



The British Army in 2016

Earth Thought Notebooks

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Histoire & stratégie

On 28 October 2014, one month after its new leader, General Sir Nick Carter, took office, the British Army left Helmand Province in Afghanistan after thirteen years of operations and more than 450 deaths.

A year later, on 25 November 2015, the new Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), the UK's White Paper on Security and Defence, was published, confirming the willingness of the UK to to always count in international relations with, in particular, the commitment to ensure a defence budget of 2% of GDP [1], as desired by NATO at the 2014 summit in Wales [2].

These two important dates mark profound changes within the Army. Indeed, after having prepared and conducted "a war", that of counter-insurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army, under the determined leadership of General Carter, is now doing everything possible to prepare for "war".

The first part of this article will underline how exhausted the Army has come out of its 13 years of operational commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan, during which, under severe budgetary and operational constraints, its overall coherence has been shaken. The struggle of the Chief of the General Staff[3], General Carter, consists today in undertaking an in-depth overhaul of the tool, which affects all its structuring areas and aims to regain a certain balance; this is the subject of the second part.

Finally, the last part will serve as a reminder that this particular context offers opportunities for our bilateral military cooperation, which is already particularly dynamic since the signing of the Lancaster House Treaties on 2 November 2010.

Iraq and Afghanistan: a difficult commitment that has shaped minds, forced military choices and traumatised public opinion.

General Carter took command of a relatively shaky army in October 2014. The latter had just emerged from 10 years of war in Iraq (OP TELIC) and Afghanistan (OP HERRICK), during which it suffered 179 and 453 deaths respectively.

The first British troops had been deployed to Afghanistan in 2001 to participate, with the other allied forces, in the stabilisation of the new Afghan institutions after the fall of the Taliban. However, efforts were more significant in Iraq from 2003 onwards when the British joined forces with the Americans and at that time the situation in Afghanistan remained relatively calm.

It was not until 2005-2006, when the Taliban resumed the offensive and NATO forces were redeployed in southern Afghanistan, that the British increased their efforts by choosing to settle in Helmand. This deployment seemed to be within the Army's grasp and it imagined that it would be able to carry out an operation to conquer hearts by limiting its "kinetic" actions, as in TeAt the time, the statements of John Reid, the Secretary of Defense, who thought that he "could leave without having to fire a single shot", were mocking. The reality was quite different. Her Majesty's soldiers went through hell, even renaming the province "HellMand", so difficult were the years that followed. They fired more than 500,000 rounds of ammunition, lost more than 450 soldiers and had twice as many wounded.

During all these years, the Army was in a state of permanent war. All the functioning of the institution, all the decisions, all the choices were guided by this context of an army at war and losing men at a rate that no other European army has faced in recent history.

Thus, in the area of equipment, it made the choice of emergency operational programmes which made it possible from the general budget (thus excluding the defence budget) to acquire equipment often off-the-shelf, if not specifically designed for the needs of the operation in Afghanistan. However, this decision led her to develop many micro-parks of vehicles, whose upgrading and reintegration into the overall fleet after Afghanistan is not a matter of course today.

In the HR field, career models were very much linked to operational criteria. For example, having commanded in Afghanistan was a major determinant^[4] for entry into the Generalate at the time. 4) The model must now be rethought as the Army has been experiencing since the end of Afghanistan an unprecedented peacetime situation for most of the officers and NCOs serving there.

Operational readiness was also adapted, with a perfectly oiled rhythm over a 48-month cycle giving high visibility to units and personnel who, at the time, they followed a metronome rhythm, one year of training, six months of deployment in Afghanistan or Iraq and six months of re-conditioning. The training at Sandhurst also adapted to the need of the short term and focused on the first job as a section leader in combat in Afghanistan. Each young officer knew from the moment he arrived in the regiment that he would be sure to follow two or three tours of duty in Afghanistan or Iraq.

At the same time, and while the Army was entirely focused on war,^[5] it also had to implement a new approach to warfare.^[5] the Army also had to implement and "digest" a strategic review that was particularly painful for the entire Ministry of Defence.

The SDSR, the British White Paper that the government wanted in 2010, was indeed characterised by its austerity and an unprecedented reduction in personnel. The exercise took place under very tight financial constraints, with drastic savings imposed by the

government to fill a "black hole" of almost 70 billion pounds. For example, while fully committed to Afghanistan, the Army, which in 2010 had 102,000 men, was reduced by 20,000 to 82,000 in 2018. The Army then entered an almost ubuesque situation where it had to continue recruiting to maintain its HR pyramid while launching into a campaign of "redundancies" [6] with managers and soldiers who, for some, were receiving their retirement notice while they were operating in Helmand!

