'LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR?' – THE PURPOSE OF MODERN ARMED FORCES RECONSIDERED

The conventional definition of 'Home Defence' is "[the] defence of a state's own territory in the event of war".[1] According to this explanation, therefore, the main purpose of armed forces is the protection of state boundaries against the hypothetical armed forces of a foreign aggressor state. This reasoning is valid when contemplating a clear example of one state attacking another state's politically defined territories. However, it excludes a whole range of situations, such as those provoked by actors who do not belong to any state, but rather represent borderless ideologies, or claim the right to self-determination as they do not identify themselves with the state they live in. Ethno-Nationalism, Anarchism, Socialism, Communism, and Fascism, before being embodied by states during the 20th Century, were widely espoused by organised groups using, for example, terrorist warfare as a political tool to challenge state boundaries. Many states used their armed forces against these international ideologies to protect the state and to preserve the status quo. Nowadays, the threats affecting modern states seem to be characterised by the same transnational essence. As the 1998 UK Strategic Defence Review (SDR) predicts:

> "Most wars have been caused by attempts to create or expand
> [nation-states]. In contrast, over the next twenty years, the risks
> to international stability seem as likely to come from other
> factors, ethnic and religious conflict; population and
> environmental pressures; competition for scarce resources; drugs,
> terrorism and crime." [2]

This account of future threats to the UK identifies the truly international nature of these dangers. Xenophobia and religious fundamentalism are and will probably be the main factors causing destruction, disruption, and human casualties. The fact that these threats know no boundaries make it very difficult for modern democratic states to create a defence policy that clearly differentiates between national and international defence strategies. Most western countries have seen the disappearance of national terrorism, with the important exceptions of Spain and the UK. The main threat now seems to come from international terrorist groups who aim to attack western democracies, as the events of 11th September 2001 demonstrated.

THE RESILIENT 1989 FOG

The difficulty of changing the focus of modern armed forces faced with such asymmetrical threats is exacerbated by friction within the Army, Navy and Air Force. While some try to adapt to modern warfare trends, others do not. The disappearance of the Warsaw Pact left Western Armed Forces without their main conventional enemy, and therefore forced NATO members to reconsider the future role of its armies. "The colossal maneuvers of the coalition armies in the [1991 Gulf War, which] may in retrospect appear, like the final charges of cavalry in the nineteenth century,"[3] came as a great relief to those who feared that heavy armoured divisions and combat aircraft would be reduced in number or even made redundant. In addition to this, Operations 'Deliberate Force' in Bosnia and 'Allied Force' in Kosovo, seemed to reaffirm the necessity of maintaining large numbers of fighter planes, justifying the construction of the more advanced and expensive Eurofighters, Lockheed Martin F-22s and Boeing X-32s (Joint Strike Fighter).[4] Regardless of the fact that, "a modernized 30-year-old aircraft armed with the latest long-range air-to-air missile, cued by an airborne warning

plane, can defeat a craft a third its age but not so equipped or guided."[5] However, the most common type of conflict seen during the last ten years is diametrically opposed to the type of fighting Western armies and equipment is best able to deal with. Low-tech warfare using light machine-guns, RPGs and artillery, usually complemented with cigarette lighters and machetes, is what the majority of peacekeeping and humanitarian missions have had to confront in places such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Cambodia, East Timor, Kosovo, Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia, Sierra Leone, the former Zaire and so on. This trend in warfare was tragically highlighted by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. As Michael Howard perceived at the time, it finally gave modern armed forces a new enemy to fight: "the 'w' word has been used, and now cannot be withdrawn; and its use has brought inevitable and irresistible pressure to use military force as soon, and as decisively as possible".[6] Nevertheless, terrorism cannot be fought with conventional military force or thought, but with "[…] secrecy, intelligence, political sagacity, quiet ruthlessness, covert actions that remain covert, [and] above all infinite patience." [7]

MISSED LESSONS? –

SOMALIA, BOSNIA, RWANDA… AND NEW YORK

These new asymmetric threats and the need for humanitarian intervention, together with the fact that nowadays most advanced countries do not believe that the survival of their state will be jeopardised by invasions or situations of total war, explain why modern armed forces are so focused on preparing for intervention outside the homeland. The above factors have meant that western armies have been reduced in size; there has been a shift from away from conscription, a decrease in the number of armoured divisions, and a reduction and stabilisation of defence expenditure. International military-humanitarian intervention during the 1990s has further strengthened this decision to remodel the armed forces, in order to create highly mobile

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rapid reaction forces that can be easily deployed to almost any part of the world. Almost all modern armed forces are developing 'High Readiness Forces' (HRF).[8]

