Occasional Paper

Management of Defence After the Levene Reforms
What Comes Next?

Trevor Taylor and Andrew Curtis
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189 years of independent thinking on defence and security

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Executive Summary

The Armed Forces of the UK were created as separate bodies at different points in history. But for more than a century, governments have recognised that the different services needed to be more effectively coordinated and, in some respects, integrated. The high-level organisation of defence has been a regularly changing picture. This paper is a reminder of the major steps that have been taken and the drivers behind them.

The pressures on the Ministry of Defence (MoD) to be more efficient and effective are unrelenting and the paper anticipates that the Integrated Review, underway in the summer of 2020, will seek to address all aspects of defence with such considerations in mind.

The arguments presented give substantial weight to two considerations:

- The first is that successive policy reviews have allocated a broad range of missions and tasks to the country’s armed forces while, at the same time, making only limited resources available. In this case, there is a need to generate a coherent pattern of prioritisation across defence.
- The second is that technological advances, especially in electronics and computing, which have transformed surveillance and communications, are putting the ability to generate and exploit information at the centre of military capability. The systems that generate, move, analyse and protect information are prevalent in all five operating environments: on and under water, on land, in the air, in space and in cyberspace.

Reconciling these two considerations within a defence operating model that underlines the separate nature of armies, navies and air forces is challenging. Tracing the development of Joint Forces Command (now Strategic Command), the paper recognises that there have been steps to strengthen the UK’s pan-defence perspective but notes the limited possibilities for even senior staff in joint roles to direct the single services.

The paper asserts that organisational change is needed to redefine the MoD Head Office’s role as, first and foremost, a department of state. Such change would be facilitated by equipping it with suitable military and civilian staff to direct and cohere all defence activity, by clarifying its relationship with Strategic Command, and by emphasising that Strategic Command should be the directing mind to which the single services would be subservient. The appointment of single service chiefs at three-star, rather than four-star, rank would underline this message. Indeed, the authors observe that the whole US Marine Corps, which is larger than the UK armed forces combined, is commanded by a single, four-star officer.

In many ways, the heart of the issue lies with the cultures of the three services, which emphasise their separate histories and competitions for resources. At a time when the government is seeking
to integrate the activities of its foreign policy, aid and defence sectors, and to assert that defence should make an appropriate contribution to the national prosperity, it is surely incumbent on the MoD to direct an integrated set of military efforts. To promote a stronger orientation among middle-ranking and senior officers to think in defence terms, rather than simply in the interest of their single service, the paper also proposes centralised career management for all officers above lieutenant colonel (and its Royal Navy and RAF equivalents).
Introduction

DEFENCE IS NO stranger to initiatives aimed at improving its performance through organisational change. The promised but delayed Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy represents an ambitious effort to bring greater coherence, relevance and effectiveness to UK activities across a number of departments of state. It will doubtless give significant attention to how the Ministry of Defence (MoD) itself, and the military forces for which it is responsible, can be better arranged. This paper provides a brief historical background on the organisational evolution of defence since the beginning of the 20th century, before looking in depth at the present situation. It accordingly offers recommendations for improvement.

For the most part, organisational change within defence has been focused on unifying authority. Historically it should not be forgotten that the Royal Navy and the British Army had separate origins in different time periods, and indeed the centralisation of defence management conceivably began only with the establishment of the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1904. During the Second World War, Prime Minister Winston Churchill made himself Defence Minister to direct the Chiefs of Staff Committee, which, at the time, was the prime coordination body for the three services. In 1946, the MoD was formed, under a new permanent cabinet post – minister of defence, although the incumbent’s responsibilities were limited to the apportionment of available resources between the single services and the settlement of common policy issues concerning general administration. Twelve years later, the Defence Board was formed, and the post of chief of the defence staff (CDS) was created as the minister of defence’s principal military adviser. The next major change saw the establishment of a unified MoD, absorbing the Admiralty, War Office and Air Ministry, under a single secretary of state for defence in 1964. Seven years later, in 1971, the Ministry of Aviation Supply was also included. In 1981, the MoD’s ministerial structure was changed with the abolition of the ministers for each of the three services and their replacement by junior ministers with functional responsibilities. Finally, the central organisation for defence was again assessed in 1984, which resulted in the

5. Today these include one minister of state (the minister for defence procurement) and two parliamentary under secretaries of state (the minister for the armed forces and the minister for defence people and veterans).
establishment of a unified defence staff, under the direction of the vice-chief of the defence staff (VCDS), and an office of management and budget, controlled by the 2nd permanent under secretary for defence.\(^6\)

Below the MoD Head Office, defence has also experienced significant organisational centralisation, primarily within the areas of procurement and support, but also in operations and training after the end of the Cold War. In 1971, following the Downey Report,\(^7\) the three services’ equipment procurement authorities were replaced by a single, defence-wide body: the MoD Procurement Executive (PE). Twenty years later, in 1991, the single-service-focused research bodies were brought together into a single Defence Research Agency, before being extended into the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) in 1995. In turn, DERA was divided into the privatised QinetiQ company and the governmental Defence Science and Technology Laboratory in 2001.\(^8\) The next major change came with the introduction of the Smart Procurement (to become Acquisition) Initiative as part of the 1998 Strategic Defence Review (SDR).\(^9\) This resulted in the creation of the Defence Procurement Agency (DPA) in 1999, which succeeded the MoD PE, and the amalgamation of the single services logistics departments and MoD central logistics agencies into the Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO) in 2000. Following an internal MoD study,\(^10\) the DPA and the DLO merged to form the Defence Equipment and Support (DE&S) organisation in 2007.

