Intervention and stabilisation: A historical approach to future UK air power engagement with the UN

Tim Stringer
MA Conflict, Security & Development

Supervisor: Prof Mats Berdal
Word Count: 14990
Date of Submission: 22 August 2018
DECLARATION

This dissertation is the sole work of the author, and has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree; all quotations and sources of information have been acknowledged.

I confirm that my research did not require ethical approval.

Signed: Tim Stringer       Date: 22 August 2018
## CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 4

Chapter 1 – Introduction .................................................................................................................. 5

Chapter 2 – Context ......................................................................................................................... 10

Chapter 3 – Stabilisation ................................................................................................................ 17

Chapter 4 – Sierra Leone ............................................................................................................... 22

Chapter 5 – Four Pillars ............................................................................................................... 32

Chapter 6 – Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 59

Bibliography ................................................................................................................................... 64
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is not to provide a study of UK air power assets and their capabilities but, rather, an assessment as to how they might most effectively be employed within or alongside UN operations. Initially this paper will establish the demanding contemporary environment for both the UK and the UN before determining the degree to which their challenges might be mutually addressed. The emerging doctrine of stabilisation in UN missions will be reviewed as this represents a developing area of operations and study. In the absence of an official UN approach to stabilisation, this paper recognises limited parallel intervention to be the mechanism through which the UK might most effectively contribute to contemporary UN missions. This paper will analyse the UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone, focusing predominantly on activity between May and November 2000, in order to determine the key factors behind its success. The intervention, in which air power was a dominant feature, demonstrated the value of an effective over-the-horizon stabilisation force, arguably heralding a new mission profile for UN operations. As developments in air power continue at pace it is essential to explore its utility in UN operations, particularly in the fields of intervention and stabilisation.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The UK’s declaration in its 2015 National Security Strategy to establish and maintain a ‘secure and prosperous United Kingdom, with global reach and influence’, is both laudable and ambitious.¹ Notwithstanding the UK’s contemporary status as a champion for democratic values with world-class soft power institutions, intelligence capabilities and a highly respected professional military, one must appreciate the fragility of this position. As the UK undergoes its uncertain transition into a world outside of the European Union, it faces a similar identity crisis with regard to its role on the wider global stage.² Pivoting between humanitarian commitments, expeditionary warfare, international cross-governmental assistance and responding to an upsurge in conventional state-based aggression, it is evident that ‘The Age of Uncertainty’ persists.³ The UK faces significant challenges in addressing the full spectrum of national and international threats whilst simultaneously maintaining global relevance and influence. Moreover, this challenge is addressed in an era in which every government department faces budgetary constraints and there is an ever-present demand to do more with less.

On the global scale, the United Nations is equally tested by significant changes in the conflict environment and questions over its relevance and ability to address

---

² Rogers, “Towards “Global Britain,”” 11.
³ HM Government. NSS 2010.
contemporary challenges. The post-Cold War evolution of UN peace operations continues at pace. The organisation is challenged by the requirement to balance a multitude of competing factors: state sovereignty with intervention, short term stabilisation with long term stability, the impact and threat of non-state actors and, crucially, the dynamics of ‘robust’ peacekeeping and keeping peace ‘where there is no peace to keep’.

Fundamentally, the UN must also face this challenge at a time when commitment to the organisation is vulnerable and there are persistent doubts over its efficacy. Arguably, this is not a new predicament for the UN, but with an ever-increasing mandate for intervention and long-term support it must find ways not just to succeed, but to succeed with less.

This paper will argue that these two situations should not exist in isolation. Indeed, a response to these challenges of identity, relevance and capacity might be found through an approach that matches the UK’s capabilities and the UN’s global mandate as the world’s largest multinational institution. It will be argued that an increased contribution to UN operations might not only reveal tangible benefits to the challenges faced by the UK and the UN collectively, but might also substantially enhance the UN’s overall status as an effective and capable institution.

Consequently, this paper will seek to identify the most appropriate model through which the UK might make such an increased commitment to UN operations, not only from a perspective that is practical and realistic, but one that also reflects societal and political sensitivities. Accordingly, this paper will review the nascent focus on

---

4 Hunt, "All necessary means to what ends?" 108.
5 Cold-Ravnkilde, Albrecht and Haugegaard. "Friction and Inequality," 34.
6 Ahtisaari, “I believe in the UN.”
‘stabilisation’ in UN doctrine and assess its applicability in the context of the UK’s contribution to UN operations. In identifying the doctrinal limitations of this approach this paper will also explore the concept of parallel intervention; the engagement that was adopted in the case of Sierra Leone.

A review of UN operations and the various ways in which nations states have contributed resources, personnel and capabilities reveals an array of successes, failures and indeterminate conclusions. Amongst them, however, there is a clear example of where the contribution of military force was able to not only decisively strike at the enemy but also to definitively alter the outcome of the UN mission. The UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone in May 2000 has been the subject of significant accolade and, indeed, has been heralded as a success.⁷ In directly confronting the threat posed to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) the UK was able to provide breathing space for the mission to successfully function as a peacekeeping force and create the environment for subsequent peacebuilding tasks.

Significantly, this paper recognises that such praise is rarely unequivocal and will explore the limitations and constraints of utilising this particular intervention as a framework for the future. However, notwithstanding these limitations, this paper ultimately argues that the intervention provides a credible model for similar engagements, paying particular regard to the application of air power as a decisive component in a wider, joint contribution. As such, this paper will focus most specifically on the UK’s air power contribution to the conflict. Air power is defined within the UK’s Joint Defence Publication (JDP) 0-30 as, ‘the ability to use air capabilities in and from

⁷ Ucko, "Can limited intervention work?" 848.
the air, to influence the behaviour of actors and the course of events.\textsuperscript{8} It is through the five fundamental characteristics of air power: height, speed, reach, agility and ubiquity, that such critical influence can be achieved.

In its analysis of the UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone, this paper identifies four key pillars that ensured its success and potential suitability as a model for future such engagements. Firstly, the intervention provided significant credibility to UK’s role as an international power and exponent of liberal democratic values. The UK’s rapid deployment of military force, endorsed by the UN Security Council, demonstrated global commitment and was a manifestation of its responsibilities as a permanent member (P5) of the Security Council. In an era of strained alliances and dissolving unions, such engagement with the UN not only highlights the UK’s commitment to collaborative conflict resolution and development but also reinforces its status as a global operator. Secondly, current UN operations are largely reflective of wider contemporary security dilemmas. The security environment of the post-Cold War era is one in which the UN finds itself embroiled in intra-state conflicts and facing threats from non-state actors. It is in the face of this challenge that stabilisation has become a key feature. Thirdly, the UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone played to its military strengths, capabilities and advantage. Whilst a joint mission in every respect, the application of UK air power was critical in allowing the intervention to be conducted with rapidity and agility. This factor was undoubtedly enhanced by the retention of command and control that was afforded by operating in parallel to the UN mission. Fourth and finally, whilst it is recognised that the intervention transitioned from its

\textsuperscript{8} UK MOD. \textit{JDP} 0-30, 5.
original mandate to evacuate UK personnel into an assistance mission, there was substantial political and social will behind the UK’s involvement in the region. There are key contributors to this which will be explored within this paper, including the public’s desire to see the UK engaged in maintaining international security, the rapidity with which the intervention was conducted and the minimisation of ground presence within the deployment; largely as a result of air power.

This paper is a recognition of the challenges faced by the UN and the UK, both in terms of the shifting nature of operational threats and also the questions of relevance and potency on the global stage. Equally this paper is a recognition of the various requirements and considerations that drive the political and social will behind the utilisation of military force. By reflecting upon historical successes and adapting the lessons learned to the contemporary context one is best able to complement innovation, not undermine it.
CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT

The UK

Sir Simon Fraser, former Permanent Under-Secretary and Head of the Diplomatic Service at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office asserts that, ‘Leaving the EU will be the biggest shock to our methods of international influencing and the biggest structural change to our place in the world since World War II and the end of the Empire.’

Regardless of the ongoing debate over the advantages and disadvantages of Britain’s exit from the European Union, what is evident is the destabilising effect that it has had on a number of international relationships and a diminished confidence in the UK’s role on the global stage. Intermittent success at diplomatic influence and failures to secure representation at the International Court of Justice and the leadership of the World Health Organisation are further evidence of a climate in which the UK’s predominance in such areas is no longer assured. Moreover, ambiguity over the UK’s ability to project global influence is compounded by perpetual uncertainty over the funding of its armed forces and the roles they will undertake.

The latest National Security Strategy recognises that in ‘a rapidly changing, globalised world, what happens overseas increasingly directly affects us at home.’ Progressing this assertion, the Ministry of Defence acknowledges the impacts to the UK of key

---

9 Fraser, “Can the UK retain global influence after Brexit?” 12.
10 Mance, “Global Britain.”
12 HM Government. NSS 2015, 10.
trends such as globalisation, demographic growth, urbanisation, climate change, resource scarcity, corruption and criminality.\textsuperscript{13} As David Kilcullen further highlights:

the trends are clear: more people than ever before in history will be competing for scarcer and scarcer resources in poorly governed areas that lack adequate infrastructure, and these areas will be more and more closely connected to the global system, so that local conflict will have far wider effects.\textsuperscript{14}

As the House of Commons Defence Committee reflected in 2015, ‘the UK must simultaneously develop the capacity to respond to an expanding series of challenges outside Europe - terrorism, brutal authoritarian regimes...extremist groups holding large territories as pseudo-states, state collapse, civil war, and state fragility. It needs to do so concurrently, and with limited resources.’\textsuperscript{15} There is, thus, a requirement for the UK to address these drivers of grievance at source, regardless of geographic distance.

Consequently, the UK faces a multifaceted dilemma; a diminished perception of its global potency, an uncertain role for its financially-pressed armed forces and an increased exposure to a multitude of threats and challenges often rooted at great distance from its sovereign borders. In order to address the vision and objectives outlined in its National Security Strategy, the UK will need to find a path that addresses

\textsuperscript{13} UK MOD. “Future Operating Environment 2035,” 1-5.
\textsuperscript{14} Kilcullen, \textit{Out of the mountains}, 50.
\textsuperscript{15} House of Commons, \textit{Re-thinking defence to meet new threats}, 4.
these challenges in a manner that is not only politically and socially palatable but also financially and militarily achievable.

