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Preventing conflict

a paper for discussion

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This paper has been written following the General Dynamics 'Whither Warfare?' Conference held at Shrivenham 25-26 February 2010 and is offered for discussion as part of the UK Strategic Defence and Security Review in 2010.¹ The paper is not a summary of discussions at the Conference but articulates a number of the issues that arose. The Conference programme is included as an attachment to this paper.

The Conference aim was to:

'examine to what degree a preventive strategy might succeed against adversaries of the future and how the military instrument should be employed to support such a strategy...'

The structure of this paper follows this aim and outlines some of the conclusions – and further questions – that emerged from the Conference.

¹ Referred to hereafter as SDSR2010.

Summary

There is a compelling but basic case for Prevention

The discussion on Prevention is poised at an interesting point. Apart from the uber-realists who contend that Prevention is an unattainable goal, too complex to understand and not the job of the military anyway, it seems there is a broadly held feeling that Prevention is something that we must get better at. It offers an intuitively more attractive way to do business – to prevent rather than react to conflict. But linear analysis is unhelpful here. Despite what some current analysis suggests, there is no timeline or sequence of events available for how crisis develops, and no straight forward choice between Prevention, Intervention and Stabilisation. They are all part of a comprehensive national approach to defending our interests.

The military has a unique contribution – Intervention – and this must be retained. In any case, the discussion about how to take Prevention forward is not just a discussion about the military, it is whole of Government business and any investment must be aimed at improvements across Whitehall and not just in constituent Departments. In this context approach is probably more important than capability. The ability to prevent cannot be designed in; the value is added in the Statecraft. Prevention is about the employment and deployment of capability, not the capability per se.

Some contend that Prevention is a ludicrously idealistic aspiration. Why prevent in one scenario or place, and not another? What we seek is the prevention of disorder that threatens our interests as we choose to define them. At the strategic level, this means risks which threaten the continued smooth running of a rules-based international order and freedom to trade. Conflict is a symptom of this disorder and perhaps its most obvious manifestation – but it is only a proxy. So Prevention may – as a reaction to the chaotic world of the 21st century – be consistent, after all, with a realist position. It is not, unless you wish it to be, a moral code.

SDSR2010 needs take the discussion forward

Discussion of Prevention is been timely and should inform the development of SDSR2010. It is hoped that the issues presented here will contribute to further discussion of how the levers of national power might best be employed – at taxpayers expense – in defence of our interests across the world.

All of the major opinions or conclusions either expressed or reached in the Conference are presented in this paper, but it is worth considering a brief summary of the key ones. As we approach SDSR2010, the subsequent discussion of Prevention must take account of the following:

- Prevention is not an alternative to Intervention or Stabilisation. They are part of a holistic response to today's security challenges and UK Intervention capability must be retained.
- Effective Prevention requires a much more developed Intelligence capability – across Government.
- More timely decision making is also essential to a successful Prevention strategy.
- Prevention is multi-departmental – although the military has a unique contribution to make – and international.
- The key enablers are People – and we need to invest in them.
- Ultimately, Prevention is as much about approach as it is about capability.

There is one key challenge, though, for Defence. Defence's own understanding of its role needs to expand and be set in the context of a much more preventative and risk management based approach to protecting national interests. Accordingly, the debate about what the Armed Forces are actually for may open up, but it needs to be balanced. Unless we completely recalibrate our foreign policy, Intervention will still remain the red line right of arc requirement for the military – but our understanding of what else is possible must expand.



Prevention is the language that people are now using to have this debate and in this context it is interesting to note that 'Prevention' does not appear anywhere in the recent revision of UK Military Tasks (on the basis of which the force structure will be designed) which probably only serves to underline the problems of applying the concept to force development.

But Prevention is a concept that Defence needs to embrace. While it is not a panacea or a replacement for Intervention, it is part of a suite of activities that can be used to protect our national interests and Defence must, in the next few months, work out what its role in it will be.

