The End of Air Power History and the Last Airman?: Air Power, Liberal Democracy and the British Way of War

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This article seeks to add to the post-Cold War character of conflict debate by putting air power, its attractiveness to liberal democracies and the subsequent British way of war, in both conventional war and counter-insurgency, into historical context. The article starts with a synoptic examination of the utility of air power in what David Edgerton has called liberal militarism, enabling Britain to avoid bloody and expensive land conflict by using economic, technical and industrial superiority. The article then questions the notion that air power has limited utility in counter-insurgency by examining Britain's use of air power as part of a liberal militarist approach to counter-insurgency. The third section critically analyses the argument deployed before the SDSR that unitary, land-centric conflict would predominate and therefore Britain's armed forces needed rebalancing. The article concludes by contending the intervention in Libya is an example of liberal militarism and continuation of the British way of war. The article's conclusion is that air power remains fundamental to the British way of war in post-Cold War conflict, as it has since the First World War.

Introduction

In his seminal essay of 1989, the American philosopher Francis Fukuyama argued the end of the Cold War, and liberal democracy's defeat of fascism and communism, marked the 'the end point of mankind's ideological evolution'.[1] Fukuyama's thesis was challenged most famously by Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilisations* for failing to take into account the challenges of extreme nationalism and religious fundamentalism.[2] The impact of the end of the Cold War on the character of conflict has also been the subject of much debate.[3] In his introduction to the British government's October 2010 Strategic Security and Defence Review (SDSR), the prime minister stated a 'Cold War mind-set' had resulted in forces ill-equipped to 'fight modern wars'.[4] The purpose of the SDSR, according to General Sir Nick Houghton, the Vice Chief of Defence Staff, was to reshape the 'utility of defence to the strategic context' against a background of acute government debt, the absence of an existential threat, and a political nervousness about the use of the military instrument following the experience of Iraq and Afghanistan, and, of course operations in Afghanistan and a black hole in the Defence budget.[5]

In these difficult circumstances, Britain's post-SDSR forces were to be shaped for stabilisation operations. The army would retain five multi-role brigades to enable a brigade-sized enduring stabilisation operation, but only enough combat air to support would be retained to support two of the five deployments.[6] Similar risk was to be taken in carrier strike and maritime-patrol capabilities. The relative prioritisation of the army over the RN and RAF represented a marked change in British defence strategy. A rough measure of the disproportionate cuts to the RAF is its relative reduction in strength from forty per cent of the army's in 2010 to thirty four per cent by 2015. Thus, as a proportion of the army, the RAF's strength had more than halved since the height of the Cold War in 1951 when it was seventy per cent.[7] Throughout the Cold War the RAF's relative strength was around sixty per cent of the army's, and from 1993 it reduced gradually to forty-five per cent in 2005. While the Arab Spring appears to prove Fukuyama's thesis that the desire to live in a modern, technologically advanced and prosperous society is universal, the outcome of the Libyan intervention is as yet unknown. But thus far it has been a reminder of the utility of air power in an age of uncertainty, with the RN and RAF using apparent Cold War legacies destined for reduction or deletion following the SDSR: the Type 22 frigates, Nimrod R1, Sentinel R1 and Tornado GR4, causing Paul Cornish to recently suggest the SDSR may be one of the fastest failures in 'modern strategic history'.[8]

There is a growing body of work on recent British defence strategy and the SDSR. Much of it has focused on the lack of leadership, strategy and coherence. Anthony King recently highlighted the failure of British political and senior military leadership to articulate a strategy linking ends, ways and means.[9] Paul Cornish and Andrew Dorman attribute this to 'campaign tribalism'; where pressure on the defence budget has led to unprecedented inter-service rivalry.[10] Timothy Edmunds has characterised the key inter-service difference as power-projection verses stabilisation. Edmunds thinks the two are interrelated as the latter often follows the former.[11] Anthony King notes the army in the SDSR won a 'Pyrrhic victory on the

basis of its geographically tiny campaign in southern Afghanistan' but at the cost of a navy and air force of sufficient size and capability to deploy and sustain it.[12]

