The British Army - a professional force, resolving crises abroad, serving the nation at home, securing Britain in an uncertain world.
Introduction

Today, the Army stands at a critical juncture. The approaching conclusion of combat operations in Afghanistan, implementing the Army 2020 concept, the return of forces from Germany, and the expansion of its core roles are significant events individually.

Together, they present a dramatic confluence of change and it is therefore wise to take a moment to consider the British Army’s unique place within the national fabric. This reflection will briefly discuss the current security environment before examining who we are, what we do, the decisive advantage we provide the nation, and what our critical path for the future will be.
The World We Live In

In the short time since the 2010 National Security Strategy was written, the Arab Spring, Mali, North Korea, and Syria remind us that potential threats to our national interests are diffuse and ever-present. In addition, climate change, resource competition, population growth and violent ideologies will manifest themselves in a variety of ways, encompassing natural disasters, terrorist and cyber attacks, and threats to vulnerable populations and international trade. Resolving insecurity may require operations at a distance, yet recent events, particularly in North Africa and the Levant, highlight that some ‘zones of instability’ have appeared closer to home.

First, some crises will leave us few options. Simply put, some wars choose us, we don’t pick them. This is firstly because of the distinctive position Britain occupies as a member of the G8, dependant upon a functioning inter-connected global economy, but also as an advocate of numerous collective defence arrangements, including permanent representation on the UN Security Council.

Our demonstrated willingness, when necessary, to participate in land conflicts can deter aggressors and reassure our friends. It also acts as an example to allies and friends, encouraging them to share the burden in difficult land operations while underpinning our own security.

Second, we depend upon a functioning, inter-connected global economy in which peace and stability are the cornerstones of prosperity. Our strength lies in our continued ambition to be ‘a prosperous, secure, modern and outward-looking nation, confident in its values and ideas’¹. This can be weakened by crises overseas having a direct impact on the economy, security and welfare of our people at home. Britain has always taken its responsibilities seriously and will continue to use all its influence to play an ‘active and engaged role in shaping global change.’² Though this ‘soft power’ is a crucial first line of our defence, we must be realistic that sometimes such influence will only be effective when it is underpinned by ‘hard power’, i.e. the military.

We can safely assume that Britain will continue to face strategic surprises and that managing and resolving inevitable conflicts will be as much a part of our future as it has been of our past.

¹ National Security Strategy p. 10
² National Security Strategy p. 21
Therefore the Army must remain prepared to engage in all types of conflict, alongside the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force in an integrated force, providing the government with credible strategic options in resolving or preventing instability. Our future operating environments will be characterized by ambiguity, uncertainty, and confusion and numerous attempts will be made to describe the future setting in which the Army must be prepared to operate. However, no matter how carefully one analyses the world, it is impossible to anticipate the precise character of future conflict, therefore the Army must ensure it is able to adapt quickly once that character is revealed.

Despite the uncertainties of the strategic environment and the changing character of conflicts, the nature of war will mean that it remains centred on land – where people and politics combine and where vital resources are controlled. The Army will, therefore, continue to play a central role, with the other Services, in projecting security abroad, where achieving control on land is likely to be the decisive act. Future conflicts are likely to be complex, the areas and populations to be secured will often be large and the effects we wish to achieve lasting. These factors demand that the Army must retain sufficient mass to achieve dominance and to endure.

There are no easy solutions to the pernicious and complex security problems often encountered on land. Technology can give us a critical advantage, but it cannot fully replace the effect our soldiers have on the ground, amongst the people. Attempts to compensate for a lack of mass through technology can lead to dangerous and uncertain outcomes. It may sometimes be advantageous to expose the nation to less risk and expense by using the Army to support either regular or irregular indigenous forces with a variety of capabilities. However, proxy forces may not conform to our values and their objectives can sometimes significantly differ from ours, leading to tactical success but problematic political outcomes.

The recent past has been dominated by the economic downturn and its effects will still last for years to come. This has led to reduced public expenditure, decreased investment in Defence, and, as a consequence, a smaller Army. We owe it to the nation to offer the greatest utility for every pound of taxpayer’s investment. Fleet management has driven reductions in equipment numbers; the planned increase in the use of the Reserve will generate capability at reduced long term cost; and the return from Germany will, over time, save money.