Comments and Further Discussion

This paper is designed to stimulate discussion; comments are welcome and can be sent to either the author or the conference sponsors. The conference sponsors were General Dynamics UK and comments may be sent to the Head of Concepts Development, nicholas.beswick@generaldynamics.uk.com

The author of this paper is David Relph. Any comments or proposals for additional collaboration can be sent to the author at chirtongroup@gmail.com

Introduction

*'Britons will not want to take themselves to the margin of world affairs. This is a nation with an activist foreign policy and a desire to be engaged in the world. It should not retire into splendid isolation. Instead, it must answer the question of how best to project military power in the future.'*²

*'There are some people who argue that Britain's current economic shrinkage must mean a continuing strategic shrinkage. Let me emphasise... that we will reject strategic shrinkage. We have not waited thirteen years to return to office simply to oversee the management of Britain's decline in world affairs.'*³

The Problem of Definition

The mid 2000s saw some initial work on Conflict Prevention (the Strategy Unit's Failing and Failed States Initiative, for example) but it petered out as a result of a lack of frameworks that forced departments to co-operate in any meaningful fashion. The events of the last ten years and perceptions of the success or otherwise of operations in Iraq in particular have lead some back to Prevention as a potential theme on which to build capability and policy. These ideas are now back in focus and the Conference is part of ongoing work to frame what is a potentially very broad and unfocussed discussion. One major stumbling block at present is definition, or the lack of it. Prevention is;

'ill-defined. We need to agree what we mean by prevention, determine definitions and relevant capabilities and understand the relationship between its constituent elements.

*The terms that we, in UK political and military circles, have traditionally employed have largely lost currency and credibility... we need to understand and agree what we mean by Prevention in the early decades of the 21st Century.'*⁴

Prevention is also routinely conflated with a number of related concepts. For the sake of clarity – and subsequent discussion, this paper uses the following definitions;

Prevention. Prevention involves preventing actors in a given situation from utilising violence as a means to achieve the outcomes they seek. The UK will be specifically concerned with instances where this violence, or the associated instability, threatens UK interests. In the UK context successful Prevention requires that conflict based threats to UK interests are anticipated, identified and neutralised by whatever means, short of violence, is most appropriate.

Deterrence. Deterrence is a negative motivational influence on an actor, and is traditionally associated with our and others' nuclear capability. In conceptual terms, it is often seen as separate from Prevention, but may be more helpfully regarded as a subset.

² Decision time for UK's military role, published in the Financial times 27 December 2009.

³ William Hague, Speech at Royal United Services Institute, 10 March 2010.

⁴ Conference Speaker.

The outcome of both is the same – that actors do not utilise violence to achieve the outcomes they seek; but Deterrence is at the hard edge of Prevention as it relies on the threat of a negative result for any actor initiating conflict as opposed to a positive benefit.

Intervention. The term Intervention may be applied to any scenario in which military forces are deployed directly to achieve an outcome. In UK terms it also relates specifically to instances where this takes place outside the UK and expeditionary capability is required – and it includes the requirement for Land based Warfighting operations in extremis. Again, it is seen as separate from Prevention (indeed by some as the anti-thesis of Prevention) but in truth the two concepts are directly related. In particular, as the Conference concluded, possessing the ability to intervene gives an underpinning credibility to any preventative strategy.

Unlocking what we mean by Prevention – six framing considerations

Prevention involves persuading actors in any given scenario not to resort to conflict as the means to achieve the outcomes they seek, but this covers a huge range of potential situations and needs to be broken down. The conference was offered a framework for this consisting of substantive questions within six ‘framing considerations’;

- Who are we preventing? Is it states, ideologies or non-state actors? Or some of each?
- What are we preventing? State conflict? Ideological confrontation? The implosion of fragile states? The export of instability?
- With what? What more do we need? Capabilities, not just kit.
- What is the role of the military instrument? What can others not do?
- What do we mean by short-term, medium-term and long-term? Are we thinking five or fifty years out?
- Is ‘Prevention’ not also about addressing global social and economic asymmetries?

These considerations formed the basis for discussion during the Conference, and the responses to them are set out later in this paper.

An increasingly popular fallacy

The concepts above are tied together by a Gordian knot of differences in understanding and false dichotomies. One particular fallacy is dangerous – that Prevention is an alternative to Intervention. If the will for further Iraq or Afghanistan style operations is reducing, there may be a temptation to build a case for capability development explicitly on the basis of preventing, as opposed to reacting to, conflict. An additional attraction – especially politically – is that the language of Prevention carries with it a greater degree of implicit legitimacy than the language of Intervention. The associated view, already developing a certain momentum – is that Prevention;

- is an alternative to Intervention, and;
- should become *the* basis upon which we build Defence capability.