According to General Houghton, the question as to whether the character of conflict had changed was central; indeed he described the MOD's own *Future Character of Conflict* study as the intellectual underpinning of the SDSR.[13] The idea that conflict evolves is not new. Fukuyama took the phrase 'end of history' from Hegel, the German historicist philosopher who saw human history as a coherent, evolutionary process of human understanding. Hegel used 'end of history' to describe the impact of revolutionary France's defeat of Prussia at Jena in 1806. Another German, writing at the same time as Hegel and using the same dialectic method of argument, thought Napoleon's use of conscripted, mass armies to win battles of annihilation represented an idealist notion of unlimited war - a revolution in military affairs. His subsequent study of Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo led Clausewitz to develop the idea of limited war as an extension of politics.[14] In the period leading up to the SDSR, Clausewitz's notion of the unchanging nature of war was widely used to critique the hubris of the information-age revolution in military affairs, and the neo-conservative belief that the US could define war in its own terms and impose democracy using shock and awe. The rapidly changing character of conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan', it was argued, demonstrated these post-Cold War enemies were adapting to the western way of warfare, and reducing the effectiveness of its defining element – air power.[15]

This article examines why successive British governments since the First World War regarded air power as central to the British way of war. It then examines the arguments used leading up to the SDSR that changes in the character of conflict made Britain's relative prioritisation of air power outmoded. The article contends that the notion of air power having limited utility in counter-insurgency is ahistorical and furthermore the idea that Afghanistan heralds the character of all conflict for British forces in 'the post-Cold War world' is flawed.

Air Force Elitism

Britain's relative prioritisation of air power in the twentieth century was a continuation of the British way of warfare, based on maritime, economic, industrial and technical strength, and what Basil Liddell Hart called an indirect approach.[16] In the eighteenth century, the transformation of the English economy by naval warfare and taxes had created a great power without loss of liberty at home. Articulating the requirements of imperial defence in the nineteenth century, machine age, Sir Colomb had described the navy as the 'shield' and the army the 'spear'.[17] Likewise, Paul Kennedy subsequently described imperial maritime strategy as a defensive strategy: Britain could afford long wars and an indirect approach because of its industrial strength, whereas decisive victory against a European enemy required a bloody continental land campaign, preferably using an ally's army.[18] In the twentieth century Britain's war machine was built, as David Edgerton has written, on weapons, resources and boffins, not on manpower, and the aeroplane had a special place.[19] The nexus of Britain's imperial strategy

and continental war occurred in 1917 and again in 1940, when an enemy air force was within striking range in Europe.[20]

During the First World War Britain's organisation and use of air power was like that of other nations - navy and army air services supporting their parent services - until they proved powerless to stop two German Gotha bomber daylight formation raids on London in June and July 1917. Britain's particular fear of the bomber in fact predated the First World War, when many novelists, including H G Wells, and newspapers such as the Daily Mail, foresaw the bomber as the new battleship, threatening British strategic invulnerability, and the panic caused by the bombing of cities.[21] The War Cabinet's response to the air raids, which killed and wounded six hundred people and threatened war production through absenteeism, was to appoint a two-man committee – the prime minister, Lloyd George, and the South African general Jan Smuts - to examine air defence and the organisation of the air services.[22] Smuts's first report on air defence eight days later established the key principle of unified command of the air defences.[23] By August the reorganised air defences had forced the Gothas to operate by night and by May 1918 the raids had stopped. In August 1917 the cabinet accepted the recommendation of the second report to form a separate Air Ministry and a new air service to be responsible for all military aircraft. The report predicted a revolution in military affairs:

> *The day may not be far off when the aerial operations with their devastation of enemy land and the destruction of industrial and populous centres on a vast scale may become the principal operations of war, to which the older forms of military and naval operations may become secondary and subordinate.*[24]

The navy and army objected to the decision, thinking it threatened their air support.[25] Field Marshal Haig, a firm proponent of air power for army support, thought the new air service's strategic role a flawed distraction.[26] Air power had become vital to what Jonathon Bailey has called the modern system of warfare.[27] Whereas the 1914 battlefield would have been familiar to Clausewitz, by 1918 the use of combined arms on the battlefield - key to which was indirect artillery fire – had caused a revolution in military affairs and would be familiar now. German possession of key terrain meant the British on the Western Front were particularly dependent on the Royal Flying Corps for aerial observation and therefore control of the air. Other air power roles as such as interdiction and the close support of tanks were growing in importance on the Western Front, but not yet essential to battlefield success.[28] The exception perhaps was the RAF's destruction of a routed Turkish army on the battlefield at Megiddo was a harbinger of Falaise in 1944 and the Basra Road in 1991.[29]