The one change programme that bucked the movement towards centralisation was the New Management Strategy (NMS). Introduced in 1991, its aim was ‘a better management of defence, to enable the purchase of a higher level of defence programme that would otherwise be the case’.\(^11\) It was based on the principles that management must be accountable, ‘objectives and responsibility must be clear, and authority must match responsibility’.\(^12\) NMS was output based, encouraging delegation through the creation of a new top-level budget (TLB) structure that merged the traditional parallel hierarchies of command (typically military) and financial (typically civilian) authority.

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In the decade that followed the end of the Cold War, defence pursued a number of cost-saving initiatives that created defence-wide bodies to replace some duplicated facilities in each of the services. For example, the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC) was established as a result of the 1998 SDR. Based at the Defence Academy at Shrivenham under a two-star director, it is the MoD’s think tank with a remit to ‘inform Defence strategy, capability development, operations and provide the foundation for joint education’. There was also a desire to instil more standardised joint training and education through the replacement of the single services’ staff training facilities (at Greenwich, Camberley and Bracknell) with a Joint Services Command and Staff College (JSCSC), also at Shrivenham. A tri-service Advanced Command and Staff Course, albeit with one of its three terms initially devoted to a single service phase, welcomed its first OF-3 and OF-4 students in 1997. It was followed three years later by the Higher Command and Staff Course, also tri-service, for officers of OF-5 and OF-6 rank.

In the emerging era of expeditionary operations, defence also sought to coordinate the warfighting activities of the three services more closely, to pool their expertise and maximise their punch, while at the same time eliminating duplication and waste. The most obvious examples of this approach were the establishment of the Permanent Joint Headquarters at Northwood in 1996, to centralise the operational command of UK deployments overseas, and the creation of the Joint Rapid Reaction Force, which was to be the spearhead of the UK’s modernised, rapidly deployable and better supported front line.

14. The Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre was originally formed as the Joint Concepts and Doctrine Centre.
16. For its first three years, the Joint Services Command and Staff College was located at RAF Bracknell. It relocated to a purpose-built facility at Shrivenham in 2000.
To some degree, almost all of the change initiatives experienced by defence in recent times have had the effect of eroding the authority of the single services and a reasonable generalisation would be that, as a result, the single services resisted what they considered to be constraints on their independence from other defence institutions. A timeline of that change is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Defence Organisational Change

The most recent reorganisation of the high-level management of defence, however, somewhat reversed that trend. The changes introduced as a result of the post-2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) Defence Reform Programme, more commonly referred to within defence as the ‘Levene Reforms’, were intended to ‘build on the strengths of the individual Services and the Civil Service … within a single Defence framework that ensures the whole is more than the sum of its parts’.21 Almost 10 years on, the jury is arguably still out as to whether that intention was achieved.

Aim

This paper explores the consequences of the Levene Reforms that were made between 2011 and 2014 to the management of defence. It also provides a case for further change. It argues that,

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although the delegated model solved many of the legacy problems from Smart Acquisition, it also created new ones. Principally, it handed too much authority for decision-making in capability management to the single services and weakened the MoD Head Office to a point where it was no longer able to oversee suitable defence-wide accountability and assurance controls. To counter this, the management of defence needs to be realigned to a more centralised position, which should be reinforced by a change in the career management construct for senior officers.

**Approach and Method**

As the references provided hitherto indicate, the paper is based extensively on government documentation, National Audit Office and parliamentary publications, and material from specified media sources. It builds on the completed PhD research on a related topic by one of the authors and on the extensive experience of both authors of interacting with uniformed and civilian defence personnel over many years. One author was an RAF officer of air rank who served in a wide range of defence management roles and the other worked for Cranfield University at the Defence Academy and then at RUSI. Wherever possible, there are specific references to support the claims in the paper but a fundamental element in the weight of its argument is the logic associated with the needs of the UK and the expectations of its public that its armed forces should be coherent and efficient in the generation of military capabilities appropriate for the current world.
I. Characteristics of the Levene Reforms

To fit in with an approaching four-year Comprehensive Spending Review, the 2010 SDSR had to be completed in a little more than five months – the shortest time taken for any defence review since the end of the Cold War. As a result, it could not ‘deal with the whole range of difficulties confronting defence’ and the government therefore commissioned a series of further studies, which delivered their findings separately over the next 12 to 18 months. As Paul Cornish and Andrew Dorman note, these studies ‘included a review of the defence acquisition process’, ‘a study of reserve forces’, a ‘report of the Military Covenant Task Force’, a ‘white paper on science and technology’ and the defence reform report. It was the defence reform report that generated the most significant change in the management of defence since the 1980s.

Defence Reform was commissioned under the chairmanship of Lord Peter Levene, who had previously been appointed from the private sector by then Secretary of State for Defence Michael Heseltine and served as chief of defence procurement for six years in the 1980s. Its remit was to ‘conduct a fundamental review of how the MoD is structured and managed, in order to design a model for departmental management which is simpler and more cost-effective, with clear

23. Ibid. For this review, see MoD, Better Defence Acquisition: Improving How We Procure and Support Defence Equipment, Cm 8626 (London: The Stationery Office, 2013).
27. MoD, Defence Reform.
allocation of responsibility, authority and accountability’. The subsequent report identified 53 recommendations on the reorganisation of the MoD, the most significant being:

- ‘Create a new and smaller Defence Board, chaired by the Defence Secretary to strengthen top level decision making;
- Clarify the responsibilities of senior leaders, including the Permanent Secretary and the Chief of Defence Staff, to strengthen individual accountability;
- Make the Head Office smaller and more strategic, to make high level balance of investment decisions, set strategic direction and a strong corporate framework, and hold to account;
- Focus the Service Chiefs on running their Service and empower them to perform their role effectively, with greater freedom to manage, as part of a much clearer framework of financial accountability and control;
- Strengthen financial and performance management throughout the Department to ensure that future plans are affordable and that everyone owns their share of responsibility for this;
- Create a 4 star-led Joint Forces Command, to strengthen the focus on joint enablers and on joint warfare development’.