The fallacy of this approach and the simplicity of the linear analysis that underpins it were tackled repeatedly during the Conference, which concluded that;

- Prevention and Intervention are not alternatives;
- the capability to Intervene is vital if a preventative strategy is to have credibility; the same applies to Deterrence.
- if Prevention fails, Intervention may be required in extremis, but;
- purely military Intervention will only ever provide some of the solution.

This paper aims to take the discussion of Prevention forward in the context of SDSR2010. The task before us is to outline what, in general, will underpin and enable a successful UK Prevention strategy and what, in particular, are the implications for the military and Defence.

This paper does both. First, however, a brief discussion of the context.

Context

A developing understanding of Security

The last twenty years have seen a broadening and deepening of the way in which the notion of security is understood. Whereas at the end of the 1960s the term was associated with military issues at the state level (the Cold war being the most compelling example of this paradigm) security has now been broadened to include a number of other considerations. Most famously, Barry Buzan added political, economic, societal and ecological factors to the purely military. This, along with a host of related work, has been referred to as the 'broadening' of security.

The 'deepening' of the concept of security has involved an expanding focus on a whole range of actors, not just the state – and the rise of the notion of human security in particular. Security is, therefore, relevant to a whole range of actors – and needs to be considered in this context. It is not something that only concerns the military and only involves the state.

Britain's role in the world

Standing quietly behind this, and of fundamental importance to the upcoming SDSR2010, is an ebbing and flowing discussion about Britain's role in the world. This is cultural and ethical (in its purest sense); complex; and tough to articulate, not least because the tradition of British policy makers has been to studiously avoid articulating any position on this issue in an attempt to retain as much freedom of action as possible when reacting to 'events'. But what John Coles called 'some idea of Britain' is hugely important because it provides the deep context to any discussion about what the role of the military should be and what sort of situation the UK will choose to get involved in. Coalition government policy on this is still developing, but the indications that have emerged thus far suggest that there will be no 'strategic shrinkage', and that the UK will seek to remain a country with global reach and global interests.

What might this mean in terms of our own national understanding of security, or the broadness of the scope with which the UK will apply the term? There is no agreed definition of security per se, but the UK National Security Strategy of 2008 does offer

the following 'single overarching national security objective'; to protect the United Kingdom and its interests, enabling its people *'to go about their daily lives freely and with confidence, in a more secure, stable, just and prosperous world.'*⁵

This is a rather broad articulation of what is important had been focused slightly a year later, the objective having become a 'vision';

*'to protect the UK and its interests in order to enable its people to go about their lives freely and with confidence.'*⁶

In this construct, the UK will retain global interests and security threats will relate to any factors that threaten the confidence of its citizens – an unhelpfully broad articulation of what matters and certainly something that is of limited use in terms of guiding SDSR 2010. The rather obvious point here is that, in response to what is an almost meaninglessly broad articulation of our interests and the associated threats, prioritisation is required.

Prevention requires collaboration inter-nationally

This discussion is also not taking place in a purely national context. We face an increasingly challenging array of complex, inter-dependent, hybrid threats that necessitate sophisticated, multilateral responses – as discussed in the MoD's own analysis of the 'Future Character of Conflict'.⁷ Any consideration of how to take Prevention forward must take account of the views of both those who are the declared allies of the United Kingdom, and of the institutions to which they belong. This cannot just be a case of conceptual agreement, because there is an extremely important practical application for the relationships we have with other nations and supra-national institutions. For example, in a world where the national reach of the UK is ever more limited, the potential availability of the Francophone network in Africa offers a compelling reason for the UK and France to work together. Achieving this in practice will require a coherent and agreed approach to Prevention. In this context, and despite of the fact the most successful instances of Prevention in recent years – Macedonia and Sierra Leone – were unilateral ventures, Prevention is very much a team sport.

⁵ The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom. Security in an interdependent world. Published March 2008.

⁶ The National Security Strategy of the United Kingdom. Update 2009; Security for the Next Generation. Published June 2009.