The real dilemma presented by these HRF forces lies in the fact that they are still not guided by a clear and concise political strategy. As Cohen argued in 1996, "the United States may drive the revolution in military affairs, but only if it has a clear conception of what it wants military power for".[9] This issue will also have to be taken into account by the EU, if in the future they wish to develop a common strategic doctrine. Western democracies still work within the international system essentially formed by the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, when the concept of sovereignty was transferred "from a divine to a national basis"[10], and by the French Revolution, when the concepts of state and nation became one. The notion of sovereignty was revisited following the 1999 NATO bombing campaign in Kosovo, which implied that "the condition for recognition of supreme authority over a polity was no longer based in the people, but in the state's not being disruptive to international order".[11] International order and preservation of the status quo seem to constrain the perceptions of the most advanced countries, and "instead of asking what is likely to result from China's regional policies or discontent in Islamic countries there is a tendency to ask whether there can be seen here evidence of a fundamental challenge to international order".[12] The resultant paradox of this dilemma is that with each multinational humanitarian intervention the essence of the international system – territorial integrity, political independence, and nation-state – becomes further out of touch with reality. Until recently, this delicate balance appears to have been kept stable by the use of small peace-keeping-enforcement contingents used for limited objectives; a trend that has been challenged by the use of overwhelming force in the Second Gulf War.

WHO AM I? –

NATIONALISM VS. HUMANISM

What truly constrains the effectiveness of today's armed forces, however, is the fact that 'nation' continues to equal 'state'. The EU is a perfect example; EU citizens are prohibited from joining an armed force outside of their own country, reaffirming Europe's incapacity to create truly integrated forces. This seems especially paradoxical when we consider that 3,500 Nepalese soldiers are full members of the UK armed forces. Currently, defence expenditure in almost all EU countries is being kept at a minimum operational level, causing clear deficiencies in air and sealift, air refuelling, precision-guided munitions, command and control, interoperable secure communications, and intelligence.[13] The only way the EU will be able to successfully challenge these new asymmetrical threats will be by ceasing to put so-called national interests first. If, as Gow believes, "armed conflict and competition between states […] has been almost eradicated"[14], then defence of the homeland in the conventional sense is certainly no longer the chief purpose of modern armed forces.

In addition to this, it is important to differentiate between modern armed forces that belong to developed countries and those that serve developing states. Using the adjective 'modern' to characterise these armed forces can lead to confusion as their acquisition of expensive high-tech weaponry follows the same patterns as in the EU and the USA. The main difference between the armed forces of these two types of state is not based on their procurement, but rather on the fact that for developing countries "[…] the internal threat is such that their armed forces have never been able to turn their attention exclusively outward in the first place".[15] This distinction provides a clearer view of the changing purpose of Western modern armed forces, whose perception of their future roles evolves from a situation of peace at home and instability abroad,

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meaning that national defence merges with international strategy. As Nye argues, "[in a Western] democracy, the national interest is simply the set of shared priorities regarding relations with the rest of the world".[16]

However, the relationship between national defence and international strategy is greatly complicated by the movement of people. For example, the collapse of the USSR left an estimated 25-35 million ethnic Russians living outside Russia's political boundaries. Subsequent armed conflict in Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova provoked the mid-1992 reform of Russian military doctrine, which promoted military intervention where necessary in former Soviet republics in order to protect the 'Russian diaspora'. Terrorist attacks against western citizens, like that in Bali against Australian tourists, have only exacerbated the problems of coherently framing national defence policies. With "over 10 million British citizens living and working abroad"[17], it may be that anti-western terrorist organisations will find it tempting to target British people in, for example, Alicante, seeing it as an easier way to attack the UK. This is why the UK's SDR, and those of most Western countries, now acknowledge the fact that "[…] national security and prosperity thus depend on promoting international stability, freedom and economic development".[18] Migration tendencies will only intensify the feeling of living in an increasingly globalised world, a factor that the modern armed forces cannot ignore. There are approximately one million people entering the US legally every year, plus another half a million illegally; 1.2 million legal immigrants enter the EU every year, also followed by 500,000 illegal arrivals.[19] While the US Armed Forces have a long record of integrating different ethnicities, European armed forces seem to find it very difficult come to terms with social realities as opposed to traditional national identities. While most European armies stress the need for translators and interpreters, they do not seem to be sufficiently open-minded to recruit

foreign speaking immigrants. They are thus refusing to acknowledge the potential of the armed forces as an effective tool for integration within Europe, and intervention outside Europe.