Levene developed a consolidated summary of the core functions that the MoD needed to undertake to meet its basic purpose of defending the UK and its Overseas Territories, citizens and interests:

- ‘Direct – understand the strategic context, make Defence policy and strategy, define and resource the necessary military capability and strategically direct operations and Defence Diplomacy;
- Generate and Develop – generate force elements to meet current operations and potential military tasks and develop the future force; a key enabler of which is to:
- Acquire – procure and support the equipment, systems and commodities needed in the short and long term;
- Enable – enable the other functions by performing or commissioning supporting services, such as infrastructure, corporate services and science and technology;
- Operate – use military capability on operations and other military tasks, as directed by Government; and
- Account – manage, control and account for the resources voted by Parliament, and report on Defence activities to Parliament and the public’.

These functions were grouped into a construct that articulated who was responsible for each function: the Defence Operating Model (DOM, Figure 2). The DOM provided the owners of each function with the authority to discharge them and identified how the functions related to each other.

28. Ibid., p. 9.
29. Ibid., p. 4.
30. Ibid., p. 16.
The Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government published Levene’s report on 27 June 2011, and then Defence Secretary Liam Fox endorsed its recommendations in a statement to the House of Commons on the same day. Thereafter, the MoD set about implementing the recommendations at pace. The Defence Reform Unit that had supported Levene during the study was retained to assist the reforming directorates within the MoD Head Office. Four months later, Fox was able to confirm the establishment of the new Defence Board and Major Projects Review Board, the creation of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation and the Defence Business Services organisation, and the appointment of Air Chief Marshal Stuart Peach as the first commander of Joint Forces Command (JFC). Not surprisingly, the organisational changes necessary to accommodate the single services’ new financial delegations for capability management took longer to implement, and it was not until April 2014 that they achieved full operating capability. In his 2015 annual review of the Defence Reform Programme, Levene recognised that the MoD had ‘achieved the great majority of the reform programme I set for it in 2011’.

The MoD strengthened Levene’s reforms through the publication of a hierarchy of formal documentation for the management of defence. At the highest level, it introduced ‘How Defence Works’\textsuperscript{34} – an operating model and control framework constructed around Levene’s core functions (at the time of writing, a fully revised version of the document was in development with a planned publication date of spring 2020\textsuperscript{35}). Beneath this direction was a layer of overarching functional guidance, which primarily consisted of department-wide operating models for finance and military capability\textsuperscript{36} and an acquisition operating system underpinned by the Acquisition System Handbook.\textsuperscript{37} At the bottom of the governance structure was internal direction written by the single services. Unsurprisingly, this direction has taken different forms, with the British Army including it in its own service-wide operating model,\textsuperscript{38} the RN producing a capability management handbook,\textsuperscript{39} and the RAF opting for a specific finance and military capability operating model.\textsuperscript{40}

\textsuperscript{35.} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38.} British Army, \textit{Army Operating Model} (Andover: Army HQ, 2015).
\textsuperscript{40.} Royal Air Force, \textit{Air Finance and Military Capability Operating Model} (High Wycombe: HQ Air, 2015).
II. Observations from the Implementation of the Levene Reforms

The MOD HAS been living with the Levene Reforms for almost a decade and, during that time, a number of key themes and issues regarding its implementation and operation have emerged. The most significant of these are discussed below.

Capability Management

Prior to the Levene Reforms, capability management still operated under the principles of Smart Acquisition amended by Through Life Capability Management (TLCM) fundamentals. The clear strength of this approach was the ability to consider capability management through a joint prism. Its obvious weakness was that the single services had no responsibility, accountability or authority and simply acted as ‘pressure groups’ in the process. The result was frequent ‘requirement creep’ with capabilities over-specified to a point where their performance, time and cost envelope often became very challenging. The Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carriers, Nimrod MRA4 and even what became the British Army’s Scout programme were marked by these features. Moreover, the view from the single services was that all of the critical capability decisions were taken by both the Equipment Capability Customer (ECC) and the DE&S project team during the acquisition phase, with capability then ‘thrown over the wall’ for the relevant user to manage in service.

The alignment of responsibility, accountability and authority for capability management to the single services, widely referred to across defence as the ‘delegated model’, was Levene’s solution to the problems above. In the main, and especially from the viewpoint in Portsmouth, Andover and High Wycombe, the delegated model did address the shortfalls in the previous system. However, it brought with it some unhelpful second- and third-order effects. These included poor implementation, differing interpretations of the new levels of


42. Private conversations between the authors and serving military officers.
responsibility, a lack of suitably qualified and experienced personnel, and an overemphasis on environment-specific capability over cross-cutting capability.\textsuperscript{43}

Some of these issues, such as the lack of suitably qualified and experienced personnel, should disappear over time as personnel become more familiar with the new operating environment and training catches up with extant ways of working. The differing views on responsibility boundaries, however, are of more consequence and not easily resolved. It is clear that there is a considerable disconnect between what the single services think they are responsible for, and the authority senior staff from the MoD Head Office believe has been delegated to them. Even in a decentralised operating construct, some amount of centralised direction and control is necessary. MoD Head Office remains the strategic headquarters and must retain responsibility to ensure defence policy is serviced to the best of defence’s ability. However, evidence suggests that the single services were given too much latitude to implement their own idea of the delegated model within their own area of responsibility. UK defence policy has remained multifaceted and ambitious with the 2015 SDSR presenting the services with three major objectives, each with numerous sub-objectives,\textsuperscript{44} without tight guidance on the key issue of prioritisation. As a result, the single services now enjoy considerable freedom of manoeuvre in their decisions over, and development of, military capability.