⁷ Future Character of Conflict Paper, Published 12 February 201 and available at http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/3E38C6EC-4A76-402F-9E28-C571EAB9929F/0/fcoc_final_revised_12Feb10.pdf

Prevention requires inter-departmental collaboration

It is also a team sport internally; this is a whole of government affair and not just the domain of 2 or 3 departments (it hardly needs stating that Prevention is not a purely military business, though one often hears this still spelled out). The acme of Prevention is to avoid conflict, whether that is conflict breaking out in an area where the UK has an interest, or the avoidance of a situation where the UK is itself compelled to intervene with military force. The best term for this skill – and it is surely a skill – is Statecraft. Effective Prevention of conflict that threatens the interests of the UK is the highest expression of this Statecraft – and any capabilities developed under the auspices of Prevention must be focused accordingly; they must do one or all of the following; identify threats as they emerge, inform decision makers, or provide a practical means to address the problem.

SDSR2010

In a world where the future role and aspirations of the UK have yet to be fully articulated, and the notion of security has broadened and deepened, the challenge for the SDSR will be, once all these factors have been weighed and considered, to answer the 'so what?' question, and design national capabilities that, across and in coherence with all levers that government has at its disposal, are best placed to protect the UK's interests.

Managing risk to UK interests in prudent fashion and then, when necessary, deciding on the application of national capability is the art of Statecraft; the post SDSR2010 structures need to provide an anticipatory capability and decision making apparatus that allows the timely prioritisation of threat and application of these capabilities. Defence may remain the ultimate guarantor of security for the nation, but succeeding in Prevention requires consideration of the wider security environment, and an approach that is truly cross government.

Discussion

Issue 1 – To what degree is a preventive strategy likely to succeed in the future?

The Environment

At this point it may be useful to consider what we think the near future might look like. The most recent articulation of this is the UK Ministry of Defence paper on the Future Character of Conflict.⁸ Some key points from that paper are worth repeating here. First, in terms of environment, conflict is likely to take place in a space that is more, not less, congested, cluttered, contested, connected and constrained. This characterisation can be usefully set alongside the major implications from the FCOC paper, which might be précised as follows:

- that the sources of potential conflict are increasing and the forms of conflict diversifying;
- that the utility of the Military Instrument in its current incarnation will reduce and that additional resources may be required to make the military instrument more useful;
- that conflict and confrontation are now population centric. Informational and perceptual elements are key; the battle of the narrative is becoming increasingly dominant.
- that international (and local) partners will be essential;
- that applying power will become more complex and difficult;
- that agility is essential and that people are what will make the difference, and;
- that major change in our own approach and structures will probably be needed.

These key themes are ones that were echoed throughout the Conference and speak of the necessity for change and the inadequacy of our current institutional structure. SDSR2010 will need to initiate and embed this change – we need to be better at identifying threats, more ruthless at prioritising them, quicker in our decision making, and more comprehensive in our response. These will be the hallmarks not just of an effective Prevention strategy but of a better approach to National Security.

Returning to the six framing considerations

Who are we preventing? Is it states, ideologies or non-state actors? Or some of each?

Inevitably, it may be the latter. Just as the concept of security has broadened and deepened, so too has the range of potential actors and levels at which we may end up having to apply preventative strategies. But the dynamic of all these is the same – decision makers need to be convinced that conflict is not the way to solve their problems. As the actors and the scale changes, so will the required response. A state level military threat will require persuasion to be applied at the very least, and potentially coercion, in order to convince decision makers to make this choice. But a marginalised non-state actor might be persuaded to make a similar choice by improving availability to the machinery of governance. There will be very different foci for problems of essentially the same nature – and we need the agility and sophistication to respond to this range of challenges.

What are we preventing? State conflict? Ideological battle? The implosion of fragile states?

The export of instability? Ultimately, two issues are important here – interests and risk. The art of Statecraft is about the management of risk, and what we are likely to be seeking to prevent is not conflict per se – because preventing all conflict will be a hopeless task. We must, however, seek to prevent that conflict which affects UK interests. The heart of the Prevention problem is indentifying and preventing disorder that has the potential to threaten our interests at either the micro or macro level – either specific UK interests or the rules based international order on which collective international trade and governance depend.

With what? What more do we need? And I mean capabilities, not just kit.

