kingdom in whose army he was serving as a commissioned officer.⁹ Fortunately for Clausewitz’s post-war career, this memorandum was never published in his lifetime, but it reveals how closely aligned passion and policy might be for him, and how he was moved to see the solutions to the existential challenge posed by revolutionary and Napoleonic France as lying in the hands of the people rather than the government. Gneisenau and he had secretly plotted a popular insurrection against France in the years before 1812 (Clausewitz 1966–90, 1:661–9). So anger and frustration

⁸ Scharnhorst’s conclusions on the French revolutionary armies and their implications for the future of war are reprinted in Scharnhorst (1988: 97–150).

⁹ For the full text see Clausewitz (1966–90, 1:682–750).

underpinned the ideas of the Clausewitzian 'trinity', even if he imposed on it a degree of cool rationality by the time that he penned its more objective formulation in *On War*. **His discussions in his mature theoretical work, both of the nation in arms and of the effect of the political aim on the military objective, clearly expected the people to be politically motivated and to fight with passion as a consequence** (Clausewitz 1976, book VI chapter 26, book VIII chapter 6B; Scheipers 2018). Clausewitz advocated conscription, and saw the future of war as lying with the nation in arms. The people would fight well if they knew what they were fighting for, just as the French soldier fought because he was a citizen of France and was ready to defend the values of the republic.

3.2. Britain has been different, at least historically

The British experience of the relationship between its armed forces and democracy is somewhat different, not least because of its status as a collection of islands rather than as part of a continental land mass. That made its navy an integral part of its economic and mercantile development. The British crown, like the American Republic, had had less justification for a standing army in consequence, and so could not use it in ways that were tyrannical or inimical to civil liberties. By contrast Parliament associated the very existence of a standing army with the monarchy, even if England's first effective modern army was Cromwell's New Model Army. The navy, not the army, was the armed force which engaged the public, and in this it both differed from the powers of the European continent and found itself distanced from the influences which underpinned the Clausewitzian trinity. National service was typecast not as the opportunity for the people to participate in the making of the state but as the suppression of individual liberties (Reece 2013; Schwoerer 1974).

The interpretation of British history that its acceptance of a standing army has always been conditional and temporary, has cast a long shadow over Britain's understanding of the place of military power in the context of its parliamentary and liberal traditions. The Bill of Rights of 1688 declared that the raising of a standing army in time of peace was against the law unless it was approved by Parliament. That approval became linked to the Mutiny Act of 1689, which permitted the government to use military law in the punishment of its soldiers. The Mutiny Act was renewed annually, and only in 2006 was the Army Act (as it was called by then) fully replaced by a quinquennial Armed Forces Act. Viewed over the *longue durée* of British history since 1688, certainly until the creation of a mass army in 1914 and the introduction of conscription in 1916, the British public's relationship with its army has been deeply ambivalent. The navy, by contrast, despite the press gang and the lash, enjoyed greater public approval.

From the perspective of continental Europe, however, the effects on Britain of the Glorious Revolution look very different. No longer was it the case that the armed forces could be condemned as unconstitutional. Instead, they enjoyed legitimacy and stability precisely because they had parliamentary approval.

As Clausewitz recognised in the 'trinity', the French Revolution carried immense implications for the utility of force. It established what Samuel Huntington in *The Soldier and the State* (1957) called 'subjective military control'. In other words armies are subordinate to the societies from which they are drawn because they are made up of citizens, and so reflect their values. The founding fathers bequeathed the United States a form of social control in the militia, its legacy evident to this day in the right to bear arms (Uviller and Merkel 2002). In 19th-century Britain, too, the militia – a force authorised solely by Parliament and

officered by the gentry – was dubbed ‘the constitutional force’, in contradistinction to the regular forces under royal command (Beckett 1991: 32–49). Since 1945, however, this approach to civil–military relations has lost its purchase. When Huntington addressed the domestic political challenges for the post-war United States of maintaining inflated military capabilities in peace, his solution was not ‘subjective military control’, but ‘objective military control’.