The government's interwar policy of prioritising strategic air power was a combination of the indirect approach, and political and public fear of a 'knock-out blow' from the air. The RAF's institutional need to protect its independence encouraged its advocacy of strategic air power; inviting a literary scholar to write the history of *The War in the Air*. Thus despite the so-called Ten-year Rule which assumed no great war for ten years, the British government quickly realised

the strategic importance of matching enemy air forces – deciding in 1923 to create a home defence air force of fifty-two bomber and fighter squadrons, an air equivalent to the navy's one-power standard.[30] As a result the UK maintained the world's largest strategic air force between 1925 and 1935. The Defence Requirements Committee in 1934 recognised Germany as the foremost long-term threat to Britain and directly led to the government prioritising air rearmament. Subsequently the Chamberlain government's Inskip doctrine of December 1937 prioritised air defence over bombers and all other rearmament in order to prevent the 'knock-out blow' and allow Britain to fight a long war using its war economy, which by 1939-1940 was out producing Germany's.[31] Revisionist historians of the appeasement controversy now argue that Chamberlain's wholly defensive military policy made poor use of Britain's relative strength and failed to defend ally France or deter Hitler.[32]

These interwar policies greatly shaped Britain's war machine, and its subsequent strategy in the Second World War.[33] There was no German 'knock-out blow' as the German air force's role was army support. The last-minute British decision in February 1939 to send an expeditionary force to France meant it was ill-prepared for combined arms warfare.[34] The allied loss of control of the air, notwithstanding significant losses on both sides, contributed greatly to the unexpected fall of France. The War Office committee investigating the defeat recommended an army air corps equipped with dive bombers and until it was formed the RAF should support the British Army at the expense of other tasks.[35] Fighter Command then won the battle it had been established to fight. The Inskip doctrine had directed Bomber Command be ready in 1942, and before then it was ineffective.[36] Though the strategic bomber offensive has been criticised as being futile, for example by Max Hastings's *Bomber Command*,[37] economic historians have shown its vital impact distorting German strategy and economic capability. By mid-1943, the bombing campaign had forced to Luftwaffe to focus almost entirely on air defence, destroyed at least thirty per cent of industrial production, interrupted Germany's raw materials and energy resources, and forced it to divert resources into wonder weapons such as the V-bombs.[38] However the contested ethics of the campaign, which Clausewitz would have recognised as unlimited war, still resonate today.

By 1943 the provision of air support was of central importance to the British Army, after a bitter dispute between the army and the RAF had been resolved.[39] John Buckley counters Max Hastings's criticism of the stickiness of the British Army in Normandy by arguing that its doctrine was to use overwhelming materiel, including artillery, close air support and, if necessary, Bomber Command's heavy bombers, to conserve men and morale.[40] For Montgomery, experience in the Second World War 'proved beyond doubt that all modern military operations are in fact combined Army/Air operations'. His 1945 pamphlet *High Command in War* listed air power as the first principle of war and four of the pamphlet's forty-odd pages explained what 'any officer who aspires to hold high command in war must understand' regarding the use of air power.[41]

The RAF's strategic and tactical roles remained central to British defence policy after 1945 and

throughout the Cold War. After 1945 the RAF fulfilled a gamut of roles, including the nuclear deterrent; operating from, protecting and maintaining the air routes to forward operating bases around the globe; the air defence of the UK; support to maritime forces in the North Atlantic from collocated maritime and air headquarters; and in Central Region, where Headquarters British Army of the Rhine and RAF Germany and Northern Army Group and 2nd Allied Tactical Air Force were also collocated.

David Johnson's argument that the relative roles of U.S. ground and air power in war fighting have shifted since the end of the Cold War applies also to the supporting British forces.[42] The liberation of Kuwait in 1991 was the combined result of a strategic air operation, a lengthy shaping air operation against Iraq's fielded forces, and a short, successful land operation. This saw the application of the US Army Air/Land Battle concept, a manoeuvrist combined arms approach designed to destroy a Soviet attack in the central region, and which was adopted by the British Army during the Bagnall reforms of the 1980s. In Kosovo in 1999 an air operation successfully coerced the Serbian leadership. The use of air power, special forces and indigenous forces in Afghanistan in 2001 was seen by some as a model for future warfare.[43] And in 2003 the majority of the joint fires used were air.