The requirement is to influence, convince and persuade – and (whilst acknowledging that this statement is too general to be useful just yet) the associated capabilities are any and all that allow us to do this. This is the area we understand the least

⁸ Future Character of Conflict Paper, *ibid.*

– and the reason we have such difficulty putting flesh on the bones of the idea of Prevention is that we struggle to comprehend its true nature; Prevention is at heart a psychological business. To make it effective we need to understand what is important to the actors involved. We need to understand people before we can persuade them, and unless we can persuade we cannot prevent.

What is the role of the military instrument? What can others not do?

This question is dealt with in greater detail in the next section of this paper – Issue 2.

What do we mean by short-term, medium-term and long-term? Are we thinking five or fifty years out?

A useful construct for the short, medium and long term was suggested at the Conference

- Long term Prevention might be best seen as that which addresses the root causes of tension or disorder and the conflict that tends to follow. The long term approach is about issues rather than specific groups of actors, about potential shortages of certain primary goods, for example, rather than the specific groups that will be affected by their scarcity. Success in the long term means the preservation of a rules based international order – and the anticipation of issues that will become problems in this context. It is a cross government, Foreign Policy led, business.
- Medium term Prevention is concerned with situations where the issues and actors have been clearly anticipated or identified, and is concerned with preventing the utilisation of conflict by these actors. For example, current efforts to prevent violent conflict between Iran and Israel might be seen as medium term Prevention. Medium term Prevention might also be seen as focused on managing a situation rather than providing a long term solution to the problems that underlie it.
- Short term Prevention is focused on preventing any further conflict in a situation that has already reached crisis. It is here that Intervention may be required.

Is 'Prevention' not also about addressing global social and economic asymmetries? Yes, in the long

term, but the practical application of levers such as the military is more likely to be focused on short, and perhaps medium term, Prevention. Long term global asymmetries are not something that

can be addressed in a Defence Review, and they are areas where the military instrument has no obvious utility. But it is extremely important for them to be understood – because they are often the origin of the tension and disorder that creates the environment in which the military and others must do their work.

A range of actors and methods

It is the range of potential actors involved in any attempts to execute a Prevention strategy that create the real complexity – and pose most challenge to our attempts to create capabilities that can be usefully employed. Most obvious is the challenge of dealing with both state and non-state actors. We have a security apparatus in the UK that is set up to deal with state actors – or at least groups whose organisation and behavior is political in a way that we understand. But we must now grapple with an environment filled with potentially atomised individuals or small groups whose organisation and motivations are completely opaque to us – at least initially. This has created a challenge that we have not even begun to understand, let alone tackle, and it has fundamental implications for the way in which we develop the Human Capital so crucial to a successful Prevention strategy.

Related to this is the well recognised transformation in the way in which state or state proxy actors seek to engage in conflict. State on state conflict is not dead, but its form has changed. The cyber domain is perhaps the greatest growth area in this respect, but ultimately, no matter what form state on state conflict actually takes, its prevention will be about the ability to influence individual political decision makers. In this respect the key challenge when dealing with either state or non state actors is the same; to understand why people have decided on a particular conflict course of action, and to use the range of levers at our disposal to persuade them otherwise.

How best to do this? This paper will not even be able to scratch the surface of the huge range of possible scenarios, but one characteristic will be true for all of them; that unless we understand the motivation of the actors involved we cannot hope to influence them. If we do not understand, we cannot predict, and we cannot prevent.

What might success look like?

A successful Prevention strategy must be comprehensive and include, inter alia:

- constant, prioritised engagement to better understand emerging problems;
- use of preventative activity to attempt to avoid conflict;
- preparation to intervene if that is required (early intervention can sometimes be very effective – see the example of Macedonia), and;
- resolution thereafter to prevent recurrence.

This is not the work of one Department. Success requires integrated Foreign, Security, Development and Home policy, all undertaken in a way that is culturally sensitive both at home and abroad. Additionally, it requires humility and a keen sense of the art of the possible. We cannot do everything everywhere – prioritisation is essential.

Issue 2 – How should the military instrument be best employed to support such a strategy?