The UN

The end of the Cold War heralded a shift in the nature and predictability of conflict about which there has been considerable debate. Mark Duffield’s ‘non-territorial network wars’ and Mary Kaldor’s ‘new wars’ propose an evolution in global violence in which conflicts are distinguishable ‘in terms of their goals, the methods of warfare and how they are financed.’ Conversely, critics of the ‘new wars’ thesis have argued against ‘perfunctory, uncritical, and ahistorical’ approaches to conflict. However, what is evident is that, within this period, there has been a deeper global interest in intra-state conflict, its impact both internally and externally and a requirement to understand the ‘functional utility’ of the violence being conducted. Indeed, the post-Westphalian era has posed a significant challenge to the UN, an organisation whose charter centres on upholding sovereignty and endorsing the Weberian model that the state should hold the monopoly on the legitimate use of force.

The ability to apply existing UN doctrine to the threats and challenges posed in this new operating environment has proved increasingly more difficult. As UN forces find themselves engaging offensively to assure their security and increasingly applying the full spectrum of military means at their disposal, there is increasing opacity between

---

18 Ibid., 6.
20 Ibid.
Chapters VI and VII of the UN Charter.\textsuperscript{22} It is evident that the ‘new security environment has pushed peace operations to the limit of what can be considered peacekeeping.’\textsuperscript{23} Despite the Brahimi Report's efforts to ensure realistic and achievable mandates and the Capstone Doctrine’s emphasis on the foundations of UN peacekeeping as consent, impartiality and the limited use of force, current missions appear to be straying away from their doctrinal core. The clear risk is that the ‘larger the gap between agreed doctrine and actual practice, the more room there will be for misunderstandings, misperceptions, disagreements, incoherence, lack of unity of purpose and lack of synergy.’\textsuperscript{24}

Reflecting upon this developing challenge, the UN’s High-Level Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) reflected that ‘peace operations today are deployed in an environment where there is little or no peace to keep’, emphasising a ‘widening gap between what is asked of the United Nations peace operations today and what they are able to deliver.’\textsuperscript{25} The lethal melange of fragile administrations and ‘non-state actors’\textsuperscript{26} creates a dangerously uncertain space in which ‘targeted and asymmetric hostile acts against UN personnel’ have become very much a feature.\textsuperscript{27}

Consequently, much focus and debate has revolved around the use of force in traditional peacekeeping; identified within the Brahimi Report as ‘robust peacekeeping’. In 2009, the UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations reported

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{22} Connaughton, “British interventions into Sierra Leone,” 77-78.
\item \textsuperscript{23} De Coning, Aoi and Karlsrud, eds., \textit{UN peacekeeping doctrine in a new era}, 1.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 3.
\item \textsuperscript{25} UN. \textit{Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations}, para 36.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Weiss, \textit{Humanitarian intervention}, 95: Weiss identifies four groups of ‘non-state actors’: Armed belligerents, economic profiteers, ‘spoilers’ and terrorist groups.
\item \textsuperscript{27} Willmot, Sheeran and Sharland. \textit{Safety and security challenges in UN peace operations}. 3.
\end{itemize}
on this concept, stressing that it was rooted in the Capstone Doctrine principles, emphasising its ‘tactical level’ application and the continuance of the requirement for consent.\textsuperscript{28} This approach is distinct from peace enforcement which ‘does not require the consent of the main parties and may involve the use of military force at the strategic or international level’.\textsuperscript{29} As Mats Berdal and David Ucko highlight, whilst ‘robust peacekeeping’ appears to permit the escalation of force within the existing doctrinal framework, it does little to add ‘clarity’ to the array of multifaceted and politically complex UN missions.\textsuperscript{30} In essence, ‘robust peacekeeping’ is arguably a further example of where mandates ‘have gone beyond the existing doctrine’ and where peacekeeping now struggles to function within the traditional parameters of consent, impartiality and the use of force for self-defence or defence of the mandate.\textsuperscript{31}

In summary, the UN faces a dynamic and highly complex operating environment in which blue helmets and white vehicles no longer guarantee protection and the traditional Capstone principles no longer appear to fit the challenges presented.\textsuperscript{32} This dilemma comes at a time in which the political and financial investment of its foremost donor, the US, is uncertain and in which geopolitical distractions are at a significant high point.\textsuperscript{33} Arguably the greatest contemporary challenge that the UN faces is in maintaining relevance and demonstrating its adaptability and ‘credibility’.\textsuperscript{34}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{28} UN. \textit{A New Partnership Agenda}, 21.
  \item \textsuperscript{29} UN. \textit{United Nations Peacekeeping Operations}, 34.
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Berdal and Ucko. “The use of force in UN peacekeeping operations,” 11.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} De Coning, Aoi, and Karlsrud, eds. \textit{UN peacekeeping doctrine in a new era},” 14-19.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Andersen, “The HIPPO in the room,” 353.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Weiss, “The United Nations and Sovereignty in the Age of Trump.“ 10-12.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Tardy, “A critique of robust peacekeeping,” 152.
\end{itemize}
Mutual challenges, mutual benefits?

As Jonathan Marley highlights, there are ‘Emerging Synergies’ in which ‘UN missions are increasingly aligning with UK foreign policy interests (most notably in Africa) and preferred modus operandi when deployed in peace support, stabilisation or peace-building roles.’ Indeed, he emphasises the overlapping foci of the UK’s International Defence Engagement Strategy, its Building Stability Overseas Strategy and the relatively recent recommendations of the UN’s HIPPO report. Within these key documents the themes of upstream conflict prevention, early warning and rapid crisis prevention through an integrated approach all feature prominently.

David Curran highlights that by addressing security and identity challenges mutually, through the increased engagement of UK forces alongside the UN, the UK would ‘derive political, security, and institutional benefits.’ Firstly, greater engagement could enhance international relations and demonstrate leadership within the Security Council. Secondly, it would reap the benefit of an enhanced national security and limit the ‘ugly reality’ of ‘outsourced’ conflict management. Thirdly, the UK would benefit institutionally from a defined post-Afghanistan role; a mechanism to maintain operational exposure and a model that fits the proposed Joint Force 2025 ambitions. Overarchingly, such an approach might directly attend to the three National Security Objectives of the UK’s National Security Strategy 2015, recently affirmed in the UK’s

35 Marley, “Beyond the UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial,” 18-27.
37 Gowan and Witney, Why Europe must stop outsourcing its security. 5-7.
National Security Capability Review 2018, to ‘protect our people’, to ‘project our global influence’ and to ‘promote our prosperity’.  

With regard to the UN, notwithstanding the strategic level benefit that would be derived from the increased engagement, investment and leadership of one of its P5 members, there are also clear operational advantages. Curran identifies two ‘particular shortfalls’ inherent to UN deployments: the ability for supporting forces to rapidly deploy to missions and the ‘considerable gaps in specialist capabilities’. These are two areas in which the UK has a strong pedigree and proven history. The fundamental challenge, however, is in determining a politically, societally and militarily sustainable approach in which to deliver this mutual benefit.

---

CHAPTER 3

STABILISATION

A ‘grey area’ in a ‘grey zone’

As the contextual introduction to this paper has sought to demonstrate, the ‘doctrinal fog’ that determines that ‘grey area’ of operations that fall between peacekeeping and peace enforcement does not seem to have lifted since it was first discussed in the early 1990s.\(^{40}\) If anything, it has arguably become more dense. Moreover, the challenge as to what force may be applied and when, has been compounded by the evolving operational environment also addressed within the introduction to this paper. Indeed, ‘the fog-filled twilight zone between war and peace’\(^ {41}\) has created a ‘grey zone’ in which it has become increasingly more difficult to determine the state of peace, the extent to which it can be achieved and certainty with which it will remain.\(^ {42}\) It is in the context of this multidimensional challenge that the concept of stabilisation has received such extensive academic and political attention in recent times.

Whilst stabilisation appears to be clearly defined and contextually understood by the UK\(^ {43}\) the same cannot be said for the UN.\(^ {44}\) Despite embracing the term ‘stabilisation’ in three recent operations, MONUSCO, MINUSMA and MINUSCA\(^ {45}\), there is still no

---

\(^{40}\) Jakobsen, “The emerging consensus,” 37.
\(^{41}\) Moe, "Counter-insurgency in the Somali territories,” 321.
\(^{42}\) Moe, “Improving security in the grey zone.”
\(^{43}\) HM Government, The UK Government’s Approach to Stabilisation. 1.
\(^{45}\) The UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the UN
definitive agreement within the UN as to what is meant by the term. These missions are notable for their determination to find a comprehensive, political solution in the midst of ongoing conflict and their acknowledgment of the requirement for offensive strikes, intelligence activities and, on occasion, the application of non-conventional forces. The utility of the Force Intervention Brigade in MONUSCO is a clear example of growing acceptance within the UN Security Council to conduct offensive operations designed to ‘neutralize and disarm’ hostile elements.46 Thus, there is a clear requirement to address the complex challenges that result from the ‘emerging practice of establishing UN peace support operations in asymmetrical conflict environments where there is no peace to keep.’47

It is evident that, whilst reflecting the zeitgeist, these missions highlight the disconnect between current doctrine and reality on the ground.48 Whilst it may be strategically preferable to leave stabilisation undefined, this ‘constructive ambiguity’ causes operational uncertainty and, ultimately, endangers lives at the tactical level.49 Indeed, the HIPPO recognises that since UN forces find themselves increasingly involved in the conflict management roles of deterring escalation, containing conflict, protecting civilians and fostering peace processes, there should be clarification of the term, ‘stabilisation’.50