Counter-insurgency

When the US Army faced failure in Iraq in 2004-5 it looked to post-colonial counter-insurgencies for inspiration. British success in Malaya, correctly regarded as an exemplar counter-insurgency campaign, was one of the historical studies which General Petraeus and his team used for their seminal counter-insurgency field manual.[44] The principles of contemporary US, British and now NATO counter-insurgency doctrine can all be traced from General Brigg's 1950 plan to turn around the British campaign in Malaya and Robert Thompson's formulation of them: the government must have a clear political aim, function within the law, have an overall plan, give priority to defeating the political subversion not the guerrillas; and in the guerrilla phase of an insurgency, it must secure its bases first.[45] The application of what should properly be termed population-centric counter-insurgency doctrine is generally regarded as a major factor in US success in Iraq and is now proving successful in Afghanistan.[46]

But air power is seen in a supporting role only, consigned to a five-page annex in the US doctrine.[47] An overreliance on air power's firepower is seen as counter-productive, reducing the legitimacy of the counter-insurgent, and means the counter-insurgent is not engaging with the population.[48] When assuming command in Afghanistan, General McChrystal warned of 'the necessity to avoid winning tactical victories while suffering strategic defeats' through the indiscriminate or disproportionate use of air power.[49] Furthermore, recent British counter-insurgency doctrine appears to write-off the role of air power through the selected use of history. However, revisionist historians are increasingly reinterpreting the British counter-insurgency expertise; the campaigns were more forceful, the approach similar to other European colonial powers than the myth allows, and more reliant on air power than the myth allows.[50]

Where conditions permit, air power has provided the fighting power to make up for force-levels too small for population control; the conventional wisdom is around twenty to twenty-five counter-insurgents are required for every 1000 of the population.[51] Thus General Brigg's eponymous plan ordered the RAF's six squadrons in Malaya to 'operate in conjunction with and in support of the ground forces. This support may include offensive air strikes (bombing and ground strafing attacks), air supply, visual and photographic air reconnaissance, survey photography and inter-communication.'[52] There is no question that the mobility role, delivering 700,000 lbs of supplies a month, was vital to ground force mobility and the effectiveness of the reformed SAS. 'Pysops' broadcasts were equally effective. When questioned in 1955, every single surrendered insurgent reported hearing broadcasts from voice aircraft.[53] Less well known is that offensive air action caused ten per cent of the 7000 insurgent fatalities during the Emergency. This is a significant proportion given the terrain; though it was the result of 7000 strike missions and over 70 million lbs of bombs.[54] Despite the cost in materiel, the use of air power appealed to British ministers by saving conscript British soldiers' lives; the Secretary of State for War, for example, was convinced air attack 'had a genuine effect on the morale of the bandits'.[55]

In an earlier age of austerity and imperial overstretch in 1920-21, Winston Churchill and his advisors, Sir Hugh Trenchard and T. E. Lawrence, convinced the cabinet to rule Iraq indirectly through an Arab king and support him with air power, as an alternative to abandoning the mandate as unaffordable.[56] This policy, called air control, followed the so-called Ten-year Rule's direction to make maximum use of 'mechanical contrivances' to police the empire economically and followed a revolt by over 60,000 insurgents armed with modern rifles, and who had overwhelmed a British battalion.[57] Scholars rightly continue to warn of learning false lessons from RAF control in Iraq, but air control allowed 'control without occupation', it reduced lines of communication and allowed 'better living conditions', and it 'not involve obtrusive presence - yet retains the threat of force'.[58] The RAF used eight squadrons of aircraft, armoured cars, locally recruited imperial levies and the nascent Iraqi army to replace two army divisions and suppress revolts by the Kurdish and marsh Arab minorities, Wahabi raids from Saudi Arabia and a Turkish attempt to regain Mosul. In the 'campaign tribalism' of the day, the War Office criticised the brutality of bombing recalcitrant villages and refused to provide the RAF with armoured cars, so it made and manned its own.[59] The RAF argued that the short-sharp pain of an air raid on an empty village was less forceful and risky than a punitive column to both sides.[60] David Omissi called air control 'technological imperialism'. Postcolonial scholars are critical of air control; Priya Satia describing it as a 'new form of imperial rule, invisible, barely existing on paper, designed for an increasingly anti-imperialist post-war world', and as much for misleading public opinion at home as maintaining internal security.[61] But that was its purpose. The British continued to use air control until the early 1960s on Southern Arabia.[62]