*'The future character of conflict will challenge military forces structured and prepared for industrial age war between global superpowers. Conflict is evolving, but it is not getting any simpler; the range of threats is actually expanding. Expanding our range of responses accordingly will be demanding without significantly more resource. The military instrument must be configured to deliver broad utility and we must better understand that the military instrument alone can rarely, if ever, deliver decisive strategic effect. Enduring success will invariably require the careful integration of all levers of national power.'*⁹

For those planning future military structures and policy, the challenge now is to identify the key capabilities that the military offers in the context of any Prevention strategy and to set out clearly that which only the military can provide. Having done so, the implications of operating in the environment described above, and in the time frames implied by the short, medium and long term should also be considered. Finally, the contribution of the military needs to be effectively meshed with the other

levers of influence in order to create a truly comprehensive (with a deliberately small c) approach.

We must retain the ability to intervene

The military can contribute to a wide range of outcomes in the context of Prevention. They offer choices to the politician, support non-military lines of operation, and have huge practical application across a whole range of scenarios such as humanitarian relief or the effective supervision of basic infrastructure or governance projects. But there is one activity that only the military can conduct – Intervention in a crisis situation.

A good deal of analysis of Prevention has focused on the military contribution to outcomes that, for the sake of easy analysis, have been seen as most likely to take place prior to conflict. Whilst it is appealing to talk of what the military can do before any conflict or crisis arises, there is a real danger that this sort of analysis oversimplifies the dynamics of conflict and leads, for example, to a very unsophisticated understanding of the relationship between Prevention and Intervention. In one possible scenario, these might follow sequentially, but to infer that this linear relationship will work in all possible situations is a mistake. The Prevention and Intervention construct is useful, but it is not universal and it does not operate in a straight line. As well as being over simplistic, this sort of analysis can be dangerous, because it implies that Prevention is somehow an alternative to Intervention. The relationship between these three is more akin to a half mixed pot of paint than a neat line on a graph.

But what capabilities do we need to develop?

If the military's unique contribution to the protection of UK national interest is the potential for Intervention, we must still ask what more the military could do to support those other national levers that would be involved in a Prevention strategy. First, we must ask if we could do more with what we have to support a national

Prevention strategy. For example, could we use our contingent capability to fill gaps caused by, say, the lack of any policing contingent capability? Events will impose a de facto limitation on the art of the

⁹ Future Character of Conflict Paper, *ibid.*

possible, but even if SDSR2010 changes nothing, there are probably more imaginative ways to deploy military capability in support of broader Prevention strategies.

That said, two broad conclusions fell out of the Conference discussion on capability in the most generic sense. First, any Prevention strategy must be based on the ability to Understand and Predict. This implies the requirement to improve considerably what might be referred to as a national horizon scanning and intelligence capability. The military will have a role here – but we are talking about whole of government architecture if we are to make any meaningful improvements. Second, the development of Human Capital is essential. As a speaker noted; *'put... the right people into it, and anything is possible'*.

People are the capability

This is not simply a Defence matter, of course, but there is little doubt that investment in Human Capital, even if it is done in the absence of any overarching government approach, will pay dividends. Linguists are the obvious gap in the UK military at present, but there is also a great deal to be done in terms of developing a more culturally aware military cohort, a group that will be much better placed to operate in, and influence, the environment in which they will have to operate. The choice is not as simple as people or kit, but there is no doubt that, in the context of Prevention, hi-tech weapons platforms are not a good way to help stabilise tottering states, and that *'The right numbers of quality people, often interacting with suspicious populations, are a huge capability in themselves.'*¹⁰

More than any other changes that may come out of SDSR2010, this would require a quiet revolution. Manpower is too often viewed as an overhead at present – and an expensive one at that. This has to change. The manpower of the military is the capability. All the kit is simply a means for the manpower – for people – to influence situations in order to protect the interests of this country. It is the equipment that is the overhead – and the quality of people is an area where we simply cannot take risk.

Is this about capability – or approach?

What capabilities should we actually develop rather than just employ differently? Does Prevention imply the development of capabilities that we don't have already? It is here that the discussion becomes more difficult. SDSR2010 may cast some more light on this, but an underlying conclusion of the Conference was that Prevention as a concept offers little in terms of concrete implications for capabilities and force structures. The military's unique contribution to a Prevention strategy is an Intervention capability, and this is where discussions about force structure must continue to focus. Designing a preventative force is abstract to the point of being useless, a point reinforced when one considers that Prevention is a truly cross departmental concept and not an effect delivered by the military in isolation. It is about Statecraft and the skilful application of the levers of national influence; less about capabilities per se and more about how they are applied and utilised. Getting better at Prevention is not about capability, it is about approach.