---

47 Cold-Ravnkilde, Albrecht and Haugegaard. “Friction and Inequality,” 34.
48 Peter, "Between doctrine and practice," 352.
49 De Coning, "Is stabilization the new normal?" in The Use of Force in UN Peacekeeping. 88.
Numerous commentators have sought to provide a definition for stabilisation and, in doing so, have highlighted the difficulty in aligning the diversity of current UN stabilisation missions and the individual stabilisation doctrines of Member States, particularly the P3.\textsuperscript{51} Whilst some propose a definition that fits with the current Capstone Doctrine\textsuperscript{52}, others suggest an entirely new doctrinal approach that allows stabilisation missions to fully serve the purpose for which they are intended.\textsuperscript{53} Nevertheless, whilst there is divergence in the doctrinal detail, certain core elements of stabilisation are recurring and less disputed. Stabilisation is a means to respond to (often ongoing) intrastate conflict, through a comprehensive approach of civilian and military capabilities (including offensive force) in which there is a fundamental requirement for the primacy of a political outcome.\textsuperscript{54} Indeed, broadly speaking, ‘stabilization is essentially a strategy, where the theory of change is to contain aggressors and spoilers and enforce stability so as to create a political space that is more conducive to moderates on all sides...’\textsuperscript{55} This categorisation of activity at the strategic level further differentiates stabilisation from traditional peacekeeping, and draws stark contrast to the ‘strategic peacekeeping’ described by Christopher Dandeker and James Gow over twenty years ago.\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{51} Boutellis, “Can the UN stabilize Mali? ” 12.
\textsuperscript{52} Gorur, “Defining the Boundaries,” 22.
\textsuperscript{54} Gorur, “Defining the Boundaries,” 12.
\textsuperscript{55} De Coning, Aoi and Karlsrud, eds. \textit{UN peacekeeping doctrine in a new era}, 296.
\textsuperscript{56} Dandeker and Gow, “The future of peace support operations,” 332-334.
The UK's contemporary option

As this debate evinces, there is a clear recognition that the current UN doctrine does not accurately reflect the contemporary demands on its forces nor adequately equips them with a structural framework to allow them to tackle the challenges they face. Whilst the adaptation towards stabilisation appears to offer progress in this area, its piecemeal and protracted evolution leaves innovative interpretation as the only alternative. With regard to how the UK might seek to engage in this capacity, Marley indicates that, ‘in the absence of a specific doctrinal base, UK contributions to the UN will be focused on the basis of an ad hoc adaptation of existing stabilisation and conventional doctrine.’

Thus, with the deficit of a doctrinally-sound UN stabilisation mission, it is argued that the UK’s contribution to UN operations might be best conducted through parallel intervention. In essence, a deployment in support of the UN but outside of its command and control structure. As Adrian Johnson highlights, such a model has been witnessed previously through the UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone and it is this example that will be analysed further within this paper.

In a review of western approaches to contemporary peace operations, Alex Bellamy explores the concept of a 'loosely coupled hybrid mission' in which a formal connection is replaced by a close-cooperating, parallel relationship. His paper highlights four different but undoubtedly interrelated contributory approaches: spearhead/vanguard operations, stabilisation operations, fire-fighting operations and over-the-horizon

---

57 Marley, "Beyond the UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial," 24.
operations. Whilst Bellamy regards the Sierra Leone intervention to be a ‘fire-fighting operation’ the engagement evidently spans across the other operational approaches that he discusses.

Of fundamental significance was that this intervention was not an end in itself, rather a means towards stabilising a deteriorating situation. In doing so, this intervention bought breathing space for the beleaguered UNAMSIL and ultimately allowed the comprehensive, politically-led peacebuilding process to succeed. In effect, whilst the mission began as an evacuation of British nations, it evolved into one that mirrors the current definition of stabilisation propounded by the British government:

Stabilisation is one of the approaches used in situations of violent conflict which is designed to protect and promote legitimate political authority, using a combination of integrated civilian and military actions to reduce violence, re-establish security and prepare for longer-term recovery by building an enabling environment for structural stability.

---

60 McInnes and Wheeler, Dimensions of Western military intervention. 141.
61 HM Government. The UK Government’s Approach to Stabilisation. 1.
CHAPTER 4

SIERRA LEONE

...the careful and ultimately highly successful relationship that was established between British forces, UNAMSIL and the government forces in Sierra Leone repays study as a guide for the best management of future emergencies.\textsuperscript{62}

In order to assess the impact of the UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone and its applicability as a model for future UK engagement with the UN, it is firstly necessary to provide a review of the circumstances preceding the deployment and identify the broad details of the UK’s involvement. Whilst this review will establish the context for the intervention, it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a deep analysis of the full social, political and military climate in Sierra Leone. Moreover, it is also beyond the scope of this paper to deliver a full account of the activities of UNAMSIL and other actors involved. Such accounts and analysis are already in print and have been used extensively in this paper’s research. They are therefore included in its bibliography.

It has been identified that conflict in Sierra Leone was the result of a combination of two key elements. Firstly, ‘the existence of endemic poverty and the country’s patrimonial system of governance’ and, secondly, ‘the desire of various individuals and groups, both insiders and outsiders, to profit from Sierra Leone’s natural resources

\textsuperscript{62} Prins, \textit{The Heart of War}, 214.
at the expense of national development’. In essence, Sierra Leone exemplified both sides of the greed and grievance argument.

In March 1991, Foday Sankoh’s Revolutionary United Front (RUF), backed by the Liberian warlord, and later President, Charles Taylor, took control of extensive diamond-rich areas of Sierra Leone and began to overwhelm the Sierra Leone Army (SLA). Over the course of the following decade, Sierra Leone suffered extensively from a weak political system, an indistinguishable blurring of soldiers and rebel, the government’s inability to defeat rebel forces militarily, the continued exploitation of the country’s resource wealth and widespread, devastating violence and destruction. This overwhelming instability was experienced at a time in which the UN was ‘shamefully negligent’ of the African nations that provided minimal strategic value and offered little return for political or military investment.

The initial UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) was established on 13 July 1998 and was charged with, amongst other roles, monitoring the security and military situation in the country. Whilst the mission established a UN presence in Sierra Leone, its reliance on the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) for protection was evidently restrictive from the outset. Powerless to repel rebel forces and reliant on ECOMOG, UNOMSIL was forced to evacuate in the face of increasing threat. In January 1999, an alliance of soldiers from the Armed

---

63 Williams, “Fighting for Freetown,” 141.
64 Keen, _Complex emergencies_. 29-31.
68 A multilateral armed force established by the Economic Community of West African States.
Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and the RUF launched an offensive, killing hundreds of ECOMOG soldiers and unarmed civilians, conducting mass rape and brutalisation and abducting thousands of children to bolster their army of child-soldiers.\textsuperscript{69} A ceasefire agreement signed on 18 May 1999 presented the opportunity for dialogue and the environment to sign the Lomé Peace Agreement on 7 July 1999. Described as ‘a sumptuous banquet for Sierra Leone’s avaricious warlords’, the settlement presented rebel forces with amnesty, political status and access to wealth in exchange for peace.\textsuperscript{70}

UNOMSIL transitioned into UNAMSIL on 22 October 1999 with a mandate, under Chapter VII, that included assisting with the implementation of the Lomé Peace Agreement, facilitating the government’s disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process and assisting with the provision of humanitarian relief. However, the withdrawal of ECOMOG in December 1999 had significant impact on UNAMSIL’s ability to meet its mandate. The AFRC and RUF sought to test UNAMSIL’s resolve immediately by conducting violent attacks, kidnappings and exploiting their new-found power-base in government. Fundamentally, ‘the key assumption of UNAMSIL’s planners that the RUF and AFRC would abide by the terms of the peace agreement from which they had benefitted proved to be fatally flawed’.\textsuperscript{71} By 11 May 2000, the ‘pretence of peace’ had dissolved with active hostility against UN forces, the destruction of DDR camps and the kidnapping of 498 UN peacekeepers by the RUF.\textsuperscript{72}

\textsuperscript{69} Olonisakin, “UNAMSIL.” 601.
\textsuperscript{70} Adebejo and Keen, “Sierra Leone.” 257.
\textsuperscript{71} Olonisakin, “UNAMSIL.” 635.
\textsuperscript{72} McGreal, “Panic usurps peace as rebels close in.”
The UK’s deployment under Operation PALLISER marked a turning point not only for UNAMSIL but also for Sierra Leone in the long-term. It has been argued that the UK’s decision to engage militarily was the result of five core objectives: the protection of British citizens, the humanitarian necessity to act, the defence of democratic values, fulfilling the commitment to ethical foreign policy and, finally, upholding the credibility of UN peacekeeping.\textsuperscript{73} This paper also recognises the additional factors of long colonial links between the two countries with the associated duty that that incurs and the responsibility attached to the collapse of the Lomé Peace Accords, in which the UK had been a key facilitator.\textsuperscript{74}

The UK’s contribution saw the rapid deployment of:

a force of around 4,500 personnel including an aircraft carrier, an Amphibious Ready Group – an amphibious force based around a Royal Marine Commando – similar in size to an infantry battalion but trained for amphibious operations – with supporting assets such as artillery and engineers capable of a rapid response, a Parachute battalion, Special Forces and a balanced air force, containing all the various elements of air power such as air defence, strike, reconnaissance, transport aircraft and helicopters and command and control assets – over a distance of 3,500 miles in seven days.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{73} Williams, “Fighting for Freetown,” 155.
\textsuperscript{74} Pickering, \textit{Policy Coherence}, 26-29.
\textsuperscript{75} Dorman, \textit{Blair’s successful war}, 27.
The UK’s primary objective to secure Lungi airport and essential locations within Freetown to enable the successful evacuation of approximately 500 civilians was achieved within a week. From this point, the mandate expanded under the direction of Brigadier David Richards\textsuperscript{76} to one of assistance to UNAMSIL and the SLA with the intention of re-establishing the military advantage.\textsuperscript{77}

Within six weeks of the initial deployment the UK contribution was scaled back to 200 personnel, undertaking an advise and assist function alongside UN and Sierra Leone forces. However, the capture of 11 British service personnel in August 2000 initiated a further ramping up of UK military activity under Operation BARRAS. The operation was fundamentally a hostage rescue mission to recover the British soldiers and free captured Sierra Leone personnel but was conducted in such a manner as to demonstrate overwhelming force and capability. The mission, which involved the delivery of Special Forces and conventional troops by helicopter at daybreak was conducted with devastating precision, resulting in the recovery of all captured personnel, the killing of at least 25 West Side Boys (WSB) and the incarceration of a further 18 WSB.\textsuperscript{78} The mission was a demonstration of experience, resources and military effectiveness that served not only to achieve its operational objective but contributed to a longer-term strategic effect.\textsuperscript{79} As Andrew Dorman notes, the stakes

\textsuperscript{76} Later the UK’s Chief of Defence Staff (2010-2013).
\textsuperscript{77} Ucko, "Can limited intervention work?" 850.
\textsuperscript{78} Woods, Military Interventions in Sierra Leone, 71.
\textsuperscript{79} Francis, "Torturous path to peace," 369.
of such action were high but ultimately, ‘the operation was a great success and had a major impact on the situation in Sierra Leone.’