Though the current British Army doctrine describes the policy of air control losing 'favour during the 1930s when it was seen clearly that aircraft can only bomb and shoot once the intimidating and deterrent effect of air power had worn off',[63] this was the period of one of

the RAF's most vital contributions in the intriguing and little studied Arab Revolt in Palestine in 1936-39. When Churchill gave control of Palestine to the RAF in 1922 it was for administrative convenience only as the limitations of air power in urban Palestine were recognized.[64] In 1936 increased Jewish immigration, perceived British weakness in the Eastern Mediterranean and external support from Syria and Iraq led to a revolt which combined a general strike, urban terrorism, and guerrilla bands, which soon controlled large parts of the countryside. Colonel H. J. Simson, the British forces' chief of staff in Palestine, who had served during the Irish Wars, thought the rebellion a new form of warfare.[65] The RAF deployed lorries equipped with radio sets with army columns and convoys to call in aircraft on ground alert if attacked. This enabled the army and RAF armoured cars to operate in mobile, small units. After a few months, two army divisions were sent as reinforcements and Lieutenant General Dill, later Chief of the Imperial General Staff, took over from AVM Peirse. This was not air control, but joint counter-insurgency operations; Dill called it 'combined action'. Aircraft had become the main mode of engaging guerrillas.[66] According to Dill's reports:

> *The value of the Air Force, when arrangements can be made for it to be at instant call, has been most marked, [...] Rebels hold the Air Force in such respect that on occasions it had the effect of driving them to cover or dispersing them before the troops could get in touch with them.*[67]

> *When it came to striking at the enemy in the hills it was usually upon the bombs and guns of his aircraft that the commander would rely for a concentration of force at the decisive point. The fact that in some months more than 50% of enemy casualties resulted from air action bears witness to their effect.*[68]

The Palestine campaign challenges the conventional wisdom of poor inter-service co-operation between the wars and of the utility of air power in counter-insurgency. Arthur Harris, the Air Officer Commanding in 1938-39, cannot resist opening his autobiography *Bomber Offensive* by telling of his 'busy year teaching the British Army the advantages and the rebels the effectiveness of air power.[69] Harris goes on to attribute Montgomery's respect for air power from his time commanding a division in Palestine. Harris thought the most effective aircraft was the front-line four-gun Gladiator fighter, and not the vulnerable and poorly armed obsolete army co-operation aircraft. When the Arab guerrillas switched to night operations to avoid the aircraft, Orde Wingate formed special night squads of British soldiers and Haganah auxiliaries to exploit Jewish intelligence. Harris thought Wingate's small squads and supported by air power would be the ideal combination – except his aircraft struggled to operate at night.[70] Although there is evidence of British brutality towards Arabs, none of the criticism is directed at the RAF, which appears to have acted within restrictive rules of engagement designed not to antagonise friendly, neighbouring Arab states.[71] In the very different circumstances of the urban Jewish insurgency in Palestine in 1948 air power was hardly used.

A more recent example of air power in counter-insurgency is in the Dhofar War. Though the

current counter-insurgency doctrine cites 'the British Army's counter-insurgency campaign' in the Dhofar as 'one of the most successful counter-insurgency campaigns of the twentieth century' it was, of course, fought by the Sultan's Armed Forces, who were led by British seconded and contracted officers. Though the doctrine also brings out the importance of drawing insurgents onto the Sultan's side and of civil-military co-ordination, little mention is made of air power. One of those seconded officers was a young Strikemaster pilot called Jock Stirrup. As the Chief of the Defence Staff, his introduction to the UK's joint stabilisation includes the only use of the phrase air power is used in the 245-page document. Stirrup is careful to make the point that, whereas the general lessons of political primacy, long-term commitment and the necessary use of force are enduring, the tactical lessons were derived from the circumstances. These were the 'use of special forces on influence operations; the crucial role of helicopters in providing tactical mobility and logistic support in difficult terrain; the ability of responsive air power to multiply many times the force available to light, mobile units, and the consequent need for close air-land integration.[72] Ian Gardiner's account of his service in the Dhofar tells a similar story and starts with a helicopter casevac.[73]