This description of the context that prevailed before General Carter took office is essential to understand the state of mind in which the Army finds itself at the end of 2014 when it leaves Afghanistan and its new leader takes up his duties. It also helps to understand the importance of the decisions intended by the new SMC, and which have been anchored in the new SRDS 2015.

An SDSR that resumes with a rising budget and relaunches the Army on an expeditionary vocation...

On 23 November 2015, new versions of the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) were published. The SDSR 2015 demonstrates the government's determination to strengthen the defence tool by taking advantage of a favourable national economic situation. With a budget increase of 0.5% above inflation until 2020, the effort is focused on counter-terrorism, the cyber domain, maintaining a nuclear deterrent, the national territory and the modernisation of equipment, primarily in the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force.

The new British "White Paper" thus confirms that the United Kingdom wishes to remain a leading player to be reckoned with. There are strong signs of this:

- a defence budget of £34 billion [7], the largest in the EU, and which meets the NATO criterion of 2% of GDP;
- the renewal of nuclear deterrence as a fundamental pillar of defence;
- an "equipment" component increasing by £12 billion a year over 10 years [8];
- and the absence of any reduction in military manpower.

The Army is not to be outdone and finds itself at the heart of two major efforts: resilience on national territory and the return to an expeditionary capability. It is thus broadening its field of action and is inscribing its model in the Joint Force 2025 described in the SRDSR 2015, in which it plays an important role. This model is intended to be ambitious, state-of-the-art, capable of carrying out a wider range of missions and rapidly generating a division capable of confronting a modern army.

After recent years of stabilization operations, it is therefore refocusing on a division-level expeditionary capability for high-intensity operations, based in particular on the new "strike brigade" concept [9]. This ambition will be ensured by the 3th (UK)^{Div}, the reactive forces, the new battle corps of the new Army, structured around two armoured brigades and two Strike brigades equipped with Scout and Mechanized Infantry Vehicle (MIV) [10].

10] At the same time, the Army will have to be able to engage on national territory (the notion of resilience, which constitutes a new and marked effort in this SDSR) in support of the civil authorities and law enforcement agencies. It will also have to participate in counter-terrorism and carry out international cooperation and support missions on behalf of allied armies. This will be the core of the activities of the 1st (UK) Div^{the} Adaptable Forces, which will be supported by six brigades, mainly light infantry, and will be the main focus of the 1st (UK) Div's activities.11], and specialised battalions with a reduced number of personnel, but with a greater number of cadres. These new battalions, formed from the

existing light infantry battalions, are expected to resemble joint military assistance detachments. This division will also draw on regional expertise by brigade to improve understanding of the issues at stake and to build long-term relationships in the different regions of the world.

The boundary between these two divisions with two different feet is not yet fully defined. It is likely that some flexibility will be adopted to provide warning units and intervene with the appropriate capabilities both in external operations and on national territory. To these two divisions is finally added the 16th Air Assault Brigade, which remains the emergency echelon.

This structural reorganization is based on a workforce whose objective of reduction to 82,000 active military personnel is maintained, but reinforced by a reserve component which is becoming essential. The ambition is in fact to recruit 30,000 reservists and above all to integrate them more significantly into the whole, to the point that the SMC clearly states in all its interventions that it commands an Army which, in the long term, will be 112 , 000 men and women strong.

These developments show a willingness to turn the pages of Afghanistan and Iraq. They are accompanied by a reorganisation of command structures and a change in the mindset and style of command.

The reorganisation of the command structure began as soon as the SMC took up its duties. It is being finalised at the time of writing. Based on a much clearer separation of design and implementation functions than before, the chain of command is being reorganised around two main pillars grouped together outside London at a single site in Andover: the General Staff[12], a 360-strong staff (with a branch in London), in charge of design and taking over all Policy and Strategy functions; the Command Field Army [13] and the SupportCommand, in charge of implementation.

The General Staff thus sees its structures and way of working evolve. In fact, its reorganisation has resulted in the setting up of younger and smaller work teams, evaluated according to processes inspired by the American 360° evaluation process, the creation of the position of Army Sergeant Major[14] and, here, we touch on spirit and style, by "taking back in hand" the colonels and brigadiers who, when they are assigned to these levels of command, are encouraged to develop a more collective spirit that goes beyond regimental corporatism[15].

15] This desire to change attitudes was also reflected in the CGS's desire to expand recruitment to include minorities (10%) and women (15%),[16] to attract more talent and to16], to attract more talent and academics to the ranks of Sandhurst ("We need best talents") and to create new, more flexible career models allowing executives to alternate military and civilian careers.

... maintaining the Franco-British partnership as a key focus of attention

As you can imagine, these reorganizations and new directions offer real opportunities to further strengthen our bilateral cooperation on land.

This cooperation is already extremely dense, as demonstrated by the validation of the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF) concept of employment during Exercise Griffin Strike in April 2016. The result of five years of effort, this CJEF is one of the key points of our bilateral relationship relaunched in 2010 under the "Lancaster House" treaties.