Undeniably, the imperative to secure the evacuation and protection of British personnel was the clear driving force behind the UK’s deployment. The expanded mandate of assistance to UNAMSIL and the training of the SLA was a combination of decisive leadership fuelled by the UK’s initial success, an acknowledgement of the requirement for more robust military engagement to fully defeat the WSB and a healthy measure of carefully managed ‘mission-creep’. The robust engagement was compounded by the capture of UK service personnel. However, the net result was the defeat of the WSB, the creation of an environment ripe for peace talks, the opportunity to re-establish a commendable DDR programme and, crucially, the breathing space for the primacy of political process. By the time UNAMSIL was concluded in December 2005 it was viewed as a ‘model’ mission.

It is necessary to recognise that whilst the UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone is argued to be a successful one, albeit one ‘pregnant with lessons’, there are key elements of this “paradigm” that do not necessarily portray success or, indeed, are not reflective of other operating environments.

---

80 Dorman, *Blair’s successful war*, 114.
81 Ucko and Egnell, *Counterinsurgency in Crisis*, 162.
82 Ucko, "Can limited intervention work?" 850.
83 UN, *UNAMSIL: A Success Story in Peacekeeping*.
84 Richards, "Sierra Leone - ‘Pregnant with lessons?’." 9.
The UK’s intervention was not regarded universally as the exemplar approach to the deteriorating conditions. As Funmi Olonisakin recognises, ‘UNAMSIL’s reputation was not helped by the UK’s deployment...while the UK presence offered support to UNAMSIL, local perceptions of the force did not improve since this demonstration of firepower was exactly what the local population expected UNAMSIL to do...’\textsuperscript{85} In effect, the UK’s delivery of over-the-horizon overwhelming force also served to undermine the UN mission by emphasising its inadequacies. Thus, whilst this paper recognises the effectiveness of the UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone, it maintains that any attempts to replicate this model in future conflicts must be cognisant of this side effect. Consequently, the best approach might be to adopt a more formalised over-the-horizon arrangement in which any parallel intervention would not be viewed as emasculating the UN’s activities but rather a planned and coordinated military upscaling in response to deteriorating conditions.

A key feature of the politics that surrounds UN commitments is the reputational risk concomitant with providing capabilities or limited support whilst leaving the riskier, and arguably bloodier, work to the non-Western nations, particularly those of the Global South. There is some argument to suggest that the UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone evinced the truth behind this criticism. The limited engagement and the nature of the UK’s operation in parallel to UNAMSIL meant that, outside of the UK’s focussed activity, the majority of ground-based operations were conducted by forces from Bangladesh, India, Nigeria, Jordan, Kenya, Ghana, Nepal and Guinea.\textsuperscript{86} Whilst the

\textsuperscript{85} Olonisakin, “UNAMSIL.” 635.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 633.
UK’s ‘loosely-coupled hybrid mission’ adopted a more engaged posture than might be delivered through niche support or logistical assistance, it was not the wholesale commitment that many nations would have liked. Indeed, it was far removed from the large-scale ground forces that the UK provided to the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia in the early 1990s.

The West’s reluctance to place their highly trained and equipped forces in harm’s way, particularly in areas of limited strategic importance, is arguably reflective of an ‘ambivalent relationship’ with UN peace operations. Indeed, to present a contemporary example, in MINUSMA, European forces are principally found in the strategic and leadership positions where the ground effort is largely comprised of African soldiers. Whilst this paper will not seek to address the advantages and disadvantages of the force composition, it does highlight that, whilst limited Western contributions of command, niche capabilities and superior military forces might assist the conflict, where they do not face the same sustained and immediate danger, the reputational risk argument will prevail.

It is necessary also to appreciate certain contextual specificities of the Sierra Leone model. Sierra Leone is approximately the size of Ireland with a large coastline on which the capital, Freetown, is located. Not only did this present a relatively small land mass in which to operate but also demonstrably played to the UK’s military advantage in its deployment of a large maritime component. By way of contrast, the Democratic

---

87 Bellamy and Williams. “The West and contemporary peace operations.” 47.
88 Ibid., 40.
89 Cold-Ravnkilde, Albrecht and Haugegaard. “Friction and Inequality,” 34-42.
Republic of Congo, where MONUSCO is based, is 33 times larger than Sierra Leone with 90% less coastline.\textsuperscript{90} Furthermore, the forces faced in Sierra Leone were, although brutal and resilient, predominantly a deeply unpopular, poorly educated and societally dislocated group largely comprised of ill-trained and forcibly enlisted children.\textsuperscript{91} To assume that the benefits of the small operating area of Sierra Leone or the advantages of combatting inexperienced and poorly coordinated enemy forces could be directly transferred to similar engagements would be a substantial miscalculation.

Ultimately, it is important to recognise that whilst the UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone has received significant acclaim, the story is one that is ‘longer and more intricate than commonly thought.’\textsuperscript{92} The UK’s involvement was, and continues to be, more than the military activity of spring and summer 2000. Indeed, David Ucko urges caution in the ‘lopsided focus’ on Operations PALLISER and BARRAS at the expense of equal focus on Operations BASILICA and SILKMAN.\textsuperscript{93} He argues that ‘attempting to replicate the success of Sierra Leone on the basis of its high-profile moments is likely to fail’.\textsuperscript{94} Thus, fundamentally, this paper recognises that military action alone is not sufficient to provide a long-term sustainable solution to intra-state conflicts and any such military action must take place within or alongside a wider comprehensive approach.

\textsuperscript{91} Mitton, “Engaging disengagement,” 195.
\textsuperscript{92} Ucko, “Can limited intervention work?” 850.
\textsuperscript{93} Ibid., 855 and 863: Operation BASILICA involved a Short-Term Training Team (STTT) of 250 personnel conducting a six-week training programme for 1000 SLA troops. Operation SILKMAN involved a UK taskforce returning to Sierra Leone to bolster UN and SLA forces, defeat the RUF and re-establish democratic process.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 851-852.
Therefore, an intervention parallel to a UN mission or as a stabilisation operation designed to provide breathing space for a comprehensive resolution might be regarded as the optimal application of this type of force. It is in this regard that the Sierra Leone exemplar is viewed successfully and, against this benchmark, one is able to appreciate that the actions of Operations PALLISER and BARRAS, in conjunction with BASILICA and SILKMAN, were highly effective.
CHAPTER 5

4 PILLARS

This paper identifies four key pillars that ensured the success of the UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone. Although each pillar is reflective of broader strategic themes and benefits, this paper will review each of these pillars in detail through the lens of the UK’s air power contribution. Whilst the air power contribution to the intervention cannot, and indeed should not, be viewed in isolation, it is essential to recognise the pivotal role that it played in ensuring operational success and consequent positive strategic effect. Air power’s ability to combine the characteristics of height, speed, reach, agility and ubiquity unquestionably provided commanders and decision makers with the flexibility required to respond in this dynamic environment. It was this flexibility, delivered through bold leadership, that allowed the deployment to adapt so successful from its original mandate into an exemplar for intervention.

Global credibility

...reputations can be fragile, and credibility must be protected if engagement is to form part of national strategy.95

As a founding member of the UN, a permanent member of the Security Council and the penholder for UN Peacekeeping96 there is a strong requirement for the UK to be

95 Blount, “Prevention is better than Cure,” 87.
96 UN. Penholders and Chairs.
actively invested in the UN beyond an administrative and leadership role. Whilst the 2015 National Security Strategy announced that the UK would double its contribution of military personnel to UN peacekeeping, it should be noted that this only increased the total figure to approximately 700 personnel with almost half of those attributed to the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP). Despite this reserved contribution of personnel, the UK was the sixth largest contributor of funds to UN Peacekeeping operations in 2017, providing 5.77% of the overall budget. This large distinction between financial contribution and delivery of personnel and resources to UN peacekeeping operations is a feature of much debate amongst academics, politicians and observers. Louise Riis Andersen notes, ‘the division between ‘those who pay’ and ‘those who play’ remains wide’, whilst Adrian Johnson asserts that ‘the UK has not matched [its] influence over peacekeeping with personnel put in harm’s way.’

This is not to suggest that the UK should, or indeed could, return to its contributions and commitments of the early 1990s but is an indication that financial contribution and direction from the relative safety of the Security Council only appears to stretch so far. In order to be able to fully reap the influential benefits of engaging through the UN, there is a requirement to demonstrate a willingness to actively participate in its missions. Whilst the commitment of personnel and capabilities to South Sudan and Somalia, again prompted by the 2015 National Security Strategy, demonstrated the UK’s recognition of this credibility gap, there is questionable operational and influential

97 HM Government. NSS 2015, 60.
98 UN. How we are funded.
99 Andersen, "The HIPPO in the room," 354.
100 Johnson, "Back in Blue?" 16.
101 HM Government, “PM pledges UK troops to support stability in Somalia and South Sudan."
impact in such localised, niche contributions. Small contributions, thinly spread across multiple missions face a number of challenges; they may be too limited to deliver a significant effect, they will always be in high demand and withheld when required in the national interests and ultimately, if they do not greatly enhance the UN’s overall effectiveness, there will be limited reputational gain from their contribution.\textsuperscript{102}

Arguably, whilst the current US administration’s tense relationship with the UN might prove only to last the length of President Trump’s duration in office, it serves as a stark warning that the financial support and leadership of the UN’s most influential Member States cannot be assumed to be unwavering. Indeed, the volatility created by resurgent Russian assertiveness is further demonstration of an uncertain geopolitical climate in which the threat of hostilities between Security Council members is once again a feature. At a time in which ‘the current global order is in a state of unprecedented flux, with new frictions in global geopolitics and a fragile global economy at the forefront’ there is an opportunity for the UK to benefit from increased engagement with the UN. Such engagement would demonstrate not only a firm commitment to reinforcing ‘the collective capacity of...multilateral institutions’\textsuperscript{103} and the rules-based international order, but also harnesses the respect of other Member States by demonstrating credible leadership and influence. Whilst the UK will undoubtedly continue to address Russian aggression primarily through NATO, there would arguably be strong benefit to the UK in countering and outcompeting Russian

\textsuperscript{103} HM Government, NSS 2015. 29.
global influence through the application of ‘soft power’ within the UN Security Council.\textsuperscript{104}