For Huntington, the armed forces should not be politicised, as they had been in the French Revolution, but politically neutral. For him a leading characterisation of the professional soldier was that he was apolitical. That also made the armed forces silent in public debate. The authors of the ‘Glorious Revolution’ and of the American Revolution had feared standing armies because they were instruments of monarchy, not because they rejected the need for effective defence or denied the utility of force. Since the Cold War that fear, divorced from its constitutional roots, has deprived much public debate of professionally informed wisdom and so impoverished the public understanding of the utility of force. Huntington’s ‘objective military control’ is now a norm across Europe, thanks in part to the United States-led ‘partnership for peace’, which imposed it as an expectation of civil–military control in the post-Warsaw Pact countries (Betz and Löwenhardt 2001). For most states, ‘subjective military control’ has a much longer pedigree than ‘objective military control’, and for many respect for one has not necessarily removed an openness to the other. This is not a ‘zero-sum’ game (Strachan 2013: 64–97).

4. The place of the people in making national strategy: Four approaches

The precedents discussed in Part 3 found their roots in the 17th and 18th centuries. Since the French Revolution, the peoples of the world have become better educated, better informed and politically more aware. Since the beginning of the 20th century, their attitudes and beliefs have been shaped by nationalism, liberalism and socialism. Huntington's 'objective control' has been undermined by the expanding opportunities which these developments have created for 'subjective control'. If the sailor, soldier or airman is a citizen, he or she is also part of the political community in a much more real sense than could ever have been the case in Clausewitz's Prussia or was imaginable in post-1689 Britain. As a result, the people's opportunities for sharing in the policymaking of defence have expanded and developed new outlets. Part 4 highlights four of these, all of which are in need of attention in today's Britain.

4.1. The nation in arms – historically prevalent in the West

National service through conscription did more for the modern state than just generate mass armies. It also produced a form of social control in how the state employed war as a political instrument. This is perhaps most evident in the French tradition of the nation in arms; as interpreted by Jean Jaurès before the First World War, it made France predisposed to self-defence, not to the attack of its neighbours, but possessed of a robustness which would deter attack (Jaurès 1915). National service touched most developed continental states at some point or another between 1789 and 1990. It created a general commitment to national security while making the armed forces beholden to the people as to the state. The decline of conscription since the end of the Cold War has further weakened the hold of the people in making strategy. France, having rooted the idea of the 'nation in arms' in its definition of the republic, has struggled since its abandonment in 1997 to interpret consequences with which Britain is already familiar: the separation of the armed forces from society and understandings of national defence (Durandin 2013; Planchais 2003). Those states that retain conscription or have recently reintroduced it (see examples in Scandinavia or the Baltic states) have also developed a greater popular commitment to national cohesion and resilience.

Britain has only rarely rested its defence on national service, pre-eminently in 1916–18 and 1939–60. In both world wars, the government recognised the need to use its manpower rationally, to balance the needs of the armed forces and industrial production, and to respond to the moral expectation that the sacrifice in lives be equalised across society. The demand for conscription in the First World War was led from below, with the Asquith government only introducing it when popular demand made its passage through Parliament a foregone conclusion (Gregory 2008: 70–111).

4.2. Taxation for defence and a strong navy – the traditional British approach

From the Napoleonic Wars onwards, Britons paid for their defence through taxation more than they contributed to it through personal service. Income tax was introduced as a war tax in 1799, and was first applied in peacetime by Sir Robert Peel in 1842 (although British forces were fighting in Afghanistan and China that year). The maintenance of the Royal Navy both as the world's principal fleet and as Britain's first line of defence was – in the 20 years before 1914 – a very expensive state exercise enabled by the taxpayer. Prime ministers like Peel and Gladstone (who was Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1842) saw financial control as giving the people's representatives in Parliament the opportunity to curb Britain's use of armed force. In practice, Parliament's view was that the cost of a strong navy was a price worth paying for Britain's capacity to secure its empire, ensure supplies of cheap food, and maintain its global trade. In 1914 Britain spent more on defence per head of the population than any other country in the world (Davis and Huttenback 1986: 161; Hobson 1993; Offer 1989: 218–20; Sumida 1989: 18–21, 24–26, 186–90).