Notwithstanding the success of the allied operations in Afghanistan since 2009, allied forces there are dependent on allied air power. Generals McChrystal and Petraeus are right of course, that killing civilians through the use of too much firepower is counter-productive; it is also wrong. But the reality is that allied forces have been too small for population centric counter-insurgency, and have therefore been dependent on firepower. The para major's famous misogynist complaint was that the RAF was useless, not unnecessary:

> *The RAF have been utterly, utterly useless. Twice I have had Harriers in support when c/s on the ground have been in heavy contact. […] A female Harrier pilot 'couldn't identify the target', fired two phosphorous rockets that just missed our own compound.*[74]

Currently in Afghanistan only around fifty per cent of the requests for close air support are filled, and the proportions for surveillance and electronic warfare are similar. There is a shortage, not surplus, of allied aircraft in Afghanistan.

Unitary War

The myth of the limited utility of air power in counter-insurgency is compounded by the argument that, as General James N. Mattis told the US Congress in March 2009, 'Simply put, much of what we see in the cities of Iraq, the mountains of Afghanistan, and the foothills of southern Lebanon, I believe we will see again in the future'.[75] Stirrup's replacement as Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir David Richards, told one magazine: 'Afghanistan is a signpost for the future'.[76] But one academic reviewer of Petraeus seminal counter-insurgency doctrine thought the manual an example of 'campaign tribalism' and a challenge to the conventional 'American Way of War' was the 'opening salvo in a fight for the internal culture of the traditional, kinetic, force-on-force' US Army.[77] The UK's stabilisation doctrine goes further. It conflates the

impact of globalisation in increasing instability and numbers of failing states, the increasing need for a British military contribution to stabilisation operations, and the 'evolving character of conflict' of blurring state and non-state actors, who present so-called hybrid threats, and exploit the limitations of the (information-age) revolution in military affairs.[78] General Richards makes a very similar argument cogently in his *Victory Among People: Lessons from Countering Insurgency and Stabilising Fragile States*, referring frequently to the DCDC's *Global Strategic Trends Out to 2040 study*.[79] Richards explains the resulting campaigns 'are almost unavoidably operations among the population. De facto, these are wars for the population, and they are complicated because those who threaten society live, hide and operate within it'. Hence understanding the population is key, not just being able to locate, identify and track a conventional enemy's tanks and aircraft. Success is measured by the population's security, not the destruction of the enemy's combat power. The requirement is therefore more 'boots on the ground' to get amongst the people.

> *In wars among the people, when counter-insurgents resort to using a lot of firepower – often delivered from the air in extremis as a result of insufficient manpower – they are almost certainly losing. It is important, therefore, to have enough troops to retain the tactical initiative and to provide the enduring routine security without which, as I have emphasised, the population will not have the confidence to reject the insurgent or spoiler.*

The implications of the prevalence stabilisation operations on force structures and capabilities were made clear. For General Sir Richard Dannatt, as Chief of the General Staff, these changes meant that Britain was at a strategic cross-roads, and the SDSR gave the opportunity to invest in the army and those 'elements' of the RN and RAF necessary to support these new wars - support helicopters, surveillance platforms, and strategic lift.[80] General Richards has frequently referred to 'our generation's horse and tank moment' requiring similar transformation to the British Army between the wars.[81] This is an interesting simile given that after the combined arms victory of 1918 the army went back to what General Milne, an inter-war Chief of the Imperial General Staff, famously called 'real soldiering', with horse cavalry rather than tanks.[82] The degree to which the army's lack of change then was internal resistance or imposed on it, because of the need for parsimony in the absence of an European threat, or cavalry was better for imperial policing, is still the subject of debate.

Max Hastings thought 'almost any likely British commitment abroad, for war-fighting or peacekeeping, will require boots on the ground. If the Defence Review pretends otherwise, it is unlikely to command respect'. In *The Guardian* he wrote:

> *Radical change is needed in the chiefs-of-staff organisation. The nonsense of assuming parity between the three services must stop. The army's role is today overwhelmingly paramount. The other services perform important support functions, but they are not fighting forces in the same way [...] A soldier should always hold Stirrup's job. Admirals and air marshals, today bureaucrats in uniform rather than warriors, lack the perspective, knowledge and experience*

> *credibly to preside over the armed forces. We shall not again have to fight either the Battle of the Atlantic or the Battle of Britain. Anti-submarine warfare platforms and high-level interceptors are almost redundant. They represent negligible priorities, alongside the army's need for infantrymen, helicopters and armoured vehicles to fight real wars in real places*.[83]