Moreover, the Army’s recent acceptance of greater financial responsibility provides further impetus to generate efficiencies in order to free up resources for vital future investment.
Who We Are, Where We Are Going

By now, the terms ‘battle-hardened’, ‘agile’ and ‘competent’ are well-worn epithets, but it is important that we remember the price paid to earn these accolades. Twelve years of combat operations against highly adaptive enemies have tempered our people, our equipment, conceptual thinking, tactics, and the way we integrate with sister Services and other partners. The competence with which we have conducted our military operations in Helmand, where our troops have suppressed insurgents, mentored reformed Afghan security forces and protected governance and development efforts, underlines this point.

The Army Reserve (formerly the Territorial Army) has been a key element in this success, demonstrating commitment and skill in the most demanding circumstances. Our intent is therefore to invest further in our reserves, closely pairing them with their regular counterparts to increase our overall effectiveness and generate a potent integrated Army. Whether regular or reserve, there have been few moments in our history when the nation has possessed such an effective and capable cohort of experienced, committed and highly skilled soldiers.

Although the British Army has many uses, it is primarily a war-fighting institution and our ability to fight and compel the enemy to our will remains the foundation from which all else flows. Many factors contribute to our strength and professional reputation: people, readiness, size, equipment, interoperability and willingness to lead, all of which require appropriate investment. However, it is the rigorous training of individual soldiers and formed units that ensures the Army is sufficiently adaptable and sophisticated to conduct operations of every nature. Sustaining this comprehensive system requires resources, but it is vital to maintaining the Army’s operational success. The Army’s capability, paired with Britain’s solemn acceptance that its national responsibilities will frequently require its Army to be placed in harm’s way, result in an exceptional combination of political will and military capability. The Army’s quality and broad utility is illustrated with the frequency in which it has been employed at the centre of the nation’s campaigns.

In addition to our quality we must also ensure that our Army is correctly sized to sustain our policy ambition
– specifically the capacity to endure when a crisis is not quickly resolvable, or intervene at a sufficiently large scale when the size and complexity of a security threat warrants it. Mass – the effects of overwhelming combat power at the decisive place and time – means numbers. A critical lesson of both Iraq and Afghanistan is that either initially neglecting the requirement for a ground force or under-resourcing it risks strategic failure - ‘recent British operations struggled with brigade sized deployments: there were simply too few troops for the tasks they were confronted with’ 3. The ancient adage remains as true today as when it was written more than 400 years ago: ‘Small armies feed wars, rather than end them, and anger an enemy instead of hurting him’ 3.

But what size is right? In practical terms the requirement for mass in support of our foreign security objectives means that Britain must retain its ability to generate a war-fighting division in an expeditionary context. Though not all operations will require the 25,000 strong, fully enabled division with its three subordinate brigades, the absence of this capability is a weakness we cannot afford. A division is far more than ‘a brigade writ large’. The breadth and depth of its capability represents a critical nexus that links tactical engagements to strategic effects and underpins a hierarchy of knowledge so necessary on operations. The divisional headquarters provides agility by virtue of its capacity to manage future planning and current operations simultaneously. In addition it is able to expand and deal with the complexity of multinational, inter-agency and integrated operations. A British division provides a ready framework under which partners and allies are able to send their contributions.

Alongside our continued leadership of the Allied Command Europe Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC), the willingness and ability to deploy a war-fighting division is a major element of our partnership with the US and a foundation of our credibility and moral weight as a leading nation within NATO, the EU and the UN. They are both part of the strategically significant elements of the UK’s military capability alongside the Royal Navy’s nuclear deterrent, carrier enabled power projection and expeditionary air forces, all of which are able to project power and deter threats. Whilst the Army has an equal part to play in deterrence and power projection too, its unique strength and strategic significance lies in its ability to project security over a wide area and a significant population. No other element of Defence can project security and control territory abroad.

3 Dr Rob Johnson, Changing Character of Warfare, Oxford University, Dec 2012.
4 Matthew Sutcliffe, the first author of an English comprehensive strategic concept, ‘The Practice, Proceedings and Lawes of Armes’ (London: C. Barker, 1593)
When used alongside our sister Services, as part of the Joint Expeditionary Force, the Army is a key strategic tool that allows Britain to remain an essential pillar of a progressive global order.
Although its primary purpose is to fight, the Army also has broader utility. In 2012 the Foreign Secretary indicated that as a nation we must remain internationally active: ‘the country that is purely reactive in foreign affairs is in decline.’ Through its international defence engagement the Army makes a significant contribution to averting crises or conflicts and positively influencing global dynamics. Persistent and planned defence engagement influences and reassures our allies while also containing and preventing conflict through upstream capacity building.