Today the 'global commons' remain as vital for Britain's trade and for its 'just-in-time' logistics. Global communications too depend on underwater cables. However, the security of the seas now rests on *Pax Americana*, not *Pax Britannica*. In 1914 almost half the world's merchant tonnage was British owned; by 2014 it had fallen to below 1 per cent (Dept for Transport 2015). The Royal Navy continues to possess and man the most sophisticated and individually costly platforms of the armed forces, just as it did in the day of the *Dreadnought*, but high unit cost has resulted in lower numbers, and so reduced the navy's visible profile. The Royal Navy is no longer the protector of trade and empire, and is less central to the nation's life and self-image (Pugh 1986).

The fact that modern voters have not had to bear a significant proportion of the direct financial costs may make it easier to go to war. Caverley (2014) makes this argument. Britain did not generate special fiscal measures to pay for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Gordon Brown, did not use war to explain tax increases or fresh borrowing. Nobody blamed the 2008–09 banking crisis on the costs of conflict. Stiglitz and Bilmes (2008) are instructive on how the US has similarly not accounted for the full costs of the Iraq war. However, there is an indirect loss in this approach: by not asking the elected assembly for the 'supply' to fund war, the government distances the electorate from war making and divests it of partial responsibility for strategy.

4.3. Parliament and public accountability

Britain's pattern of government rests on representative, not participative, democracy. Until the referendums on Scottish independence and British membership of the European Union, the principal political function of its citizens was to elect their MPs and require them to hold the government to account. **Between 1688 and 1945, those with experience in the armed forces (predominantly the army) regularly formed the largest single occupational group after lawyers in the House of Commons.** The proportion swelled in time of major war: during the First World War 264 MPs performed military service and 31 officers were returned to Parliament in by-elections, and the numbers were similar in the Second World War (Johnson 2015; and more generally Strachan 1997: 27–35). Those who suggested that members of the armed forces might be

ineligible to serve in Parliament did not do so on the grounds that service personnel should be apolitical, but challenged the propriety of an MP having other employment, asking how he could be in two places at once. **The principle that there should be a clear demarcation between military service and political activity is a convention that has been established since 1945, and has little basis in British constitutional precedent.** Its effect has been to create a distance between the armed forces and Parliament, which has only been partially offset by the presence in the House of Commons of retired service personnel and Reservists, and in the House of Lords of ennobled former chiefs of staff.

Parliament has been increasingly divorced from military life in consequence, and has arguably paid less attention to defence issues than once it did. The pattern of annual defence white papers, sustained for much of the Cold War, lapsed thereafter. Only two appeared, in 1991 and 1998, before 2010, when the Cameron coalition government established a quinquennial cycle of SDSRs, themselves linked to national security strategies. In 2017 the government decided to 'refresh' the SDSR of 2015, producing the National Security Capability Review in 2018. However, the defence element was divorced from the main process, being published as the Modernising Defence Programme at the end of the same year. As a result the pattern of defence reviews is once more in flux. They have generated more debate in their preparation than they have after their publication, and they have too often appeared when the House is in recess and so not been properly debated.

The United Kingdom has one of the least robust systems of parliamentary accountability for the use of military force in Europe, at least in the judgement of some.¹⁰ In August 2013 David Cameron bowed to Parliament's rejection of his proposal to intervene in Syria, a decision which was taken as evidence of his acceptance of the principle of parliamentary approval for the use of military force. However, the Commons debate focused more on strategy itself, on the 'how' more than the 'why'. Since then, the British government has supported the use of force in Syria, for example when backing the action of the United States in April 2018, without a prior parliamentary debate.

Parliamentary oversight of the armed forces and of the use of military force is exercised less on the floor of the House and more through its committees. The House of Commons Defence Committee was formed in 1979, and since then robust and informed discussion has also migrated to other committees, including the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Joint Committee on National Security Strategy. The Public Administration Committee conducted an enquiry on strategy in the 2010–15 Parliament. The challenge is not to reproduce this work but to disseminate its findings more effectively.