Whilst the Cold War had finished over a decade prior to the UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone, the general apathy of powerful Member States to engage with and through the UN was still evident. Despite the disastrous consequences of a failure to prepare for and react to the deteriorating situation in Rwanda in 1993, there was still a ‘climate of neglect and ignorance’ amongst the international community towards Sierra Leone and other countries of limited strategic and economic value.\textsuperscript{105} As Abiodun Alao asserts, the desperate situation in Sierra Leone presented ‘a salutary lesson in the lack of concern about the fate of peripheral nations.’\textsuperscript{106} Consequently, not only was the UK’s intervention striking in its rapidity and effectiveness but also, crucially, in as much that it demonstrated a willingness for powerful Member States with a highly-trained, professional forces to support UN operations in areas remote from their natural sphere of influence. As Andrew Dorman notes, ‘the government had emphasised that one of the reasons why Britain should retain its position as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council with veto rights was because of its representation of the Commonwealth and its good citizenship...The crisis in Sierra Leone therefore tapped into both these arguments and placed the government at somewhat of a quandary.’\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{104} House of Lords, “Persuasion and Power in the Modern World.” 51.
\textsuperscript{105} Adebejo and Keen, “Sierra Leone.” 249-251.
\textsuperscript{106} Alao, “Sierra Leone: Tracing the Genesis of a Controversy.”
\textsuperscript{107} Dorman, Blair’s successful war,” 66.
Whilst, the motivations for the UK’s intervention were multiple and, to a large degree, self-serving, the undertone of liberal interventionism championed by the UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair, was a key feature. Indeed, over a decade after the intervention, the effect of the British leadership’s commitment to the region was still tangible.108 Thus, a key feature of the Sierra Leone intervention was that it evades the criticisms and accusations that it was purely an exercise in self-serving, postmodern, neo-colonialism. Such criticisms were undoubtedly fuelled by the controversial assertions of a senior British diplomat to accept foreign policy ‘double standards’ and embrace an approach of ‘new liberal imperialism’.109 However, the clear desire of the Government of Sierra Leone to see intervention, the palpable relief of the Sierra Leone population at the arrival of British forces, the endorsement at the highest levels of the UN and the rapidity with which the contingent was extracted served to legitimise the operation.110

Notwithstanding the UK’s own national reasons for deploying to the region, the intervention was, significantly, a direct response to the plea for assistance from the UN Secretary General. Consequently, the UK’s deployment of forces, whilst outside of UNAMSIL, was conducted under the authority of the UN Security Council and carried the global validity that such a mandate confers.111 This sentiment was reflected in a speech delivered by the Chief of Defence Staff, General Sir Nicholas Houghton,

---

108 Renton, “Sierra Leone: one place where Tony Blair remains an unquestioned hero.”
109 Cooper, “The New Liberal Imperialism.”: ‘The challenge to the postmodern world is to get used to the idea of double standards...Among ourselves, we keep the law but when we are operating in the jungle, we must also use the laws of the jungle.’
111 Bellamy and Williams, “The West and contemporary peace operations.” 51.
over a decade later, as he remarked that, the UK should ‘be far more pro-active in [its] investment in United Nations Operations ... such operations come...with the benefit of an extant legal mandate which confers legitimacy.’\textsuperscript{112} Indeed, the war in Iraq demonstrated that military engagement without UN endorsement can be not only a costly affair in terms of manpower and resources but also in the spheres of global influence and diplomacy.\textsuperscript{113}

The UK’s intervention was a definitive example of its military capabilities and demonstration of its credibility as a highly flexible and adaptable force. It is here that the air power contribution to the Sierra Leone intervention is worthy of mention in its own right. The rapid deployment of significant forces and assets to the region through a combination of strategic airlift and also, in the case of two CH-47 Chinooks, ‘the longest self-deployment of helicopters in British history (approximately 3,000 miles),’\textsuperscript{114} emphasised the forces’ credibility on the global stage. Moreover, beyond the successful deployment of personnel were simultaneous operational achievements: The dusk delivery of Special Forces and 1PARA troops by C-130 Hercules to secure Lungi airport, the initiation of the deployable Joint Force Air Component Command (JFACC) aboard HMS Illustrious and the utilisation of the full spectrum of air power assets available in short order, including establishing a Joint Personnel Recovery\textsuperscript{115} capability and displays of force by rotary wing and fast jet aircraft. The utilisation of air

\textsuperscript{112} Houghton, Annual Chief of the Defence Staff Lecture 2013, RUSI.
\textsuperscript{113} Chitalkar and Malone. The UN Security Council and Iraq. 8-9.
\textsuperscript{114} Dorman, Blair’s successful war, 74.
\textsuperscript{115} NATO and UK MOD. “Allied Joint Doctrine for Recovery of Personnel in a Hostile Environment.” 1-2: ‘Personnel recovery (PR). The sum of military, diplomatic and civil efforts to effect the recovery and reintegration of isolated personnel.’
power during Op BARRAS was arguably an even more concentrated display of capability. The daybreak deliberate assault on the WSB’s encampment to recover captured personnel demonstrated the ability to seamlessly integrate air and land forces in a joint rescue mission. The delivery of troops by helicopter, both conventionally and, in the case of the special forces, by fast-rope delivery, was supported by air and ground-based firepower and resulted in the successful rescue of personnel and the capitulation of the WSB.

Not only did this deployment allow the UK to achieve its operational objectives, both in evacuating its national citizens and the subsequent bolstering of UNAMSIL and SLA operations, it also served at the strategic level. The deployment demonstrated the UK’s credibility in being able to project effective force globally, provide a deterrent to future rebel activity, uphold its commitment to the UN and, ultimately, demonstrate willingness to take personal risk as a P5 member on the Security Council.

**Reflective of the evolving security challenge**

Notwithstanding the debate over Kaldor’s proposed ‘new wars’, what is evident is that many contemporary conflict environments differ greatly from conventional state-on-state hostilities. Indeed, Thomas Weiss summarises the key areas that characterise ‘new wars’ to be: Firstly, ‘the locus of war no longer coincides with state borders’. Secondly, ‘instead of states and their militaries being the main agents, non-state actors are playing an increasing role’. Thirdly, ‘the economies of war are no longer financed principally from government tax revenues but increasingly from illicit activities, aid and plunder’. Fourth and finally, ‘instead of informed combatants being the main victims,
civilians are increasingly paying the lion’s share of the costs.’116 These diverse and multifaceted features of conflict are undoubtedly present in most, if not all, of the contemporary UN peacekeeping missions. As such, there are clear demands on UN forces, not only to remain within their doctrinal parameters, but also operationally, to determine how to engage hostile forces and protect themselves and others. Such environments present a very real threat to UN forces who, as this paper has previously indicated, are in many circumstances no longer viewed as impartial and neutral arbiters. The frequency of UN fatalities has risen significantly and almost continuously since 2011 with the 56 fatalities of 2017 marking the ‘deadliest single year on record since [the spike in] 1994.’117 Indeed, a recent report conducted by Lieutenant General (Retired) Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz (the ‘Cruz Report) into the dangers of contemporary peacekeeping operations highlights ‘not a spike [in UN fatalities] but rather a rise to a continuing plateau.’118 The statistics of this report demonstrate that whilst attacks against UN personnel are not a new phenomenon, their growing prevalence and the success of the methods used to inflict them, including Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), suicide attacks and Indirect-Fire (IDF) presents a significant area of concern.119

The security situation in Sierra Leone, which ultimately demanded the UK’s intervention in May 2000, reflected the developing environment that Weiss describes.

116 Weiss, Humanitarian intervention, 91.
118 Ibid. ‘Since 2011, peacekeeping fatalities due to acts of violence are rising with 2013-2016 establishing a plateau. 2017 ends the plateau with significantly higher fatalities. 90.2% of fatalities are suffered by military components with the vast majority from attacks on movements and camps.’
119 Hunt, “All necessary means to what ends?” 117.
Whilst the conflict had strong links to surrounding regions, the ‘locus’ was centred within Sierra Leone national borders, largely around Freetown and the resource rich areas. Whilst the SLA were a key fighting force, other non-state actors such as the RUF, the AFRC and external ‘spoilers’ were key components. Looking only marginally further back in its history, the utility of the Private Military Company, Executive Outcomes, and the Kamajor hunters must also be regarded within the bracket of non-state actors. The Sierra Leone conflict demonstrated a civil war economy fuelled by a complex blend of greed and grievance; significantly, an economy in which plunder, exploitation and illicit activity were substantial components.\textsuperscript{120} Undeniably, the most disturbing and recognisable feature of the civil war was the indiscriminate brutality that resulted in the displacement of two thirds of the Sierra Leone population and the death of 50,000 of its citizens over the course of a decade.\textsuperscript{121}

As a consequence of this complex conflict environment, the response required by the UN forces, in conjunction with the UK’s parallel assistance, was not indistinct from that required to combat an insurgency. NATO defines an insurgency as:

\begin{quote}
actions of an organized, often ideologically motivated, group or movement that seeks to effect or prevent political change or to overthrow a governing authority within a country or a region, focused on persuading or coercing the population through the use of violence and subversion\textsuperscript{122}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{120} Voors, Van Der Windt, Papaioannou and Bulte. "Resources and governance," 281-282.
\textsuperscript{121} Mitton, "Engaging disengagement," 194.
\textsuperscript{122} NATO, "Allied Joint Doctrine for Counterinsurgency (COIN)," 2-1.
\end{flushright}
Such conditions were clearly evinced in Sierra Leone, where the threat faced by the Government, its armed forces and its population, required a comprehensive, counter insurgency-style response. Significantly, Russell Glenn argues that the ‘British armed forces made it only too clear that quality in small numbers can render an insurgency impotent where a less competent larger force inspires rebel confidence.’ This paper argues that whilst highly trained British ground forces were key to the UK’s contribution, it was the air power component that provided the dominant military advantage in the face of such a threat. The rapid delivery of forces into theatre largely by strategic airlift and their movement around the operating area by air mobility platforms, all supported by demonstrations of force by fast jets, intelligence feeds from air platforms and the coordination from the ‘embryonic’ Joint Force Air Component Headquarters substantially contributed to the intervention’s success.