Financial Management

On a strictly financial basis, entrusting funding to the single services has clearly not helped the MoD to manage its overcommitment, especially in the equipment space.\textsuperscript{45} When the services are in a competition for resources, as retired Colonel Bryan Watters underlines is the case,\textsuperscript{46} they are incentivised to understate rather than pronounce accurately the full eventual costs of commitments being made. While service chiefs can be held to account for their choices, this applies only during their three-year term. Thus, they are under little pressure to worry about the possible consequences of decisions that arise after they have left office. The cynical might suspect they could be tempted to game the system by making commitments that are affordable in the short term, but excessively expensive through life. Such commitments may be politically difficult to reverse in the longer term, even when the full cost implications become

\begin{itemize}
  \item Andrew Curtis, ‘Why Does the UK Have the Military That It Has?’, PhD thesis, King’s College London, 2020, p. 212.
\end{itemize}
apparent. For instance, the simultaneous operation of two carrier strike groups will be a considerable challenge.  

With an overheated Equipment Plan, pressure continues to mount on capability managers to deliver efficiencies within their programmes. Indeed, securing efficiencies is perhaps the most vexing issue within the boundaries of MoD financial management today. The need to deliver efficiencies was integral to the MoD’s 2018 Modernising Defence Programme, and continues to feature significantly in contemporary investigations into the Defence Equipment Plan. The sums of money involved are significant; for example, in the 2015 SDSR, the MoD, together with security and intelligence agencies and cross-government counterterrorism, were given responsibility for delivering more than £11 billion of savings. Furthermore, the way efficiencies have been managed to date puts budget holders on the back foot from the outset. In the recent past, efficiency targets have been divided among TLB holders with budget totals commensurately reduced. This system of ‘wedging’ takes money from capability managers, as well as many others, before they can even consider the measures they could enact to manage the shortfall. As a result, their default response is a ‘salami slicing’ of control totals across all programmes, which often leads to reductions in sustainability and training, or delivery delays and cost overruns.

The obvious flaw in the traditional approach to achieving efficiencies was the lack of any incentive for capability managers to reduce expenditure, as any cost reductions they generated were simply taken by the MoD Head Office as a saving to the overall defence budget. Recognising this, in 2015 the government explicitly allowed the MoD to ‘invest efficiency savings into the armed forces’. This was flowed down to TLB holders, which meant the single services could be confident of being able to benefit from their own efficiency measures. This has, however, created an unfavourable consequence. A perceived efficiency today will produce a cost reduction profile that is projected over the relevant programme’s budget for future years. Once the efficiency measure is accepted, the reduced budget figures are programmed into the overall TLB, seemingly creating headroom in the profile. But that headroom only exists on paper until the efficiency measure is actually enacted, which is often a year-on-year occurrence. As a consequence, the actual delivery of

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47. Working on a 3 to 1 ratio to guarantee availability, the Royal Navy requires a fleet of 24 frigates and destroyers just to ensure it can maintain four escorts for each carrier strike group – and that leaves no assured capacity to undertake any other tasks. However, the UK’s current Equipment Plan provides for a total of just 19 frigates and destroyers (six Type 45 destroyers, eight Type 26 and five Type 31 frigates).


51. Ibid., p. 27.
the cost reduction frequently cannot be confirmed until it happens. Nevertheless, to benefit from the efficiency, capability managers have to plan to spend against the perceived budgetary headroom in advance and, in most cases, commit to that expenditure in the form of a contract. The result is committed expenditure against a non-guaranteed efficiency. Consequently, if the anticipated cost reduction is not delivered, the overall defence budget deficit increases. This situation already exists across all the services. Furthermore, as it is essentially internal, TLB business and the effects may not be felt for years to come, estimating its defence-wide impact and instigating appropriate mitigation will not be easy.

Increasing Influence of the Single Services

The single services are different. The environments within which they operate, the traditions they have assimilated over time to develop the culture and ethos they have today, and their visions for the future are all distinct. The simple adage that the Royal Navy and the RAF man the equipment while the Army equips the man is a powerful indicator of their contrasting approaches to capability development. However, there are dangers in combining the naturally individualistic approach of the single services with a delegated model that, at the very least, provides latitude for nonconformist agendas to be pursued. In increasing the single services’ responsibility, accountability and authority for capability management, the Levene Reforms have given them far more freedom to exercise their individuality. The delegated model has been designed to improve defence’s ability to develop and maintain military capability, but it has also introduced a tension around the needs of the joint force versus the aspirations of the single services.

A prime aspect of this reality is that the Royal Navy, Army and RAF have almost total control over the careers of their officers. Thus, even officers posted to joint appointments have to be aware that, if they behave in ways perceived to be at odds with the interest of their service, future promotion could well be at stake. The services understand the power over behaviour that career management brings and jealously hung on to it when the Levene Reforms were being considered. For example, even though Levene’s recommendation of an enhanced role for the Senior Appointments Committee was accepted, the individual services still decide which candidates are put before them for any given competition. Also, perhaps because the three services have less visibility of their people in joint posts, the authors have anecdotal evidence that positive annual appraisals written by an officer from one of the other services, or the civil service, are often overlooked by individual service promotion boards.