4.4. Press, communications and cyber – equalising the roles of people and elites

The fourth way in which the people are implicated in the making of war in a modern democratic state is less direct but of increasing importance. Compulsory primary education and the arrival of near-universal

¹⁰ See the evidence presented to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee for its enquiry, 'The role of Parliament in the UK constitution: authorising the use of military force', HC1891, session 2017-19, 20th report, published 6 August 2019.

literacy made the press the primary agent of political debate by 1914. By 1939 that was supplemented by radio, and by the 1960s television. **Today, public communications have themselves been 'democratised' by new technologies, most immediately mobile phones and the Internet.** The conventional media have spoken to, and represented the views of, older generations. Younger generations access the news directly, rather than through opinion formers, and do so through a variety of platforms. The means exist for private individuals to express their views directly to large audiences. The implicit loss of control on the part of elites leaves them with a sense of confusion. They see the Internet less as an agent for education and democratisation, and more as a threat, home to fake news and trolls. The capacity to use artificial intelligence to capture and analyse 'big data' enables governments to re-enter the media space and compete effectively. But in so doing they have to recognise as equal partners those whom they are trying to influence.¹¹

In sum, two traditional approaches – one continental and one insular – for engaging the public in the use of force have lost their potency, at least for now. During the two world wars conscription, as in Europe, united the armed forces and society, and the latter was inclined to support the former because they were 'their boys'. Outside the two world wars, *Pax Britannica* rested on a strong navy. That has gone. More indirect ways are now required in order to link the people and the armed forces. The country's elected representatives and the government are recognisably one, but while parliamentary oversight remains weak they too do not function as effectively in this regard as they might. The cynicism about Parliament generated by Brexit can only deepen this problem. That leaves the media in its current and evolving forms. An approach which recognises that the structures for social media are flat and entry is open to all – and understands the potential for a more participative form of democracy – may carry risks, but within risk is also opportunity. **Influence through debate, not control through statement, should be the maxim.**

¹¹ Patrikarakos (2017) is heavily anecdotal but makes the main points.

5. The implications for national security

5.1. The mirror image of 'hybrid war'

'Hybrid war' is conceptually important not least because it targets the role of popular opinion in shaping national strategy. In 2014 the phrase 'hybrid war', coined by Frank Hoffman and others in the US Marine Corps for use in a very different context, acquired new force thanks to its association with the Russian attack on eastern Ukraine. In the frenzy that followed, much of it stoked by NATO itself, the press and public were presented with the Russians, not the Americans, as the progenitors of hybrid war. In practice, Russia's use of subversion and its readiness to attack public opinion were not new. They were widely employed by all sides in the two world wars and especially in the Cold War. However, the means for waging such 'wars' are much more sophisticated than they were 25 years ago (Cullen and Reichborn-Kjennerud 2017; Fridman 2018; Lasconjarias and Larsen 2015; Renz 2018: 160–88). 'Hybrid war' as it is now construed is less about 'real war' than about political influence as a substitute for war.

In addition, 'hybrid war' has become a prism through which the west can examine its own vulnerabilities rather than a statement about the character of contemporary war. NATO worries about populism within its own borders and about the influence of hostile online media in shaping opinion and disseminating fake news. For Britain specifically the 'external' threat posed by Russian military action, as seen in Crimea and Ukraine, is remote, not least geographically. **What matters is the use of the Internet and of influence operations as part of hybrid warfare for the promotion of messages which divide British society against itself.** The reason for concern is that these divisions are already present – among them Brexit, Scottish independence, racism, Islamophobia and far right nationalism. **They can therefore be easily exploited by malign and covert actors.** Britain's demonisation of 'hybrid war' rests on an implicit recognition of its own weaknesses, although they are themselves the product of a free society.

5.2. Resilience and civil society

A corollary of the engagement with hybrid war has been increasing attention to social resilience in relation to national security. Many concerns around resilience focus on natural events, such as extreme weather, rather than on deliberately malign actors. Even when hostile intent is involved, the focus leads logically to actions that are not conventionally military, such as organised crime, requiring not the response of the armed forces specifically but of civil society as a whole. Moreover, the level of threat varies by region and generation. Terrorism is a greater concern for urban populations; floods and wind damage may affect rural communities more. Therefore, much of what follows does not directly impinge on the use of armed force. What unites it is an argument that awareness of the need for security creates a more robust society, and that

in itself provides a level of protection as it reduces the returns on attack. Moreover, some developments within warfare, including 'hybrid warfare' and 'grey zone warfare', flourish particularly at the intersection between the civil and the military, and between the effects of natural events and those precipitated by human actions. **Societal ownership itself underpins resilience. It also further shifts the balance (in Huntington's terminology) from 'objective' to 'subjective' military control.**