Sierra Leone represented many of the challenges that have been faced by UN forces in the numerous conflicts of the post-Cold War era. Evidently clear from Glenn’s analysis, however, is that for the UN to be effective in achieving their mandates in the face of such challenges, they will require more ‘preemption’. Such proactivity, in an organisation that is designed for reactivity, is difficult to achieve. Thus, this paper argues that, in the absence of a permanent force and adequate UN doctrine, any proactive and targeted stabilisation support to the UN in delivery of its mandate, would

123 Glenn, Rethinking Western Approaches to Counterinsurgency,” 140.
124 Thompson, “Post-Cold War development,” 84.
125 Dorman, Blair’s successful war, 93-94.
126 Glenn, Rethinking Western Approaches to Counterinsurgency, 140.
127 Ibid.
be more appropriately conducted by a capable parallel contribution. As Glenn highlights, the UK demonstrated that ‘a relatively small, well trained, disciplined, and effectively led’ force could contribute significantly to a successful result.\textsuperscript{128} This is reflective of Michael Codner’s ‘strategic raiding’ option for the future of the UK military, in which small, agile forces would be capable of ‘short-term early interventions...[using] preventive, precautionary and pre-emptive deployments to contribute to shaping the security environment proactively.’\textsuperscript{129}

In an era in which both the UK and the UN are consistently challenged to \textit{do more with less}, combining interests and capabilities presents an opportunity for mutual benefit. The UK’s focus on upstream conflict prevention provides a vehicle through which the UK’s contribution to a wider UN effort might be justified and supported. Explicitly, this paper recognises the observations of Gp Capt Clive Blount, who identifies that ‘air power has inherent qualities that make it a unique instrument that strategists and policy-makers can deploy in order to influence future events, manage crises and potentially prevent conflict as part of a comprehensive UK response.’\textsuperscript{130} In his paper, Blount recognises five ‘headlines’ that make air power such a crucial asset in this arena. Firstly, it offers an ‘Agile Commitment’ in which its effect may be both rapid and scaleable; providing decision makers with the advantage of time and adaptability. Secondly, it offers ‘Freedom of Political Choice’, again allowing pressure to be increased and decreased accordingly and, if required, permitting decision-making to be deferred until the latest acceptable stage. Thirdly, air and space power can deliver

\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{129} Codner, "A force for honour?" 7.  
\textsuperscript{130} Blount, "Prevention is better than Cure," 93.
‘Effects at Range’, providing the ability to influence from afar and often entirely remote from the theatre of operations. Fourthly, air power allows for enhanced ‘Wider Effects’ such as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), increased understanding of the operational area, influence operations and informed contingency planning. Fifthly, air power has the ability to integrate and support other ‘Cross-Government Activity’, thereby assisting beyond the traditional military parameters.\(^\text{131}\)

It is, finally, essential to recognise a less-celebrated outcome of this intervention; the minimal impact that the deployment of forces had on the UK’s national commitments and capabilities. Representing an exemplar for low-intensity operations, the UK’s intervention demonstrated an ability to maintain international commitments without compromising national security.\(^\text{132}\) It achieved this through both the utilisation of appropriate assets and also through the short duration of the engagement. In an era which has seen resurgent Russian belligerence and the demonstrable ambition of other powerful states there is a clear requirement to sustain technological dominance and high intensity capabilities. Put simply, low intensity operations do not require the most advanced and technologically superior air power assets to achieve the required effect.\(^\text{133}\) Indeed, the capacity to simultaneously undertake low intensity operations whilst retaining high intensity expertise allows the UK not only to address the full spectrum of threats it faces but is also a demonstration of global potency and military agility.\(^\text{134}\)

\(^{131}\) Ibid., 94.
\(^{132}\) Dorman, "The British experience of low-intensity conflict in Sierra Leone." 185 and 195.
\(^{134}\) UK MOD, *JDP 0-30*, 62-64.
Military advantage

Air power is essential to develop an “environment of security”. But it remains an under-used and under-studied tool for peace operations.\textsuperscript{135}

Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire (Retired)

Fundamentally, the intervention in Sierra Leone played to the UK’s military strength and advantage. This paper identifies four key areas that allowed this to be the case. Firstly, the rapidity with which the military contribution was conducted, secondly, the retention of command and control (C2), thirdly, the minimal ground presence and, fourthly, the application of superior and diverse force. As previously stated, this paper will review these elements through the air power lens, not to diminish or devalue the contribution of the other components but, rather, to highlight the profound significance of the air component’s involvement.

The UK’s engagement in Sierra Leone is perhaps best regarded as a successful early application of fifth-generation strategy; a strategy that Alan Stephens regards as, ‘characterized by knowledge dominance, speed, fluid movement, precision, and a fleeting footprint’.\textsuperscript{136} This approach was to be endorsed by the successful initial action of US forces in Afghanistan in which advanced airpower alongside special and indigenous forces conducted specific and targeted strikes with minimal ground

\textsuperscript{135} Dallaire, “Foreword.” In Air power in UN Operations: Wings for Peace. xxii.
presence to remarkable effect. By adopting this fifth-generation strategic approach to contemporary threats through the operational concept of ‘strategic raiding’, one is able to appreciate that tempo has a strategic value in its own right. It is argued that this air-centric approach allows ‘greater systemic and strategic effects at lower cost in lives, treasure and damage. Gwyn Prins reflects on Sierra Leone’s effectiveness as a model of ‘strategic raiding in the conduct of diplomatic/military operations (DMOs). The tempo of the UK’s intervention was undeniably quick. Indeed, at times, the deployed operational component arguably outpaced the strategic direction from Whitehall. This model provided Brigadier Richards not only with swift movement to and around the operational theatre but also allowed him to overtake his opponent’s decision-making cycle and afforded essential rapidity in the ‘rate of application of force.’ Indeed, as Dorman confirms, ‘it was the speed and determination of the intervention which brought success’; a feat which would have been unachievable without air power. As Richards reflects, without such tempo positive solutions would be overtaken by events and risked compounding new problems when applied too late. As the UK, and particularly those in the defence community, continues to aspire for enhanced C2 agility there will be even greater opportunities to mitigate the Clausewitzian ‘friction’ that persistently complicates and frustrates engagements of this nature.

137 Ibid.
139 Ibid.
140 Prins, The Heart of War, 218.
143 Dorman, Blair’s successful war, 130.
145 Von Clausewitz, On War, 119.
Facilitating the pace of deployment and operations in Sierra Leone was the retention of command and control. By deploying as a parallel force alongside UNAMSIL, the UK was able to operate with substantial autonomy. In doing so, British forces were best able to manoeuvre flexibly, react quickly and coordinate familiar assets without restraint. It would, however, be a misrepresentation to suggest that the retention of C2 was purely for the purposes of speed and agility. The sensitive intelligence feeds that form the foundation of targeted military action, the complexities of national rules of engagement and, fundamentally, the issue of self-preservation were all factors. Indeed, there was an inherent distrust in the capabilities of UNAMSIL and an appreciation that its command was operating beyond capacity.\(^{146}\) It has been argued that to place assets and personnel under this command would not only have impeded their capability and utility but would have placed UK personnel at risk.\(^{147}\) This paper proposes that such a model presents the greatest level of operational freedom and flexibility but does not overlook the requirement for operating within the UN C2 construct when participating as part of, or indeed leading, a UN mission.

The limited ground presence of the intervention was also a key feature. Reflecting on US air operations throughout the 1990s, US General Robert Scales determined a requirement to move away from a protracted ground presence in which forces would be required to hold terrain and face their enemy's mass.\(^{148}\) Indeed, the extremely challenging and costly 'boots on the ground' campaigns of Iraq and Afghanistan from

\(^{146}\) Adebejo and Keen, “Sierra Leone.” 263-264.
\(^{147}\) Dorman, *Blair’s successful war*, 88.
2003 onwards bore testament to not only the warfighting difficulty that this entails but also the political and diplomatic pressure that must accompany it. As a study of the limitations of General Krulak’s ‘Three-Block War’\textsuperscript{149} reveals, a successful ground presence requires significant mass, a long-term engagement and depth of cultural understanding that is seldom achievable at short notice, particularly without substantial financial and administrative commitment. Moreover, in addition to its resource and logistics burden, large-scale and long-term ground campaigns, particularly in post-colonial regions, bring accusations of neo-imperialism and significant societal and political pressure from the domestic audience. Scales’ model for a ground force that would ‘replicate the characteristics of advanced airpower’ was one that reflected this sociological component in addition to an acute appreciation of technological advancement. Such a force would be capable of capitalising on airborne ISR, utilising and exploiting Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) and leveraging the spectrum of air power whilst manoeuvring rapidly with minimal ground presence.\textsuperscript{150}

Whilst the intervention in Sierra Leone was an early and limited representation of this approach, it should not be overlooked that a large-scale ground presence simultaneously existed in the form of the SLA and UNAMSIL forces. It was these ground forces that, in addition to playing a valuable role in elements of the UK-led action, allowed for capitalisation on intervention’s gains. Thus, this paper echoes arguments that air power alone, or even in conjunction with a small-scale ground force, will almost certainly not deliver a long-term solution.\textsuperscript{151} Rather, more specifically, it

\textsuperscript{149} Stephens, "The Defence of Australia and the Limits of Land Power." 34-36.
\textsuperscript{150} Stephens, “Fifth-Generation Strategy.” In Airpower Reborn, 146-147.
\textsuperscript{151} Dorn, Air power in UN Operations: Wings for Peace. 318.
highlights that an intervention or stabilisation force working within or in parallel to the UN is most effective when its presence on the ground is as limited as possible. Distinct peacekeeping forces and a legitimate state security sector will almost certainly also be required to ensure the deliverance of a long-term, comprehensive and politically-driven peace.\textsuperscript{152}

Fundamentally, Prins highlights that the success of the UK’s ‘strategic raid’ in Sierra Leone, particularly the information operations component, would not have been as effective without the diverse spectrum of forces available to Brigadier Richards; something that a ‘dribbled deployment’ would not have provided.\textsuperscript{153} Specifically, the array of deployed assets allowed forces to undertake the four core roles of air power; control of the air, ISR, attack and air mobility.\textsuperscript{154} This paper has previously detailed the variety of air assets used in the intervention and highlighted their contribution to the mission’s success. It is therefore, more appropriate at this stage to address the realistic potential for the contribution of air power that is possible nearly two decades later. As Dorman reflects, the UK’s experiences in Sierra Leone and later conflicts fuelled a drive to develop ‘sensors capable of identifying targets; a communications network able to transfer this information to commanders to decide on a response; and the strike assets capable of accurately hitting the target within the requisite timeframe’\textsuperscript{155}

\textsuperscript{153} Prins, The Heart of War, 213.
\textsuperscript{154} UK MOD. JDP 0-30, 4.
\textsuperscript{155} Dorman, Blair’s successful war, 135.
There is already a well-documented, clear requirement for increased air power in UN missions.\textsuperscript{156} Most notable is the perennial shortage of helicopters to provide essential mobility and medical cover in the theatre of operations.\textsuperscript{157} However, this paper seeks to address the air power contribution with regards to intervention and stabilisation missions and not the more conventional commitment of air assets in support of the UN. Notwithstanding this distinction, it must be appreciated that there is an overlap in utility and, moreover, experiences gained in the one will undoubtedly contribute to the effectiveness of the other.