In today’s resource-constrained environment, it is self-evident that the single services in general, and the service chiefs in particular, must be prepared to compromise to ensure the right capability to meet the requirements of the joint force is procured and maintained, regardless of their individual aspirations. However, at the highest level, the DOM is not overly conducive to this

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52. Curtis, ‘Why Does the UK Have the Military That It Has?’, p. 269.
53. MoD, Defence Reform, p. 57.
54. Private conversations between the authors and serving military officers.
collegiate approach. Instead, it confirms that the service chiefs have specific responsibility for identifying the most effective and affordable force structure and capabilities needed to realise defence requirements, and then developing their service to deliver them. It also confirms that they have no main responsibility for defence strategy, allocating resources or managing defence at a business level. To that end, defence’s extant ways of working encourage service chiefs to focus on their own service, which they would naturally want to pass on to their successor in as healthy and prominent a state as it was received, while absolving them of any formal, collective responsibility to do the same for defence as a whole. Ultimately, a significant characteristic of the current system is that the pressures on individuals to ‘think defence’ are weak compared with those that direct them to think of their service.

Decreasing Influence of MoD Head Office

The Defence Reforms had envisaged that the MoD Head Office would give sufficient direction to the single services to yield coherence and efficiency because, ultimately, it is a central responsibility to ensure defence policy is serviced within the available budget. It is, however, hard to evidence that this has taken place. Overall, the control and steering of the services was to be undertaken through the specification of policy and strategy, centre-generated regulation (such as the Armed Forces Act) and through scrutiny and approval processes for investments.

Regarding coherence, it is important to realise the extent to which defence management is a matter of prioritisation. Undoubtedly, the rustication of staff from the old ECC to the service commands left the MoD Head Office lacking both expertise and capacity. As a result, it is regularly overmatched by its subordinate organisations and struggles to undertake its capability development scrutiny and approval role. An overall theme of the Levene Reforms was that the MoD Head Office could and should be smaller. However, the observations above suggest the pendulum may have swung too far and an element of rebalancing may now be required.

Future Operating Concept

Crucially, the most demanding operations in the future will not be conducted by a single service but will require the services to work together even more seamlessly than in the past. Moreover, the UK’s most recent Future Force Concept makes it clear that defence must ‘enhance joint action … through exploiting information better, being more integrated as a force … and more adaptable to changing circumstances’. This is not the place for a lengthy analysis of multi-domain operations, let alone the latest US concept of ‘all-domain operations’. Suffice it to say the widely perceived key to future success on operations is to generate information from a

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55. Development to include: recruiting; educating; training; equipping; preparing; and sustaining.
56. MoD, Defence Reform, p. 27.
wide range of sensors on land, on the sea, in the air, in space and in cyberspace, make sense of it, and distribute it to all relevant force elements who can then act, as quickly as possible.\textsuperscript{59} In the US, and to a lesser extent the UK, individual services are competing for dominance of such matters but, from an external perspective, the UK emphasis needs to be on the coordination and even integration of efforts across defence, not the autonomy of the three services.

In a core sense, the driver for more integrated structures in defence is technological change in computing, software, sensors and exploitation of the electromagnetic spectrum, coupled with precision weapons that can be launched from land, sea and air, which are the source of key enhancements in military capability. Yet, as has been extensively studied across the defence academic community, military organisations have frequently resisted technology advances that render obsolete extant ways of working and make irrelevant previously valued experience.\textsuperscript{60}

### Summary of Observations

In implementing the Defence Reforms, a key consideration is that UK defence policy is extremely wide ranging and ambitious. Indeed, it is hard to find any plan for the development of a particular capability that could not be justified within one of the eight extant armed forces missions.\textsuperscript{61} This provides the individual services enormous scope for prioritising the tasks they prefer and in which they have a central role. However, achieving coherence between them, and ensuring vital joint-enabling capability is not disregarded, becomes extremely challenging. There is thus a clear risk of inconsistency in defence-wide military capability decision making, and an increased likelihood that the needs of the joint force will be overlooked in favour of the wants of the single services. Some recognition of these matters was apparent in the changes announced in 2019 for JFC.


\textsuperscript{60} For an excellent exploration of this topic, which discusses a wide range of earlier literature, see Terry Pierce, \textit{Warfighting and Disruptive Technologies: Disguising Innovation} (London: Frank Cass, 2004).

III. Joint Forces Command to Strategic Command

The Defence Reform report concluded that joint enabling military capabilities were ‘not organised and managed as coherently or effectively as they could be’.\(^6^2\) To that end, one of Levene’s key recommendations was the creation of JFC ‘to manage and deliver specific joint capabilities and to take the lead on joint warfare development, drawing on lessons and experimentation to advise on how the Armed Forces should conduct joint operations in the future’.\(^6^3\) JFC was subsequently established with its headquarters at Northwood. It achieved initial operating capability on 2 April 2012, and full operating capability exactly one year later.

In September 2018, CDS and the permanent secretary commissioned a review to examine from first principles the scope for further improvements in the management and delivery of JFC’s current functions and outputs, and how best to deliver improved pan-defence integration/coherence and future-focused force development. In January 2019, the two-star-led review team concluded that there was an enduring and compelling rationale for a future joint organisation to exist within defence, building on JFC. Moreover, it confirmed Levene’s judgement had stood the test of time and that the demands of a future contested environment meant that any successor to the JFC should take on a series of increased responsibilities. Specifically, the review recommended the new organisation should operate more clearly as an agent of the MoD Head Office, vested with appropriate authority, assisting defence to think strategically and to be responsible for a defined range of strategic and pan-defence capabilities.