As security is the precursor to prosperity, the British Army provides the foundation for combating poverty and protecting vulnerable populations. This reinforces the importance Britain attaches to the Millennium Development Goals and lends further moral weight to our significant financial contributions to the UN.

With the approval of the Army 2020 concept, we began an evolution which redefined the structure and utility of our Army. In the coming years we will significantly expand our activity in the realm of conflict prevention and international engagement, but the effectiveness of these activities will stem directly from our strength as a combat-ready Army. Our Adaptable Force will be the main vehicle for delivering the Army’s engagement overseas providing a greater degree of continuity and understanding within Defence.

The Army will also continue to support other government departments in safeguarding security at home. Civil emergencies, including natural disasters, pandemics, major accidents and terrorism, have the potential to threaten the welfare of British citizens and the environment. The Army’s utility as the UK’s domestic ‘safety net’ is based on its adaptability, size and geographical footprint. It is this, together with specialised skills such as Special Forces and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), that allows the Army to make a sizable, rapid, and well-executed response to any civil emergency.

This was ably demonstrated during the 2012 London Olympics when the Army provided 13,500 ready trained security personnel at short notice. Few organizations can offer such flexibility and leadership so quickly. As an employer, our contribution to wider society is also profound, providing the greatest variety of opportunities and personal development to anyone in who wishes to serve, regardless of background or beliefs. It is as a result of our connection with the country’s youth through the cadet scheme and perhaps more visibly it is our iconic role as a national institution playing a central and prominent ceremonial part in the country’s most symbolic events.

The return of troops from Germany and the integration and expansion of the reserve will further solidify our footprint and positively connect us to society in a way we have not experienced for many years.
Conclusion

The British Army exists to provide our national leaders credible choices and options in an uncertain world. Its proven combat effectiveness serves to prevent conflict through deterrence; it can fight within a multi-national context and support smaller allies; it actively contributes to the UK’s global influence through Defence Engagement; and it provides ready manpower in support of civil authorities here at home. It is the ability to undertake a wide variety of operations, including war-fighting, that defines the Army’s utility and strategic purpose.

The requirement for continued investment to maintain this capability is self-evident. Sir Winston Churchill highlighted the disproportionate risks that lie in cutting too deeply:

“An Army is not like a limited liability company, to be reconstructed, remodelled, liquidated and refloated from week to week. ... It is a living thing. If it is sufficiently disturbed, it will wither and dwindle and almost die; and when it comes to this last serious condition it is only to be revived by lots of time and lots of money.”

The task now is to invest prudently so that the Army retains its edge. The utility and value for money the Army presents can only be derived by continuing to invest appropriately in its people, training, equipment and basing. This commitment will maintain the British Army as a professional force, resolving crises abroad, serving the Nation at home; securing Britain in an uncertain world.
The Army’s Communication Themes
**Soldiers are our core strength and underpin our success**

Our people are key to our adaptability and success on operations.

‘With good people you can do anything’.

They are the wisest capital investment we can make, a catalyst to operational success and ensure the nation retains pride in the quality of its Army.

This increasingly puts the reserves front and centre too, with a re-defined relationship between regulars, reserves and employers leading to an integrated, adaptable and sustainable force.
Conflict is constant and inevitable
Conflict is often non-discretionary and usually decided on land. Operations in Afghanistan are almost over, but this does not mean the Army will have a long period searching for a new role.

‘We don’t choose wars, they pick us’
Versatile by design
Organised, trained and equipped for maximum utility’ - at home and abroad, in all situations. We have a proud record of adapting quickly to meet any crisis, providing the government strategic choices. We do so well because our training is effective.
We prepare for conflict whilst strengthening peace abroad
The Army’s international defence engagement deters conflicts and strengthens our friends.
It is an important part of upstream conflict prevention.
At the very heart of a joint and allied force
We depend upon and integrate with our sister Services and strive to be an inclusive partner to our allies in their operations and ours.
Effect demands mass
Some circumstances, based upon the scale and complexity of the task, demand mass.
As one example the scalability and range of operations that can be performed by a division and its subordinate units dramatically expands the utility the Army offers the nation.
Our institutional resilience to re-generate and reconstitute must also be underpinned
Ready to assist in any crisis at home
The Army is the UK’s domestic safety net.
We spend the nation’s money wisely. Through efficient procurement processes and sound financial management we spend the nation’s money wisely. There is a critical level of investment beyond which we must not fall if we are to meet all our nation’s expectations and underpin our long term future.
For further information please see the Army’s website: www.army.mod.uk