The Sierra Leone intervention demonstrated the effectiveness of integrating multiple rotary wing platforms into composite packages to deliver swift tactical gains. Whilst such an approach was by no means novel, the application of coordinated, intelligence-led, air power against an unprepared enemy was sufficient to elevate its tactical utility to a more significant level. This application of air power would become a staple of the UK’s operations in Afghanistan, albeit the Taliban’s more coordinated insurgency and familiarity with counter-air operations reflect a different circumstance. Collectively these experiences drove developments in rotary tactics, training and procedures and demonstrated the necessity for such assets. The capability to deliver personnel with the element of surprise and protected by firepower support from the air has become an essential feature of contemporary operations. Whilst the Lynx helicopter, alongside a Sierra Leoni Mi-24 Hind, was able to provide airborne firepower during Op BARRAS,

the UK’s Apache helicopter, arriving into service in 2004, undoubtedly escalates this ability, not only with regard to firepower but also from an airborne C2 perspective.

In addition to enhancing the delivery of troops to a target, the advancements in extraction have also been substantial. Increases in range, endurance, firepower and responsiveness, not only from rotary aircraft but also in UAS, are critical in reducing this risk and enhancing effectiveness. Similarly, empirical experiences and refinements of the airborne Medical Emergency Response Teams (MERT) and Immediate Response Teams (IRT) in Afghanistan have generated a world-class capability.\(^{158}\)

Countries that have a contemporary UN presence, particularly those in Africa, are largely characterised by vast distances of rugged terrain, geographically isolated urban areas and have poorly connected transportation networks; an environment ripe for exploitation by hostile forces.\(^{159}\) Air power has the ability to substantially mitigate the challenges presented by distance, environment and diffuseness. However, as has been highlighted previously, these low-intensity operations, do not demand cutting edge assets and capabilities to achieve the desired effect.\(^{160}\) Indeed, even modest advancements in the permanence and efficacy of airborne ISR platforms ensure that the inability to satisfactorily harness and rely upon human intelligence does not necessarily preclude military action. Moreover, the ability to corroborate information garnered from ground-based sources through imagery and signals intelligence will

\(^{158}\) Clarke and Davis. "Medical evacuation and triage," 1261.
\(^{159}\) Fearon and Laitin. "Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war." 80-81.
only lead to enhanced effectiveness, enabling an early intelligence picture and the shaping of operational activity.\textsuperscript{161} Furthermore, this ability to extend a force’s ‘eyes and ears’ may even serve a deterrent effect, negating the need for kinetic action in toto.\textsuperscript{162}

Finally, as this paper has identified previously, the rapid manoeuvre of forces against a threat may be conducted so efficiently that the effect exceeds the tactical objectives. In Sierra Leone, the speed of response not only achieved the mission’s aims but also led to the collapse of the most significant opponent force within the country, paving the way for sustained peacebuilding. Advancements in the UK’s expeditionary capability and preparedness, such as the Joint Expeditionary Force, demonstrate the posture for such a response. However, as was witnessed in Sierra Leone, the challenge of knowing when to commit such force and to what end remains a significant dilemma.

\textbf{Political and social will}

There were aspects of the UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone that allowed it to satisfy the political and public conscience and be ‘widely welcomed with minimum criticism’.\textsuperscript{163} It is necessary to appreciate that many of these considerations are equally as valid today.

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{161} Blount, “Prevention is better than Cure,” 90.
In responding to the deteriorating situation in Sierra Leone, the UK’s intervention evinced a desire to uphold, in this case as a parallel actor, a multilateral approach to delivering peace. However, in delivering upon its commitment to the UN, the UK was simultaneously able to react to events that directly affected the security of its own nationals and thus demonstrate the argument for mutual benefit. This was recognised by a Defence Select Committee report in advance of the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) which suggested a reflection on ‘the successes of Sierra Leone’ as a model for future interventions.\textsuperscript{164} However, any assumption that deployments under the ‘force for good’\textsuperscript{165} banner might automatically receive the approval of the British public must be examined. There are two key opinions that should be explored. Firstly, the opinion towards the UK’s role on the global stage and, secondly, the opinion towards that UK’s commitment to working within or alongside the UN.

With regards to the public’s opinion towards the UK’s global role, a YouGov poll in October 2014 assessing British attitudes to military action revealed an uncertain picture. When questioned on the UK’s role in the world, 37% believed that the UK should ‘stop trying to project international influence’, 22% believed that the UK ‘should seek to be a global power’, 22% believed that that UK ‘should seek to be a regional power’ and 19% were undecided. However, a recent study by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) designed to compare the foreign policy attitudes of the general public and ‘security elites’ provides a less equivocal picture. In this study, 97% of elites and 67% of the public considered that ‘it would be best for the future of the

\textsuperscript{164} House of Commons Defence Committee. \textit{Re-thinking defence to meet new threats}, 35-36.
\textsuperscript{165} Cook, “Robin Cook’s speech on the government’s ethical foreign policy.”
UK to take an active part in world affairs'.\textsuperscript{166} A further YouGov poll, conducted in conjunction with Chatham House in 2015, saw two-thirds of those asked supportive of the UK’s aspiration to be a ‘great power’ in the world and almost 70% of the public recognising the UK’s ‘responsibility to maintain international security’.\textsuperscript{167}

With specific regard to the popularity of different approaches to conflict resolution, the 2014 YouGov poll assessed, in one instance, the appetite for intervention against Boko Haram in Nigeria and determined that support for RAF strikes was low with 38% in support and 36% in opposition.\textsuperscript{168} Interestingly, the use of RAF for strikes in Syria and Iraq received significantly more support with over 60%. Of note, the use of UAS in Nigeria revealed 46% in support and 28% in opposition.\textsuperscript{169} Moreover, the use of special forces to rescue hostages received 55% support and an advise and assist role received 62% support.\textsuperscript{170}

In terms of the perception of the UK’s approach to multilateralism and, specifically, the UN, the 2014 YouGov poll indicated that 68% of those questioned believed that the UK ‘should definitely or consider’ sending peacekeepers at the request of a foreign government against 19% that indicated that the UK ‘should probably or definitely not’.\textsuperscript{171} These figures were endorsed in the 2015 YouGov/Chatham House poll in which almost 60% of the public thought that the UK should provide troops for international peacekeeping.\textsuperscript{172} It is to be appreciated that this relates to conventional

---

\textsuperscript{166} Thomson, “Mind the Gap,” 8.
\textsuperscript{167} Raines, \textit{Internationalism or Isolationism}? 7.
\textsuperscript{168} Rogers de Waal, “Report on British Attitudes to Defence, Security and the Armed Forces.”
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{172} Raines, \textit{Internationalism or Isolationism}? 8.
peacekeeping and not the parallel intervention and stabilisation broached within this paper. The RUSI study provides further insight, determining that 79% of elites and 53% of the public believe that ‘the best way for the UK to be a world leader in foreign affairs is to build international consensus.’\textsuperscript{173} Interestingly, support for operating through international bodies, such as UN received 56% support from the elites and 44% from the public whilst 84% of the elites and 87% of the public perceived strengthening the UN to be either ‘very’ or ‘somewhat’ important.\textsuperscript{174} Finally, there was recognition in the RUSI report for unilateral action with 76% of elites and 56% of the public agreeing or strongly agreeing that to ‘go it alone’ was sometimes necessary in foreign affairs.\textsuperscript{175}

A number of initial conclusions can be drawn from a review of these, albeit limited, polls. There is a strong opinion that the UK ought to play a role on the world stage and should be instrumental in maintaining international security. Functioning with global consensus is clearly important, and, whilst operating through an international entity received lukewarm support, there is still strong support for the UN and the UK’s function within it. Arguably, intervention is most clearly supported where the effects are experienced ‘closer to home’, such as the migration crisis deriving from Syria and Iraq, the requirement for hostage rescues and the response to highly publicised humanitarian atrocities. There is evident reticence towards the offensive use of aircraft for strikes and many reasons why this might be the case. Understandably, a key feature is the limited and questionable effect that they achieve in isolation or without

\textsuperscript{173} Thomson, "Mind the Gap," 14.
\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{175} Ibid.
significant ground forces and political will to support them. Thus, as Berdal and Ucko highlight, a key challenge is the ‘longer term translation of operational outcomes into lasting political gains.’\textsuperscript{176}

Therefore, whilst the intervention in Sierra Leone highlighted that military action could be significant, it was essential that such action should not be an end in itself but, rather, a facilitator for a political solution. As Berdal reflects, stability cannot be imposed by external forces, it must be elicited.\textsuperscript{177} Such a point was echoed before the Defence Select Committee in 2016 by Major General Shaw who identified that ‘a military solution to a military threat was vital, but that issues arose when a military solution was used to try and resolve a difficult political situation...’\textsuperscript{178}

The intervention contributed towards stabilising the situation in Sierra Leone without the UK having to assume the responsibilities of UNAMSIL, nor the large-scale ground presence that a full unilateral campaign would require. By evolving the mission mandate into one of facilitating UNAMSIL, the UK would have a means of fitting into the wider political solution in the region and, in effect, translate ‘operational progress into political gains.’\textsuperscript{179} Where there is political engagement and the main focus is to establish a climate for successful peacebuilding, one appreciates an environment of legitimacy and a reduced likelihood of accusations of neo-imperialism and unwarranted military occupation.\textsuperscript{180} The Short-Term Training Team (STTT) under

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{177} Berdal, Building peace after war. 97.
\textsuperscript{178} House of Commons. UK military operations in Syria and Iraq. 52.
\textsuperscript{179} Ucko, “Can limited intervention work?” 854.
\textsuperscript{180} Ford, “Building stability overseas,” 597.
\end{flushleft}
Operation BASILICA and, principally, the reinforcement of the International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT) through Operation SILKMAN served to this effect, providing reinvigoration, increased capacity and strategic guidance to the Government of Sierra Leone and its security sector.\textsuperscript{181} In effect, this sustained and comprehensive politico-military engagement allowed the gains of Operations PALLISER and BARRAS alongside the activity of UNAMSIL and the SLA to be converted into long-term success.\textsuperscript{182}