In July 2019, then Secretary of State for Defence Penny Mordaunt announced that JFC would be renamed Strategic Command and take responsibility for a range of strategic and defence-wide capabilities. The formal change of title was on 9 December 2019.\(^6^4\)

Strategic Command’s first commander, General Patrick Sanders, took to Twitter in January 2020 to explain the three basic roles and responsibilities of his new command.\(^6^5\) The first was to generate and develop the strategic capabilities that the UK will need to compete, and if

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62. MoD, *Defence Reform*, p. 44.
63. Ibid.
necessary, to fight ‘sub-threshold’, which he listed as space, cyberspace, special operations
and information operations. It also includes command of the strategic base (namely, defence
facilities within the UK) and the UK’s global bases, as well as overseeing the capabilities required
to deploy and mobilise, such as logistics, support and medical. Sanders defined this as a ‘vertical’
role, similar to the single services’ capability management responsibilities in the maritime, land
and air environments.

He described the other two roles as ‘horizontal’. The first of these was leading the digital
modernisation of defence, which involves generating and developing an integrated force fit
for information age warfare. The second concerned integration. Here, Sanders confirmed
that Strategic Command would become defence’s integrating command, responsible for the
MoD’s input into cross-government fusion, defence’s multi-domain integration (across the five
warfighting domains of maritime, land, air, space and cyberspace) and integration with allies.

Embedded within these roles is Strategic Command’s remit to be a more obvious agent of
Head Office. As part of the MoD’s ongoing adoption of the government’s Functional Model, the
Strategic Command is expected to provide a number of defence’s functional owners. Although
details are yet to be confirmed, the combined structure of the MoD Head Office and Strategic
Command is looking more like the traditional military staff construct with the MoD Head Office
chief operating officer acting as a chief of staff and senior joint appointments roughly aligning
to the following branches:

**Table 1: Senior MoD Head Office and Strategic Command Staff Appointments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Branch/Function</th>
<th>Current Post</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J1 Personnel</td>
<td>Chief of Defence People</td>
<td>Head Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J2 Intelligence</td>
<td>Chief of Defence Intelligence</td>
<td>Strategic Command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J3 Operations</td>
<td>DCDS Military Strategy and Operations</td>
<td>Head Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J4 Logistics</td>
<td>Chief of Defence Logistics &amp; Support</td>
<td>Strategic Command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J5 Plans</td>
<td>DG Strategy and International</td>
<td>Head Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J6 Communication</td>
<td>Chief Information Officer</td>
<td>Strategic Command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J7 Training</td>
<td>DG Joint Force Development</td>
<td>Strategic Command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J8 Finance</td>
<td>DCDS Military Capability/DG Finance</td>
<td>Head Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J9 Policy</td>
<td>DG Security Policy</td>
<td>Head Office</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Author generated.*

However, although the emerging structure looks coherent, it is not without its problems. In the
first instance, it has evolved piecemeal, rather than as part of a holistic plan to tackle the higher
management of defence. Posts have been created within the MoD Head Office – for example,

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director transformation and director risk – which have no real power to direct the broader activity beyond. At best, they can only influence. Finally, the pan-defence implementation of the government’s Functional Model will be extremely challenging. It could be argued that a system for organising activities that cut across organisational boundaries is anathema to defence. In a construct where the single services control their own budgets, it is questionable how enthusiastic they will be to accept central direction on cross-cutting activities, such as logistics and support, especially if that direction is at odds with their own envisioned direction of travel.
ON BALANCE, THE changes brought about by the Levene Reforms have been for the better, but that is not to say there is no need for further improvements. Levene moved the MoD from a highly centralised model to one that is highly disaggregated; it should not be a surprise that the preferable answer for the 21st century is somewhere in the middle. Moreover, there is broad agreement that delegation will not last forever and the cyclical nature of organisational change is likely to prompt a more centralised reset in due course.\(^67\) In line with this thinking, this paper suggests that additional measures are needed now to build further coherence in the defence effort. Much more than before the Levene Reforms, the services generate capabilities and prepare separately, and hope that they will be able to operate together if the need arises. If defence is to fully embrace the opportunities offered by the integration of activity across all five operating domains, and to prioritise in a coherent way, hope cannot be a planning factor. A solution must be found to ensure that the single services retain sufficient freedom of manoeuvre to procure and maintain appropriate military capability. Such a solution should also provide the MoD Head Office with sufficient powers of direction and control to ensure that the capability choices of the individual commands actually deliver an appropriate joint force.

In his recent speech to the Air and Space Power Conference, Secretary of State Ben Wallace acknowledged that the status quo is not satisfactory:

> We’re no longer in the business of relying on one fighter, or on one type of aircraft that can do one thing. You will need to defend, police, control and command the battlespace. That requires multi-role capabilities. But it also requires greater integration between the services ... We need to do things differently, moving from a joint force to an integrated force, with every asset and capability we have, seamlessly, in real time, with our partners and allies, to hold our adversaries to risk.\(^68\)

### Organisational Change

Given the complications and specific roles involved, a detailed reorganisation of the governmental defence sector cannot be provided in a brief overview such as this. The MoD would probably opt to hire consultants to get this done in any case. However, the authors conclude that the

\(^{67}\) Private conversations between the authors and senior officers within both the MoD Head Office and the Service Command Headquarters.

cohesion required for the future implies the need for a significant overhaul of the higher-level defence organisation and even cultures.