Public engagement in defence – of the sort evident in Finland or Estonia for example – creates a level of mass participation, which itself leads to resilience. National service is the most obvious tool to achieve this effect, and in Finland almost every member of society has an assigned role in case of hostile attack. There are other methods – of which taxation and its corollary, proper parliamentary accountability, are one. However, the most central method in Britain today is mass communication via the Internet, as discussed in Section 4.4. If the debate about strategy is conducted by elites and in ways which do not trust those charged with defence to address the public openly and sensibly, it will follow that the public will not have a proper understanding of the issues that govern the utility of military force. **The lack of mature public engagement creates a lack of national resilience.**

A promising tool for public engagement ought to be cybersecurity. The United Kingdom has been congratulated for its approach to cybersecurity and particularly for its attention to possible threats to critical national infrastructure. However, cybersecurity cannot just be left to government. The pervasive role of IT means that this form of security is an individual as well as collective responsibility, and the advent of 5G is going to intensify these issues. As Ciaran Martin, the chief executive of the National Centre for Cyber Security, told an audience in Brussels in February 2019: 'We must have higher standards of cyber security across the entire telecommunications sector; the market does not currently incentivise good cyber security' (NCSC 2019). The private sector and the wider public have crucial roles in responding to these calls. The pursuit of profit has to be tempered by the elevation of security, and the realisation that the neglect of the latter could itself erode the former.

Not dissimilar points could be made about the need for public awareness in relation to biological security, an area where the belief that the devastating consequences, in this case of infectious disease rather than of war, belong to the past rather than the future. Dame Sally Davies was not alone, when as Chief Medical Officer between 2011 and 2019, she said that a pandemic is 'a matter of when, not if'. The first National Security Strategy (NSS) in 2010 had acknowledged this point, and in 2015 the second NSS categorised a major human health crisis as a tier 1 risk. Despite these warnings neither the government nor the public was ready for the impact of the Covid-19 virus. The reality of a pandemic has now provided a real illustration of the importance of public engagement in what is a national security issue, as well as a crisis for public health. First, it confirms - given its origins in China and its global transmission - the irrelevance of any distinction between 'home' and 'away'. Second, it creates a 'perfect storm' as its consequences affect food security, the economy, employment, education, transport and social care. Third, it requires a 'trinitarian' response, with government, professional experts and the population at large each having their own contributions to make, and all having to work together as one for policy to be effective.

To natural events are added the possibility for hostile and terrorist uses of chemical or biological weapons, the latter a much less regulated field than the former. The protracted effects on Salisbury of the 'Novichok' attack on the Skripals makes even more powerful the case for creating societal resilience. Better preparation not only means that any event will be well handled (as in many respects the Salisbury attack was), but it

also has a deterrent effect, as it diminishes the effectiveness of an attack and so makes the hostile case for another less attractive.

However, the relationship of cyber, chemical and biological security **to the utility of military force is indirect. More direct resilience rests on the integration of the armed forces within the community, and in particular on direct evidence of their contribution to security.** Yet owing to their reduced numbers and concentration in certain parts of the United Kingdom, for large swathes of Britain they are conspicuous only by their absence. That does not have to be the case. Military deployments under the Civil Contingencies Act both familiarise the public with the armed forces, who can otherwise seem remote, and enhance an awareness of resilience as an aspect of domestic security. In particular the incorporation of Reservists in security support at the local and regional level, as the National Guard in the United States does, deserves more consideration than it customarily receives.

The armed forces themselves are wary of the role, and the police can be reluctant to admit that they need help. Defence chiefs have noted the impact on France of Opération Sentinelle, which has deployed 10,000 soldiers on the streets of Paris and other major cities since 2015. Professional servicemen and women do not join up to serve out their time on suburban street corners; the added burden curtails what the armed forces can do outside France; and prolonged troop deployments create a degree of complacency in the police (Tenenbaum 2016). On the other hand Opération Sentinelle has brought the armed forces closer to the public, and that matters when France is confronting the weakening of such links 20 years after the end of conscription. The fact that since December 2018 the role of the armed forces has extended to address the riots caused by the *gilets jaunes* is of additional relevance to the United Kingdom, given some of the warnings of civil unrest associated with Brexit.