"THAT THE BRITISH ISLES COULD ONLY BE DEFENDED ON THE CONTINENT OF EUROPE"[20]…AND BEYOND?

As the mission of the modern military moves from defence of the homeland towards fighting instability both at home and abroad, it is essential that the armed forces become a model of this new social reality. Xenophobic tendencies throughout Europe are likely to increase, as the political successes of Le Pen in France, Haider in Austria and the racially motivated riots in Southern Spain and Bradford seem to suggest. The armed forces are more likely to contribute to greater stability through social programmes rather than by direct intervention. It should be stressed that the security of the state is primarily the responsibility of the Home Office. Forces such as the police and paramilitary organisations such as the Italian Carabinieri, France's Gendarmerie and the Spanish Guardia Civil, should spearhead attempts to 'fight' the effects of international instability at home by recruiting on a wider social and ethnic basis.

Outside the territory of their respective states, modern armed forces will continue to focus on a range of humanitarian intervention such as relief aid following natural catastrophes, UN peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations, unilateral support for friendly governments in the shape of military advisors and equipment, safeguarding transitional political regimes and armed intervention to stop large-scale human rights abuses, and so forth. These types of intervention will deeply influence the military ethos, which was formerly focused on preparing and training to face full-scale wars, and will prove particularly "[…] difficult for combat soldiers trained to seek victory in high intensity warfare".[21] Involvement in highly sensitive conflicts, such as

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civil wars, ethnic clashes and political struggles, primarily in underdeveloped countries suffering from continuous economic crises, will necessitate a reallocation of resources. Specialist training in dealing with low-intensity warfare and humanitarian operations will become a high priority. In addition languages, philosophy, politics, and history will need to become an integral part of military education if such interventions are to succeed. The need for highly educated soldiers will means that the armed forces will consistently have to attract and recruit people with university degrees and higher diplomas, people who speak languages and have a good knowledge of other cultures. These requirements will cause problems with the NCOs and lower ranks as academic qualifications for entry into the army have generally been overlooked due to shortages of volunteers, an especially acute problem in countries with recent experience of military dictatorships or misuse of the armed forces. This issue may be aggravated if the military education system is based on "an over-emphasis on technical issues"[22], rather than pursuing " the need for breadth of understanding based on analytical methods, not mere accumulation of knowledge."[23] Armies primarily formed by conscripts will, in the future, have to abstain from participating in the aforementioned types of intervention, especially if combat is involved. The dangers of using conscripts in combat situations, as the Falklands War demonstrated, are the high numbers of casualties combined with poor morale and low performance. Professional armies are better prepared to deal with difficult armed conflicts, however studies to gauge the impact of 'Operations Other Than War' (OOTW) on soldier's morale and performance have frequently given cause for concern. For example, using armed forces to police countries or areas has often led to boredom and dissatisfaction. At the same time, the deployment of weaker formations when faced with heavily armed warring factions has resulted in catastrophes such as the

Srebrenica massacre, where the decision not to use force to protect the civilian population increased friction among the chain of command.

From a strategic and political standpoint, these contributions to international peace and security will prove particularly complicated and controversial, as "it is always difficult for political elites of advanced industrial societies to argue that national security interests are at stake in strategic peacekeeping initiatives".[24] Moreover, some countries will also argue that furthering their participation in international intervention coalitions will increase their chances of being targeted by terrorist groups, and as a result will try to avoid getting involved in controversial areas such as the Near and Middle East. 'Public opinion' has also expressed concern over rises in defence expenditure, even though defence budgets need to be increased if humanitarian intervention is to have some chance of succeeding. This is particularly significant in the EU countries where "ageing voters […] are worried primarily about pensions, healthcare, jobs and internal security".[25] If and when intervention does occur, the forces deployed will be closely scrutinised by real-time media coverage, which often works on the premise that bad news is news, and good news is not. If there are casualties but no immediately positive results, a sensationalist media eager to criticise will stir up fear and mistrust of the leadership. Furthermore, the increase in multi-state operations, in which one state's soldiers will be under the command of another, may be exploited by the media of the less powerful country if the troops seem to have been badly treated.