Countries vary in how they seek to organise their governmental defence sector to promote civilian direction, divide roles between uniformed and civilian public servants, and allocate tasks to the private sector. The UK is unusual in having an MoD Head Office that is both a ‘department of state’ and, in some ways, a military headquarters, with military personnel serving across the board. A more common model is to have a defence ministry providing direction and control over a separate joint defence organisation, which operates a recognisable military staff structure (such as J1 to J9) and directs and constrains the individual services.

What the authors have in mind is a ‘Head Office’ that would be primarily a department of state leading on high-level defence issues. This would include, for example: arms control and disarmament issues; defence industrial strategy and the defence’s contribution to prosperity; relations with other government departments, parliament, the media and the public; and links with foreign governments. It would also have a role in the military strategic oversight of operations. In brief, it would be organised to address the political agenda of the day.

The emerging model of ‘contracting out’ elements of department of state responsibilities to Strategic Command should be abandoned. Instead, all functional owners should reside in the Head Office, which would maintain a suitably organised strategic staff to undertake the core department of state activities of policy, strategy, planning and governance. Consisting of both military and civil servants, it should direct and cohere all defence activity through the ownership of MoD-wide policy and strategy, including the agreement of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timebound) objectives\(^\text{69}\) for all of its subordinate organisations.\(^\text{70}\) It must also have the capacity to establish and oversee suitable accountability and assurance controls across defence to ensure that policy and strategy are delivered.

A suitably resourced department of state would have no need for elements of Strategic Command to act as its ‘agent’. Instead, Strategic Command should concentrate fully on its three fundamental roles of generating strategic capabilities, leading digital modernisation and defence integration. Crucially, in the latter two roles, it must become the primary command, with authority to direct and constrain Navy Command HQ, HQ Army and HQ Air. This is fundamental to rebalancing the Levene Reforms and ensuring that the needs of the joint force prevail over the aspirations of...
the single services. Without such a change, defence’s future operating concept is unlikely ever to become a reality.

Centralisation of Senior Career Management

As uniformed personnel advance in rank, they need to move from thinking and behaving as part of their unit or specialisation to understanding the wider demands of their service and finally to recognising and contributing to the demands of defence and even security at the macro level. They do not need to be pressured into supporting the interests of their own service while serving in joint appointments. The best way to achieve this is to centralise the career management of all officers above a certain level, realistically OF-5, which would allow the single services to continue selecting their own unit commanders. This ‘Defence Senior HR Management’ function should operate within the chief of defence people’s chain of command, although it would not have to be physically located in Whitehall. Such a change would still allow individuals who wanted to maintain a single service focus with career progression predominantly within, but not solely limited to, their own service command. It would, however, also provide much better prospects than those that exist today for individuals wanting to think and act on a pan-defence basis, and would facilitate the capacity of individuals to serve in more than one service during their careers while enhancing their promotion chances. This change would be central to building the coherence that strengthening the strategic staff functions in Head Office is intended to provide. Appointing people to joint posts, when their career prospects customarily depend on favouring a single service perspective, makes little sense.

It should be stressed that what is being sought here is a culture change, particularly in the senior ranks of the armed forces, to weaken interservice rivalry and build a greater sense of common purpose. The authors recognise that all of the services work to change the outlooks of their personnel as they progress and rise. For example, the British Army remains a significantly tribal body, with young people understandably instilled with the significance and history of their own cap badge. But, over time, they are also exposed to wider thinking about the contributions of other elements of their service, and when they reach the rank of colonel, red tabs are added to the collars of their uniforms to show they belong to the Army as a whole. They become ‘late’ of their corps or regiment and join the General Staff. In none of the armed forces, however, is there provision for an individual to become a ‘defence’ person; indeed, actively thinking in such terms is seldom encouraged. Some officers may feel sufficiently liberated to ‘think defence’ when they realise they are in their last appointment, although even then the influence of the individual services remains strong.

71. Recognising there would have to be some flexibility across this personnel management boundary, as some services also have command appointments at OF-5, and MoD Head Office and Strategic Command have staff appointments at OF-4 and OF-3.
72. See also Watters, ‘Political Versus Military Leadership’, p. 41.
73. The authors have heard of one flag rank naval officer who was told by a more senior officer in his service that, if he did not promote the naval line on one particular matter, in retirement he would never be invited again to a naval function.
This paper is not suggesting going so far as to impose a common label as some countries do: for instance, all military in Australia are fundamentally part of the Australian Defence Forces and in Israel they are part of the Israeli Defence Force. But a clear signal of Strategic Command’s revised status would be to reduce the appointment of the established service chiefs to three-star rank. The comparatively high number of UK general officers has often been discussed, usually critically, and here the authors will confine themselves to the observation that the US Marine Corps, operating on land, sea and in the air, and with 186,000 full-time personnel, is larger than all the UK armed forces combined. They are all under the direction of a single four-star officer. The aim would be to leave CDS, VCDS and Commander Strategic Command as the sole four-star officers within the UK’s armed forces, which would significantly simplify command and control arrangements at the top of defence.

Intriguingly, the changes outlined above do have decades-old provenance. Prior to the establishment of a unified MoD in 1964, General Hastings Ismay and Lieutenant General Ian Roberts were asked by the minister of defence to undertake an independent study of the central organisation for defence. They outlined three options, the first of which (choice A) was maintenance of the status quo, a choice ruled out as ‘inadequate to present needs’. They went on to write:

[Choice] B – To extend the Ministry of Defence to include as subordinate departments the three Service Ministries ... the three Services to remain intact.