5.3. Deterrence

The effect of ignoring domestic resilience is to undermine deterrence. As with resilience, societal ownership strengthens deterrence. If the public don't understand what they are interested in defending or what they will fight for, then the enemy will assume that the democratic state will pursue every policy option short of war, but not war itself. The Argentinians made that assumption in 1982; Saddam Hussein did so twice over, in 1990 and 2003; and Putin continues to do so in Russia's 'near abroad'. Being forced to go to war because deterrence has failed may reinforce deterrence in the future but at the significant price of deterrence failure in the short term (Ministry of Defence 2019).

The public debate on deterrence has collapsed since the end of the Cold War, and not just in Britain. Academics, who originally drove expert thinking, have moved on to other areas of study, and governments have become wary of encouraging debate on an issue which has a capacity to divide opinion. Although Russia's re-emergence as a threat since 2013–14 has prompted recognition that deterrence has a part to play, the nervousness around its association with nuclear weapons has constrained the ways in which it has been articulated. Conventional deterrence is not a whole answer: it is part of wider deterrence, which includes nuclear weapons. At the moment Britain struggles to produce coherent deterrence because it is reluctant to think through the strategic links between conventional and nuclear capabilities. They support each other in making deterrence credible and in clarifying the steps of escalation within it. The regional pressure for Britain to lead on this has increased with the demise of the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear

Global Strategic Partnership

Forces (INF) agreement. Now that the United States has confirmed its withdrawal from the INF agreement, its European partners will be forced to confront their own conceptions of regional nuclear deterrence, and the place of their conventional forces within it.

6. Conclusions and policy implications

British government is fearful of public opinion, and even public engagement, on matters to do with the defence of the realm. It is not the first democratic government to confront this issue. Indeed, many democracies have been reluctant even to engage with the people's elected representatives, let alone the people themselves. By being too fearful of controversy the government breaks the links between it, the armed forces and the people.

The effective exclusion of the people from the making of national strategy can be addressed narrowly in the context of civil–military relations and their role in shaping policy and its use of force. But it is more than that. Particularly for a democratic state, civil–military relations do not exist in a self-contained compartment. That is partly because our understanding of national security has widened beyond the narrowly military domain, but also because ministers, the electorate and even the armed forces themselves do business in many environments other than that of defence. In the early 19th century Clausewitz was addressing an autocratic Prussian state, which he wished to see become a nation, and he realised that mass popular participation in the army was a means to that end as well as an end in itself. Today Britain's own sense of identity is being challenged by Brexit, nationalist fragmentation and – some might argue – multiculturalism. Its form of democracy – a house of elected representatives – is itself attacked as an elite, removed from the issues that shape thinking outside London or from the needs of 'ordinary people'. The levels of literacy enjoyed by today's citizens are much higher than they were in the 19th century, and they receive news at a speed and in a quantity which dwarf the circumstances in which the model of parliamentary government evolved. Two referendums, on Scottish independence in 2014 and the European Union in 2016, have questioned the principle of parliamentary sovereignty, deferring major decisions to an alternative and more participatory form of government. The government and the opposition have responded to the Brexit referendum by treating a small majority in favour of leaving, a majority of those who voted but a minority of the electorate as a whole, as binding the parliamentary behaviour of many MPs, despite their own opinions. In other words the referendum result has been seen as sovereign, not advisory. The constitutional ramifications are potentially major. Is the EU referendum a precedent? How, for example, would the government respond if confronted with a demand to leave NATO?

These are not silly questions. Until shortly before the 2014 Scottish referendum, leaving NATO because it was a nuclear alliance was the policy of the Scottish National Party. Although it revised its position, it remains opposed to nuclear weapons. If Scotland had voted for independence, Britain's structure for home defence would have been shattered and its nuclear deterrent called into question, quite apart from the effects for Britain's global reputation. The EU referendum too has profound implications for national security. The European Union is a direct product of two world wars and their awful legacy for the continent, and

yet when David Cameron played on this theme in support of the Remain campaign he was accused of scare-mongering. Thucydides and Athens as a whole might have recognised some of our dilemmas. The crisis of democratic government, and how far it should move in a more participative direction (as in classical Athens), not least if it is to respond more effectively to populism, has direct implications for how we address decisions about the utility of force and how highly we rate its contribution to our national security.