In *The Spectator* he argued the RAF should be reintegrated with the army. Having an airman as chief of defence staff was a charade, and meant he appointed other airman to key operational appointments: a navigator as chief of joint operations and another airman as senior British military advisor at CENTOM.[84]

Hew Strachan, the Oxford historian, thought the existing joint models of operational command, doctrine and training were now dangerously outdated given the unitary, land-centric character of future conflict. In his view, increasingly, the armed forces should prepare for a unitary view of war which is land-centric. He saw 'airpower in terms of attack helicopters, air mobility and strategic lift, not fast jets'. Strachan argued that the institutions of joint warfare – joint doctrine, a joint staff course, and a permanent joint headquarters merely detracted from land-centric future war and therefore Britain's conduct of war.[85]

But this burgeoning argument that stabilisation or counter-insurgency represents the future of conflict is flawed. It is true internal 'wars amongst the people' has been and is increasingly the most prevalent and deadly form of war, and counter-insurgency has been the most common form of warfare for British forces during the retreat from empire and in the aftermath of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.[86] The warfare that 'seemed peripheral has become central' but it has not become the only form of war.[87] The MOD's *Global Strategic Trends* and its sister *Future Character of Conflict* study look beyond stabilisation. Both warn that the convergence of a number of strategic trends - globalisation, climate change, and increasing population, and a shift to multi-popularity – in addition to failing states, may lead to increasing inter-state competition for limited resources and access to the global commons and require other forms of armed intervention.[88] In the past people have formed states to fight for resources: as Charles Tilly wrote 'war makes the state and the state makes war'.[89] Furthermore, WMD proliferation increases the potential for inter-state tension. The stabilisation argument also assumes Britain will always intervene on the side of a legitimate government whereas in Responsibility to Protect-type humanitarian interventions it may intervene in order to protect the population from the government.

The presupposition of the highly trained, well equipped semi-regular Hezbollah hybrid threat of popular myth as a harbinger of future conflict has been questioned. William F. Owen has argued the 2006 conflict requires no new language or new concepts of conflict as it has all been seen before and assuming all future operations will be counter-insurgencies or asymmetric is a failure of thought. Instead Owens thought the conflict should be seen as a warning of 'ignoring what should be well known and understood'.[90] Others, including the official Israeli government inquiry, thought Israel's performance was a result as much of its own

shortfalls as Hezbollah's abilities. It is clear that Israel's unrealistic expectations for systemic effects-based operations implemented by air power contributed greatly to its operational and tactical problems. Furthermore, a focus on internal security operations in the occupied territories meant the Israeli Army was tactically unprepared and untrained to fight against a determined Hezbollah force conducting a conventional, fixed-position defence.[91] Israeli air power was not a 'silver bullet', but it was the most flexible tool for fighting Hezbollah; a land-led campaign might well have led to much higher losses and an even more negative press, and may not have had Israeli public support, initially. The Israeli Defence Forces succeeded in that there has been relative peace between Israel and Hezbollah since 2006 but failed to win the 'battle of the narratives'.[92]

The Kosovo operation is an example of successful coercion by air power; various studies have shown that despite the political limitations on targeting and collateral damage, air power did surprisingly well in the conflict.[93] A recent quantitative study has shown that air strikes increased the cost of continued defiance to Milosevic and his supporters, while demonstrating NATO's resolve.[94] Air power was viewed as the next acceptable step after diplomatic and economic measures and was chosen because it had worked in Bosnia and Iraq, could be deployed quickly, and minimized the risk of Allied and civilian casualties.[95] Initial efforts were hampered by poor co-ordination and a limited number of approved target sets, and the 214 US aircraft and 130 from other NATO Allies flew only around 100 sorties a day. After a month the target set was widened and the number of sorties flow increased to around 500 per day. The role land forces played in Milosevic's decision to concede is hotly debated; General Wesley Clark, as SACEUR, thought it important, whereas a Lambeth's Rand study found no evidence for it.[96] Wes Clark's deputy, General Sir Rupert Smith is quite clear about the success of air power in Kosovo in the UK stabilisation doctrine: 'Serbian targets in both Kosovo and the rest of Serbia were bombed to the point that the Serbian forces withdrew from Kosovo and NATO forces entered the province. The objective of the bombing was achieved'.[97] Smith then explains the need to plan for the subsequent occupation. Despite the relative success of the Kosovo operation, Tony Blair's Chicago speech laying out the doctrine for humanitarian intervention made during the operation is referred to in the past tense in the *Future Character of Conflict*, a zeitgeist of a previous age.[98]