¹⁰ Both these quotes are from a Conference speaker.

Conclusions

Prevention is not an alternative to Intervention

There is a view that somehow Prevention is an alternative to Intervention. This can be seductive and some involved in the discussion have referred to the rise of 'Preventionism' – the notion that the UK will be able to save money by investing in preventing rather than reacting to conflict or threats to our interests. The very clear conclusion of the discussion in Shrivenham was that this is not the case. An Intervention capability adds credibility to a Prevention strategy and it is a mistake to suggest that we can somehow get out of Intervention and into Prevention; they are not mutually exclusive. Intervention is not separate from Prevention, but part of the range of capabilities that form part of a comprehensive security strategy. It is the military's unique contribution to the security of the UK and – unless we are to completely recalibrate the UK's foreign policy – it must be protected.

Getting better at Prevention

Prevention is clearly a good idea – no-one will argue with the logic of anticipating and neutralising threats to our interests before they become crises. But this simple logic defies obvious translation into deductions about force structures and niche capabilities and this was an area where the Conference struggled to come up with significant conclusions. The reason may be that, as previously stated, getting better at Prevention requires a change in approach more than it requires the development of capability – certainly for the military.

One does not build a force to prevent, but to act. Design exclusively for Prevention or Deterrence and you may fail to achieve either. We must not forget the military's core competence; Prevention may be a driving force behind national Statecraft but it cannot tell us how many ships we should have. Prevention may form the context nationally, but the discussion about military capability must focus on the most demanding requirement – Intervention – and preserving this capability.

That having been said, there are clearly areas where the UK could improve. If intelligent Prevention focused Statecraft is the aim, then better and more comprehensive anticipatory capability is needed. This is at heart a challenge of prudent and prioritised risk management and in this context we need to understand before we predict before we prevent. At various levels this might imply different capabilities;

for example at the Strategic Level we must improve our horizon scanning capability, whilst at the Operational Level what matters is a much more developed understanding of culture in areas that we seek to influence. The tactical level will be different again but what links them all is the requirement to develop better understanding and Intelligence capabilities across the board. This implies more embassies just as much as more Army linguists and it is a key area of cross-Government investment.

Related to this and enabled by it, decision making is the key to effective and agile responses to the threats and challenges of today's world. Whether one is talking about Command and Control or Statecraft, at different levels and in different contexts these highlight the same issue – that the most important enabler of any preventative strategy is timely decision making based on sound intelligence and a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of a situation.

Political will and structures are important influences on decision making in this context. So is culture. A more flexible, and less traditional, understanding of the role of the Armed Forces is probably required – the ability to imagine innovative ways to employ military capability and a move away from the current understanding of the role of the military.

Most important, however, are people; for it is they who interpret, decide and act. If there was one recurring theme of the Conference it was that people are at the heart of the effort, the core capability. We must invest more in this area – manpower is not simply an overhead.

Conference Agenda and Speakers

Preventing Conflict: Co-opting, Deterring, Coercing and Neutralising the Adversary of the Future, 25 and 26 February 2010

Introduction

Conference Welcome	Prof Christopher Elliott CB MBE
Keynote Address	Gen Sir David Richards KCB CBE DSO ADC Gen Chief of the General Staff

The Context

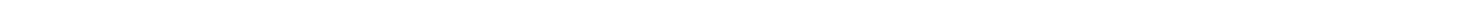
	Chair: Prof Christopher Elliott CB MBE
The Strategic Context	Prof Hew Strachan, Chichele Professor of the History of War, Oxford University
The Holistic View of Security	Prof Michael Clarke, Director RUSI
The Future Character of Conflict	Mr Maxie McFarland, US Army Training & Doctrine Command

Problems and Solutions

	Chair: Maj Gen James Bucknall CBE, Assistant Chief of the General Staff
Deterrence Theory and its Current Application	Prof Colin Gray, Centre for Strategic Studies, Reading University
Smart Power	Prof Michael Cox, London School of Economics
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Maritime and Air Perspectives	RAdm Philip Jones, Assistant Chief of Naval Staff
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