CONCLUSIONS

Since the end of WWII the world has witnessed a progressive decline in inter-state conflicts; in contrast, the number of intrastate conflicts seems to have increased exponentially. However, this perception of an increasingly complicated world may be explained by the evolution of media technology and its capacity to bring television

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coverage of any war during the last 35 years to every living room. With the formation of

the EU, Western and Central Europe have experienced decades of peaceful stability,

forcing the armed forces to rethink their role within modern states. The fact that "[…]

several developed countries already now have more people employed by the security

industry than there are soldiers in the uniformed armed forces"[26], only leaves the latter

with the task of intervening abroad to defend human rights and above all, maintain

international stability. As George Robertson put it, "in the post-Cold War world, we

must be prepared to go to the crisis, rather than have the crisis come to us".[27] This new

role will demand a quick and sometimes controversial transformation of the modern

armed forces. This new model will be characterised by the full decentralisation of

decision-making, quick deployment of troops, ability to combat asymmetrical warfare,

knowledge of languages, social habits and cultures, and adaptability to 'wars-without-

fronts' due to a low dependence on communication lines, logistics, and technology. This

is most likely to occur first in the EU, USA, and Japan, followed by future advanced

democracies such as perhaps Brazil, South Africa, and the Russian Federation.

Successful contributions to international stability will depend on the capacity of the

modern armed forces to adapt to third world scenarios, and above all, on the willingness

of the general public to pay for the economic and human cost.

NOTES:

1. Bowyer, Richard (1999), *Dictionary of Military Terms* (Teddington, Middlesex: Peter Collin Publishing), p. 56
2. Secretary of State for Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review*, Cm 3999 (London: Stationary Office, July 1998), http://www.mod.uk/issues/sdr/wp_contents.htm/ accessed 26th December 2002, paragraph 29
3. Cohen, Eliot A. (1996), 'A Revolution in Warfare', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 2, pp. 44-45
4. The absence of any comments regarding Naval forces is not a mere coincidence. It is the belief of the author that with the decision of the British government to commission two £2.7 billion Aircraft Carriers (CVS), a clear signal has been sent to the rest of the EU Navies of the need to create navies capable of delivering, sustaining, and protecting military operations anywhere in the world. The use of 'mini' CVS (± 20,000 tons) during the Falklands War showed the dangers of using aircraft with limited air cover. As

Freedman argued in 1983: "It is probably the case that with more aircraft of longer range than the Sea Harriers with the Task Force, casualties could have been severely reduced." Freedman, Lawrence (1999), *The Politics of British Defence, 1979-98* (London: Macmillan Press), p. 92

5. Cohen, Eliot A. (1996), 'A Revolution in Warfare', p. 45

6. Howard, Michael, 'Mistake to Declare This A 'War'', *RUSI Journal*, December 2001, p. 2

7. Ibid., p. 1

5. For a list of the countries and international entities developing '60 days or less' deployment of combat forces outside their home territory see, 'Table 2: Selected Military High Readiness Forces', *IISS Military Balance 2002/03* (Oxford: OUP), pp. 218-220

9. Cohen, Eliot A. (1996), 'A Revolution in Warfare', p. 52

10. Gow, James (2000), 'A Revolution in International Affairs?', *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 31, No. 3, p. 295

11. Ibid., p. 296

12. Freedman, Lawrence (2001), 'Grand Strategy in the Twenty-First Century', *Defence Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 11

13. *IISS Strategic Survey 2001/2002*, p. 135

14. Gow, James (2000), 'A Revolution in International Affairs?', p. 299

15. Van Creveld, Martin, in Patman, Robert G. (2000), ed., *Security in a Post-Cold War World* (London and New York: MacMillan Press and St. Martin's Press), p. 36

16. Nye, Joseph S. (1999), 'Redefining the National Interest', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 4, p. 23

17. UK 1998 *Strategic Defence Review,* para. 20

18. Ibid.*,* para. 21

19. 'The Longest Journey: A Survey of Migration', *The Economist*, 2-8 November 2002, p. 5

20. Howard, Michael (1972), *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of Two World Wars* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Pelican Books, 1974), p. 130

21. Reed, Brian J., and Segal, David R. (2000), 'The Impact of Multiple Deployments on Soldiers' Peacekeeping Attitudes, Morale, and Retention', *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 27, No. 1, p. 59

22. Lambert, Andrew (2001), 'The Principal Source of Understanding: Navies and the Educational Role of the Past', *Hudson Papers*, Vol. 1 (London: MoD), p. 53

23. Ibid., p. 63

24. Dandeker, Christopher, and Gow, James (1997), 'The Future of Peace Support Operations: Strategic Peacekeeping and Success', *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 23, No. 3, p. 330

25. *IISS Strategic Survey 2001/2002*, p. 127

26. Van Creveld, Martin, in Patman, Robert G. (2000), ed., p. 36

27. 'The Strategic Defence Review: How Strategic? How Much of a Review?', *London Defence Studies* Vol. 46 (London: Brassey's for the Centre for Defence Studies, 1998), p. 34