It should be recalled that the ambition of the two nations regarding the CJEF is to have the capacity to deploy at short notice, autonomously, an expeditionary force of 10,000 men across the whole spectrum of operations for a maximum duration of 90 days. A catalyst for our interoperability, this capability, which is not based on any permanent or pre-designated force, has for the past five years resulted in a series of bilateral exercises, first between armed forces components and then at joint level, leading to this validation in April 2016.

This highly structuring framework, which for the land component aims to be able to deploy up to a binational divisional headquarters to which a French brigade and a British brigade would be subordinated, thus enables the two land armies to develop their interoperability. This is the major challenge. This involves not only the technical aspects, but also a perfect knowledge of procedures, ways of thinking, ways of working and cultures so that work within the staffs is as fluid as possible.

The densification of the exchange and liaison officers' networks, the numerous exchanges in the field of operational preparation, the work accomplished by the 16th Air Assault Brigade and the 11th Air Assault Brigade and the 11th Parachute Brigade to develop an emergency response team and, very recently, the exchange of two divisional assistant generals, are all concrete elements that tend towards this goal.

These results, although very satisfactory, should not, however, be taken for granted, even if this partnership is now one of the priorities of both Ministries. The strategic documents published on both sides of the Channel and the density of meetings between the two Defence Ministers bear witness to this.

Efforts are therefore being pursued today by exploring new avenues of exchange. Thus, as the Army is developing the Scorpion Force and the Army is setting up its strike brigades, it seems natural to exchange on our doctrines and concepts of use in the field of the Median Forces.

In the organizational field, the two partners also have everything to gain by exchanging on the divisional level, whereas the Army, in its project "In contact", rediscovers this level and the Army has entirely reorganized itself around its two divisions.

Two areas in which it is not a question of copying what the other does, but rather of trying to find points of convergence that will enable us to be even more interoperable.

Conclusion:

The Army and the Navy are two organizations with very similar formats and ambitions serving two nations that matter on the world stage. The security context that now shapes the nature of our commitments, as well as the economic context that constrains the choice of formats, does not leave us with an alternative to our bilateral cooperation.

This cooperation has now reached a remarkable level of density, to the point where real working habits have been established between headquarters, as demonstrated by the Griffin Strike 2016 exercise. Let us dare to say today that, while technical interoperability is not the least of the difficulties, cultural interoperability, that is to say understanding each other's ways of working and thinking, has made great progress.

At a time when, on 23 June 2016, the United Kingdom has decided by referendum to leave the European Union, we feel that this bilateral relationship is becoming all the more necessary. The British defence community has been sending out reassuring signals ever

since the Brexit' decision. However, there is no shortage of pitfalls. Foremost among them are uncertainties about the British economic situation and therefore the sustainability of the military tool, the risk of a confidence that could be eroded depending on the way the process of exit from the EU is going to unfold, and the impact of this exit on the British strategic positioning in the international landscape.

In the face of the worrying deterioration of the security context, particularly in Europe, it is more important than ever to do everything possible to maintain and strengthen the close links between our two armies and to continue working on the interoperability of the two systems.

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1) National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review, p.29.

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/478936/52309_Cm_9161_NSS_SD_Review_P RINT_only.pdf

3) The British CEMAT

4) This condition was almost indispensable, to the point that some lieutenant-colonels, although intended to command illustrious regiments, left active service when they learned that their regiment was not scheduled to tour Afghanistan during their time in command.

5) At the height of its commitment in Afghanistan, the Army will deploy up to 9,000 soldiers.

6) The term redundancy was on everyone's lips at the time.

7) Rising 0.5% above inflation until 2020.

[8] That's a forward total of about £180 billion.

9) A concept that can be compared to the French median brigades and for which the model and capabilities developed by the Army in Mali with the Serval brigade or by the Americans in Iraq are sources of inspiration.

10) The acquisition of the MIV, a wheeled infantry combat vehicle, alongside the Scout, a tracked vehicle, marks an important milestone in the history of the French army.10) The acquisition of the MIV, a wheeled infantry combat vehicle, alongside the Scouts, a tracked vehicle, marks a significant shift in thinking towards the wheel/track pair within the mechanised infantry and cavalry who had until then always remained adept at the track.

11) The British refer to this as "return into the Core Programme". Complex procedure given their diversity (micro-park problem) and their initial funding (much of this equipment was purchased directly with Treasury funds, outside the defense budget).

12) Equivalent of EMAT

13) CFT equivalent

14| Equivalent to the President of the NCOs of the Army close to the CEMAT.

15| Without wanting to break the regimental system that has always structured the Army, the CGS wishes to instill in its senior officers a more collective spirit that goes beyond regimental corporatism.

16 | SDSR 2015

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