6.1. Possible policy considerations

What this paper addresses is a range of trends which go far beyond a series of quick solutions. The following recommendations are designed to begin the process of reversing the terms of a debate which assumes that the public is reluctant to condone, and finds it hard to understand, the utility of force.

- **Emphasising the shared responsibility of resilience:**
 - The 2015 SDSR took the defence of the UK as its central and unifying principle, and reflected the theme of resilience. That was in part a response to the armed forces' role in the 2012 Olympics, in counter-terrorism and in flood relief. It was specifically designed to reconnect the armed forces and the people, and yet it was not a theme picked up by the press at the time. It has now been lost sight of in the talk of 'global Britain', which has created a counter-narrative. Given the personnel strains which any sustained deployment within the UK would generate (and the example of France is a warning), the Ministry of Defence is understandably wary of the resilience theme. But domestic security is everybody's business, partly because of terrorism but principally because of cyber, and so the responsibility for resilience is a shared one. Future strategic reviews need to make this point explicit.
 - War gaming and table-top exercises are ways of establishing trust, creating mutual familiarity and building resilience. Using such means could familiarise communities with the agencies responsible for their security, and accustom the wider community to methods of enhancing their own protection. They should be mandatory for incoming governments, open to MPs and others engaged in public debate, and regularly conducted at local level. There is a case for a model National Security Council, on the lines of a model UN Security Council, for educational purposes.
- **Developing a UK concept of deterrence:** The 2015 SDSR put deterrence more firmly in the frame, but again it was neglected by the press. The public is almost evenly divided on the value of the nuclear deterrent (and the polling shows only a small difference between Scotland and the rest of the UK), but the cases for and against the possession of nuclear weapons are both at a rudimentary stage in their development. Statements in favour generalise about unknown future threats, and statements against tend only to address the danger of terrorism, regarding inter-state war as an anachronism. If we are to possess nuclear weapons, we need a more sophisticated understanding of their strategic utility, and they need to be integrated in national strategy more broadly. The decision by the United States to withdraw from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces agreement will put added weight on its European partners to think through for themselves how they see nuclear

deterrence operating. That includes the relationship between nuclear deterrence and conventional deterrence. The United Kingdom needs a concept of deterrence which is nested in its national strategy and communicable to its own people, as well as internationally.

- **Creating coherence in communications:** The immediate challenges facing public understanding of the utility of force relate to perceptions generated by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, reporting in relation to current British involvement in either country is minimal. More importantly, the public has lost all awareness of those 'wars of intervention' which have worked – at least so far: Sierra Leone and Kosovo are cases in point. Not intervening can have bad consequences too, as Syria makes clear. To decide to use military force is inherently risky and morally fraught but it can be the right decision: the public needs to understand the issues. Below are some proposals for achieving this:
 - **Tackle disinformation effectively:** On 23 January 2018 the government announced the creation of the National Security Communications Unit for tackling disinformation produced by external state actors and others. The National Security Capability Review reinforced this commitment but described it as 'an enhanced capability' to give senior officials 'access to a broad cross-government group of communications professionals who can work centrally or alongside them to achieve communications objectives as an integrated part of the government's approach to national security' (HM Government 2018: 4). This approach accords with the Fusion Doctrine developed by Sir Mark Sedwill, in his capacity as the National Security Advisor. In evidence to the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy on 28 January 2019 he said the Communications Unit was now up and running, but also that it would focus its efforts on people outside, not within, the UK. It should do both, a point which the government is increasingly recognising.
 - **The Fusion Doctrine**, which was set out in the National Security Capability Review in March 2018, seeks to develop cross-governmental working by creating 'a more accountable system to support collective Cabinet decision-making' (HM Government, 2018, 10). It is – as the previous paragraph suggests – focused on integrating the activities of different government departments. To that end, it uses senior responsible officers (SROs) to deliver particular parts of the government's package for national security. **The public too has a place in the commitment to deliver national security objectives, and the National Security Council should nominate an SRO to deliver on that aim.**
 - **Decentralise and democratise defence communications:** The Ministry of Defence's communications need to be opened up and decentralised. Members of the armed forces should be as free to use social media and similar platforms as other citizens. Those in uniform should be able to speak directly to the press, and should receive training to do so. If they are trusted to use lethal force, they should be regarded as responsible enough to explain why they have done so. The public puts more faith in professional experts than in politicians. If the government is ready to allow the Chief Medical Officer to speak to the BBC about epidemiology, or senior police officers about knife crime, why is it reluctant to allow the Chief of the Defence Staff to speak about strategy, or a commanding officer to explain why somebody in his or her unit was killed?