Whilst it would a misrepresentation to paint the UK’s intervention as a wholly positive example of the application of the Comprehensive Approach (most recently referred to as the Full-Spectrum Approach)\textsuperscript{183}, it was undoubtedly an opportunity to test this concept and the limits of the UK’s inter-departmental coherence.\textsuperscript{184} In his review of the lessons of the Sierra Leone intervention, David Richards argues that the intra-government and inter-agency ‘coherence’ would be critical to future success, noting that:

\begin{quote}
...too often the actors in these different areas work narrowly within their own discipline, even parochially; blind to the requirement to ensure their work remains coherent with the overall effort.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{181} Ucko, “Can limited intervention work?” 865-866.
\textsuperscript{182} Berdal, \textit{Building peace after war}. 106.
\textsuperscript{183} UK MOD. \textit{JCN 1/17}. 55: ‘A full spectrum approach draws on a range of levers available to a state actor in a coordinated way to achieve (geo)political and strategic objectives…’
\textsuperscript{184} Dorman, \textit{Blair’s successful war}, 126.
Thus, arguably, one of the resultant successes of the Sierra Leone intervention was not necessarily the application of the Comprehensive Approach, but the lessons learned which have re-shaped the UK’s whole-of-government philosophy. Furthermore, this lesson has undoubtedly moulded the perception of expeditionary interventions, providing empirical evidence to drive forward a focus on the conceptual and doctrinal components of stabilisation operations.\(^\text{185}\)

Finally, the ability to conduct so much of the intervention utilising air power was a contributory force in its political and social acceptability. Air power carries the major advantage of significantly reducing risk to personnel, both by limiting the amount of time that forces are exposed to threat and also by reducing the requirement for ground presence. Indeed, in some cases, as was experienced in Sierra Leone, large force elements can be positioned outside of the conflict area entirely, either in neutral or friendly territory or aboard ship.\(^\text{186}\) The UK’s recent military advancements have guaranteed this capability even further. The Queen Elizabeth-class aircraft carrier might continue to provide assured landing space along littoral regions and modern UAS are able to deliver an increase in range and endurance whilst also removing the physical presence of the pilot from this area of the battlespace. Furthermore, the utilisation of space-based assets will continue to contribute to the ubiquity and the agility of C2, ISR and communications. As Robert Steel argues, the shifting security environment and nature of conflict in UN operations requires a concomitant shift in the utility and application of air power. He argues that the future of air power in UN

\(^{185}\) Ford, "Building stability overseas," 585-586.
\(^{186}\) McInnes and Wheeler, Dimensions of Western military intervention. 29.
operations will see the UN serve as a ‘coordinator, not a commander’ but nonetheless critical component in delivering ‘Peace from Above’\textsuperscript{187}.

Air power, particularly in recent years, has allowed force to be delivered accurately and in a manner that is discriminatory; maximising effect against hostile forces and minimising impact on non-combatants. In an era of intense media coverage, both from professional outlets but also at the amateur level, the requirement for precision and judgement has arguably never been greater. As the images of US forces in Vietnam proved, the ‘theatre of war extends well beyond the battlefield’ and can influence an entire campaign\textsuperscript{188}. Thus, there are evident reasons why air power has ‘become synonymous with the West’s use of force’\textsuperscript{189} and, indeed, has been argued to be the ‘weapon of first political choice’\textsuperscript{190}. Whilst Eliot Cohen’s suggestion that air power can offer ‘gratification without commitment’\textsuperscript{191} might appear a rather nonchalant summary, it does highlight that the ability to engage rapidly, accurately and intelligently whilst minimising risk to personnel and assets is a highly attractive option for politicians and public alike.

\textsuperscript{187} Steele, “Peace from Above,” In \textit{Air Power in UN Operations}, 299-301.
\textsuperscript{188} Mack, “Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars,” 177.
\textsuperscript{189} McInnes and Wheeler. \textit{Dimensions of Western military intervention}. 28.
\textsuperscript{190} Gray, “Air Power: The Asymmetrical Edge.” 17.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The evolving security environment requires greater responsiveness (the ability to act in hours rather than weeks or months), long range (the ability to span the globe), effective delivery (the ability to deliver weapons or relief with precision to achieve desired effects), and high leverage (the ability to reduce personnel, support and overall monetary costs).

There is a clear dilemma in striking the balance between addressing the challenges of the contemporary security environment whilst responding to the pressures of limited resources. Essentially, the problem faced is the requirement to do more with less. As this paper has demonstrated, this challenge is one that is felt not only by national governments and their militaries but also by multinational organisations. As such, there is an argument to explore opportunities for greater engagement between the two, both as a mechanism to address threats and instability but also as a vehicle to demonstrate and foster influence and credibility. Indeed, from the UK’s perspective, it has been argued that there is a strategic imperative to reduce international instability, preferably in less controversial and risky ways, coupled with a strong desire to restore

some damaged international friendships and clear UK interests in regions high on the UN priority list.\textsuperscript{193}

This paper identifies that one approach would be for the UK to engage more actively in UN stabilisation-type operations outside of conventional peacekeeping or niche contributions. In the absence of a doctrinally-sound mechanism to conduct such activity within the UN, this paper suggests that parallel intervention, akin to that witnessed in Sierra Leone, might be regarded as the best approach. Demonstrating the contemporary relevance of this historical model, Arthur Boutellis asserts:

The growing number of asymmetric attacks targeting the UN mission no doubt provide strong arguments against deploying large, static, and therefore vulnerable UN peacekeeping missions to such theatres; and instead preferring a lighter footprint, with a parallel non-UN rapid response and/or counterterrorist multinational force doing the fighting necessary to stabilize the situation and create space for the UN to support a political process through impartial good offices.\textsuperscript{194}

Through the commitment of such a force, the UK would be able to deliver highly capable and focussed assistance to UN missions in a manner that avoids engagement beyond the limits of social and political tolerance. Clearly, such an approach does not address the spectrum of modern security challenges including, but not limited to, conventional state-based threats, cyber warfare and international terrorism and as

\textsuperscript{193} Griffin, “The UK and UN Peacekeeping: Back in Blue?”

\textsuperscript{194} Boutellis, "Can the UN stabilize Mali?” 11-12.
such, the requirement for provision in these, and other, security areas is still essential. This approach does, however, have potential to act as an effective vehicle for upstream conflict prevention, and would serve towards increased global influence, international engagement and understanding. As a former UK Chief of the Defence Staff asserts, in ‘adopting a strategic posture of engagement we can better add to the country’s influence on the world stage.’\textsuperscript{195}

The UK’s intervention in Sierra Leone presents a model in which military force contributed not only to short-term stabilisation but also long-term stability. Thus, it demonstrated that where military force alone is unlikely to solve conflicts, it can be a crucial component in allowing a wider comprehensive approach to succeed.\textsuperscript{196} Whilst this paper recognises certain limitations of the Sierra Leone model as an exemplar for future operations, it nonetheless highlights the key elements of the intervention that allowed it to be regarded with such acclaim. Firstly, the intervention, operating in parallel to UNAMSIL and with endorsement from the UN Security Council, allowed the UK to demonstrate a credible commitment to the UN whilst addressing elements of its own national security agenda. Secondly, the engagement was an effective response to the dynamic and multifaceted contemporary security environment of the post-Cold War era. The deployment of UK forces demonstrated the requirement to retain low-intensity expeditionary capabilities and develop their contribution towards its wider strategies of international engagement and building stability overseas. Thirdly, the intervention played to the UK’s military advantage. The deployment was able to be

\textsuperscript{195} Houghton, Annual Chief of the Defence Staff Lecture 2013, RUSI.
\textsuperscript{196} McInnes and Wheeler. \textit{Dimensions of Western military intervention}. 141.
conducted at pace and within its own C2 architecture providing the flexibility to adapt to the changing operational requirements and strategic shifts. Furthermore, the deployment was able to minimise the ground footprint and retain a substantial element of its forces at distance from the conflict whilst harnessing the spectrum of assets in theatre, particularly air power. In doing so, UK forces were able to provide a positive contribution to the wider UN mission at reduced physical and reputational risk. Finally, the intervention balanced the requirement to respond to the situation in Sierra Leone against what would be acceptable in the political and social spheres. By simultaneously addressing elements of its own security agenda whilst demonstrating a commitment to maintaining international security and stability through the UN, the UK was able to chart a course of mutual benefit and retain broad support during and after its engagement.

Pervading these key areas is the role of air power; by no means the sole component of military force but critical to the intervention’s success and applicability as a model for future such engagement. As the Sierra Leone intervention demonstrated, air power provides the capacity to react with speed, intelligence and precision from great distance and with minimal ground presence; thereby reducing risk and cost. Furthermore, it offers the ability to deliver proportional responses and effects by escalating and de-escalating rapidly as required. In doing so, air power is able to operate successfully in the coercive and deterrence space; removing the requirement for kinetic activity and hastening the transition to politically-driven peacebuilding. Collectively these attributes give air power significant appeal to public, politicians and military commanders alike.
As Kilcullen reflects, there is a considerable challenge in responding to the multitude of threats that relate to ‘human security (the welfare of individuals and groups in society) rather than national security (which, classically defined, focuses on the survival and political interests of states).’ Moreover, to do so in an era of substantial financial constraint whilst retaining the ‘capability edge’ to respond to conventional threats in a high-tech environment requires significant resourcefulness.

Ultimately, this paper assesses that whilst innovation undoubtedly will, and rightly should, play a crucial role in the UK’s approach to contemporary security challenges, sometimes reflection will reveal as many opportunities. Sierra Leone has been described as a conflict ‘pregnant with lessons’; perhaps it is time to now fully give birth to them.

---

198 Ibid.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Ahtisaari, Martti. “I believe in the UN, but it needs to examine its conscience over Syria.” The Guardian, April 20, 2018.


Renton, Alex. “Sierra Leone: One place where Tony Blair remains an unquestioned hero.” *The Observer*. April 18, 2018. 
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/apr/18/sierra-leone-international-aid-blair


https://yougov.co.uk/news/2014/10/25/report-british-attitudes-defence-security-and-armed-


https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201802_whr_2-18_mind_the_gap.pdf


https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/how-we-are-funded