[Choice] C – To achieve a completely integrated, functionally organised, Ministry of Defence, with the three Services retaining their identity in units and formations while being fused together in their higher organisation.

We recommend choice B, not only because of its intrinsic merits but because it is a considerable and logical step towards choice C, which we regard as the inevitable aim. Indeed, we would suggest that if Her Majesty’s Government decided to adopt choice B, they would be well advised to announce that they were doing so with a view to the eventual attainment of choice C.

Furthermore, when considering the impact on career management of a completely integrated, functionally organised MoD, Ismay and Roberts suggested that:

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74. Recognising that, as today, a UK officer could be appointed to a four-star role in an international organisation, most obviously Deputy SACEUR in NATO.

75. For example, under the current construct, the Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) has no command responsibility for the service chiefs, a situation that former CDS Lord Richards pointed out during a recent House of Commons Select Committee inquiry, even the prime minister did not understand. For more details, see House of Commons Defence Committee, ‘Decision-Making in Defence Policy: Eleventh Report of Session 2014–15’, HC 682, 26 March 2015, p. 32.


77. Hastings Ismay and Ian Jacob, Higher Management of Defence, cover letter.
Officers would belong to their own Services until they reached the rank beyond that of unit command. There would be no change in the uniforms of the men or the officers up to this point. However, on promotion to Rear-Admiral, Major-General or Air Vice-Marshal, the picture would change. They would be promoted, no matter what their previous Service, to the same rank of the Armed Forces of the Crown. From that moment on, they would cease to be one-Service officers.]\textsuperscript{78}

Conclusion

CONSISTENT PRIORITISATION ACROSS defence is challenging, especially while national defence and security ambition is so wide ranging and ambitious. Some narrowing of the scope of responsibilities of the armed forces in the forthcoming Integrated Review would further facilitate cohesion beyond the changes suggested here. Moreover, it should also be recognised that the organisational changes proposed to encourage senior officers to think instinctively that they work for defence and not the Royal Navy, Army or RAF, would not bring instant change in attitudes. It will take time, persistent leadership from political and military figures, and modifications to military education and training. But the authors also ask if the current situation is satisfactory when, as they heard anecdotally, a group of new appointees in the MoD Head Office was asked if they had worked in defence before and most answered no, despite many of them having come from the single services. Surely the goal must be to encourage those ambitious officers best able to ‘think defence’ to work in the Head Office and Strategic Command without fearing such a posting could limit their opportunities when they return to their own service.

This paper has been prepared with little confidence that its direction of argument will be followed. The delegated model is well liked by the individual services and the service chiefs would, in all likelihood, resist any move that threatens the status quo. In doing so, they could doubtless count on plenty of support from the retired admirals, generals and air marshals commentariat. Furthermore, the authors understand that a proposal to bring together elements of senior career management has been explored in the recent past, but was dropped after it encountered stiff resistance from outside MoD Head Office. Nevertheless, the strength of single-service resistance reflects the reality that it is their control of the careers of people in ‘joint’ and defence-wide appointments that limits efforts to bring a more integrated effort into defence.

In the past, the single services have had (painfully) to adjust to technology that changed their core elements: the Royal Navy had to change from sail to steam propulsion; the Army had to adjust from reliance on the horse to the internal combustion engine; and the RAF is currently having to contemplate the reduced value of the piloted aircraft. However, today’s technological advances in surveillance, communication systems and precision weapons offer major improvements in combat capability, but, at the same time, necessitate a reduction in the degree of separation across all operating environments. This will be a significant challenge for three separate organisations accustomed to doing their ‘own thing’ and keeping joint initiatives in

79. Private conversation between one of the authors and a retired RAF two-star officer.
check by controlling the careers of those posted into joint appointments. Bureaucratic politics, analysed so ably by scholars in the 1970s, remains a force in shaping behaviour in defence.

There may also be some civil service reluctance to embrace the prospect of a more coherent military, on the grounds that a system of competing, rival services makes it easier for civilians to exercise influence. But the authors would argue the answer here should surely be to strengthen the contribution of the civilian element within the MoD, not to continue with what should be recognised as significantly anachronistic military structures. In addition to pushback from those in defence, opposition may also come from within government, as accepting the changes suggested would mean admitting that some aspects of the Levene Reforms, a Conservative party initiative, have not worked as well as was hoped. It would also be another major transformation programme for the MoD to implement at a time when the external environment is already producing a full agenda about the UK’s role in the world and multiple other issues.

That said, the authors have regularly outlined these ideas informally across the armed forces officer cadre and have been met with little resistance and, indeed, often endorsement. Many recognise the logical faults of treating maritime, land and air as separate services in the 21st century without a strong, single directing mind above them. Moreover, technological advances have demanded the elevation of both cyberspace and space alongside the traditional operating environments and produced a need for innumerable linkages among all five operating domains if military capability is to be optimised.

Notwithstanding the anticipated opposition, it is the role of think tanks to think the unthinkable and to offer lines of thought which, while in this instance are not necessarily novel, have been gathering dust for most of the last decade.

80. The US is also facing the logic outlined here and is using its culture of inter-service competition to stimulate innovation while requiring the duplicated use of some resources. As a consequence, the current situation is that the Joint Chiefs of Staff have a Joint All-Domain Command and Control concept to link every sensor to every shooter via a military ‘Internet of Things’. The US Air Force is planning an Advanced Battle Management System; the US Navy has a plan for a Naval Integrated Fire Control – Counter-Air network; and the US Army is promoting its Integrated Air and Missile Defense Battle Command System.

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