- **Track changes in data:** YouGov collects polling data for the Ministry of Defence, and it differentiates the evidence it provides by age, gender, region, class and ethnicity. It would be sensible also to track changes over time, and to make this data available to others concerned with national security.
- **Connecting the armed forces and the public:** The Armed Forces Covenant has failed to deliver on empathy as opposed to sympathy and of late has become disproportionately concerned with the past (the First World War especially), rather than with the present and future. According to opinion polls, 65 per cent of the British public know little or nothing of the armed forces, and 68 per cent say that of the Ministry of Defence specifically.¹² The emphasis has been on getting the armed forces to the public, but current serving personnel are too few in number and too concentrated geographically for this to work across the UK, a point reflected in the regional differences in the awareness of and knowledge concerning the armed forces. Events like Armed Forces Day add to their workload. There are pockets of success and large blank areas. Perhaps the emphasis should be on getting the public to the armed forces – and especially in opening up bases to enable greater understanding. Employers (especially those who have signed the Covenant) of ex-service personnel or of Reservists might ask them to speak to their colleagues about their experiences. Almost none of the £10 million available per annum under the Armed Forces Covenant Fund has been used to promote understanding of today's armed forces through forms of direct public engagement.
- **Engendering clarity and transparency regarding the wars Britain can fight:**
 - British strategy needs to be explicit about the capabilities for which its armed forces are configured. The decision for war is rarely a binary choice between war and peace, as current British practice makes clear. CDS talks about an era of 'constant competition', and current military doctrine is reluctant to use the word 'victory', with its battlefield connotations and expectation of a clear-cut result. Diplomacy may offer the better route forward, especially given a hope to avoid armed conflict entirely or to contain it if it is employed. Britain cannot fight a major war on its own, and there is little point in politicians using the vocabulary of such conflicts to explain the very different sorts of war which Britain is equipped to undertake today. The public needs to understand that.
 - The 2010 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) (HM Government, 2010a and 2010b) suggested that Britain has a narrative about itself, which embraces the sorts of situations in which it is more likely to act and in which its sense of its own identity is bound up. Narratives which explain how, why and where Britain might use armed force, and which capabilities it might use, are therefore possible. Although necessarily constructed around hypothetical situations, they can make concrete what might otherwise seem abstract or aspirational, and so deepen public understanding.
- **Being open to a debate on national service:** Britain has established a near-universal and almost impermeable consensus against even discussing national service. Those countries with longer

¹² YouGov polling for the Ministry of Defence, February 2019: fieldwork dates 31 May 2018 to 27 February 2019.

traditions of conscription but which no longer apply it are having conversations to which Britain might want to pay attention. Denmark has a compulsory Defence Day (compulsory for males; voluntary for females) when young people are variously enticed to sign up for service or compelled into it (there's a lottery involved). Basic conscription is then four months and mostly focused on broad national service, with this service serving as a recruitment pool for military service. Germany has launched a debate about opening recruitment to the Bundeswehr to citizens from across the EU: that betokens either a rejection of the Clausewitzian trinity or an acceptance of a supra-national EU. In France, President Macron, reflecting a growing French concern about some of the same issues which face Britain, has opened a debate about national service broadly defined (not just to the armed forces) and with a limited commitment. Smaller states have been readier to return directly to conscription, and its existence – for example in Norway and Estonia – has made the debate on defence much more fully 'trinitarian'. Since 2014 Sweden has developed a programme of 'psychological defence', designed to conduct counter-influence operations. Politicians, armed forces, civil servants and journalists have all received training, been involved in exercises and received a draft handbook (Sverige Radio 2016). Not to discuss national service is to limit the debate artificially.

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