Conclusion

The intervention in Libya is another reminder of the utility of air power in limited war and its attractiveness to liberal democracies. *The End of History and the Last Man* has been interpreted as a neoconservative tract, calling for the use of force to impose democracy, and the use of air power has been linked with this discredited approach. This may have been why David Cameron's spokesman told the Economist during a visit to Cairo in February 2011 that the prime minister was not a "naive neoconservative" who thought that democracy could be dropped from a bomb bay at 40,000 feet'.[99] But on 19 March RAF Tornado GR4 (and HMS Triumph's Tomahawk missiles), authorised by the UN Security Council Resolution 1973,

participated in a co-ordinated strike against Libyan Air Defence systems because the UK believed 'we should not stand aside while this dictator murders his own people'.[100] The intervention in Libya complies with the five considerations outlined by Tony Blair in his Chicago speech in 1999.

The RAF is currently flying around twenty-five per cent of all sorties over Libya. The unwillingness of the US to take a leading role in the operation has obviously caused difficulties. At the time of writing the outcome is uncertain and may result in a stalemate given the limitations of an air only intervention and the restrictions of the UN mandate. However there is an element of *Schadenfreude* in the newspaper accounts of requests for more unmanned air vehicles from the USA, US maritime patrol aircraft protecting HM ships, and the Chief of the Defence Staff calling for NATO to attack Libyan infrastructure to coerce Ghaddafi's regime.[101]

To assume all future conflict is land-centric and therefore the utility of air power is limited is flawed for a number of reasons. First, air power often plays a vital role in counter-insurgency. Where circumstances allow, all the roles of air power are a force multiplier, particularly for Western forces too small to secure the population. Furthermore it is our conventional strength, and in particular air power, which forces the insurgent to fight as a guerrilla or terrorist. Second, British military intervention will not always be as a counter-insurgent, supporting a threatened government which has some claim to legitimacy. In Libya, as in Kosovo previously, Britain and its allies have intervened to prevent civilian casualties, in doing so indirectly supporting an insurgency. Third, global trends in demography and climate change, competition for limited resources and geopolitics mean does not mean that for Britain all future conflicts will result in counter-insurgency operations.

In the evolving character of conflict argument in Britain much has been made of Clausewitz's characterisations of the nature and character of war. According to the MOD's *Future Character of Conflict* study, to forget war's unchanging character will lead to hubris, as with the belief that the information-age revolution in military affairs could redefine war. But the use of air power in Libya is a reminder of Clausewitz's dictum that war is a continuation of politics. Moreover, Clausewitz realised different societies through the ages have waged wars in their own way: 'differently, with different means and with different purposes and the aims a belligerent adopts, and the resources he employs, must be governed by the particular features of his own situation'.[102] Successive British governments favoured air power because they and the public saw it as a unique threat to Britain from its inception to the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, Montgomery listed air power as his first principle of war because it saved British lives on the battlefield, and this remains a truism for operations in Afghanistan today.

The fourth reason that air power continues to have utility is that the liberal democracies wish to avoid bloody land conflict. Before World War Two air power offered Britain an alternative to a continental commitment. After the 'end of history', in Fukuyama's post-Cold War world, it offers what Edward Luttwak has called a 'post-heroic way of war'.[103] In Clausewitz's trilogy of people,

state and armed forces, it allows public support for the use of force, using technology to avoid casualties. Furthermore, in the particular circumstances of Libya, it has allowed intervention in support of democracy without the occupation unacceptable both to the British polity and the international community.[104] This does not mean all future conflict will look like Libya, but nor will it look like Afghanistan.

In their attempts to construct universalisms for history and war respectively, both Clausewitz and Hegel used a dialectic approach; that is their writings took the form of a debate, recording synthesis, antithesis and synthesis. By noting both sides of the argument, they are particularly prone to selective quotation. Thus, Hegel's observation 'that peoples and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it' reads as a criticism of a failure to learn, until one reads the next line which is a defence of the particular in the search for universal truths: 'Each period is involved in such peculiar circumstances, exhibits a condition of things so strictly idiosyncratic, that its conduct must be regulated by considerations connect with itself and itself alone'.[105]

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