

CAS' Fellowships: Research Proposal Examples

(1st Edition)

The Lost Continent: The Defence Implications of a Radical Rethink of UK Policy Toward Latin America and the South Atlantic

Since the end of the Falklands War, interest in the UK's South Atlantic Territories has waned incrementally. Nevertheless, HM Government has remained steadfast throughout in its assertion of sovereignty. Rigidity in this policy is evident, with the UK's commitment continuing to be underpinned by the 'Fortress Falklands' paradigm. Policy toward the South Atlantic is inextricably linked with that of Latin America, with the requirement for Access, Basing and Overflight (ABO) to support this paradigm being an important focus of UK interest in the region. In the mid to late-1990s Latin America moved towards a more constructive relationship with the UK. However, by the end of 1999, progress appeared to stall and the UK position became entrenched. UK policy towards Latin America now appears to be in *stasis*, reflecting the inability to move beyond this Fortress Falklands legacy; even as Brazil booms, the UK focus has been towards her BRIC partners.

A radical rethink of policy is required, with a far more proactive stance taken towards bilateral links with Latin American nations. The historical context of a continent that has suffered few major military conflicts has 'fostered the development of a defence mentality that is essentially peace-orientated in its outlook'.¹ Overt displays of 'colonial' hard power are not welcomed. Moreover, the pursuance of sovereignty of the Falkland Islands by the Government of Argentina by exclusively 'peaceful terms in the diplomatic field'² appears clumsily at odds with the employment of a UK policy utilising hard power assets to demonstrate enduring commitment. This is also an expensive policy in terms of the utilisation of RAF and wider MOD finance and resource. More importantly, were ABO support withdrawn due to the pressure exerted on the Fortress Falklands paradigm by the continued strengthening of regional relationships within South America, the operational and financial impact to RAF operations and Defence could be significant. Replacing the vestiges of hard power with soft power in the region would be cost effective for Defence and would release military resource within the RAF and wider MOD. Moreover, the UK could pursue wider strategic objectives if bilateral relationships were developed beyond the constraints of ABO support to the South Atlantic.

The study will examine events and processes that have shaped UK policy towards the South Atlantic and Latin America since the 1982 conflict. Recent trends in bilateral relations between the UK and Latin American states will also be investigated. An alternative foreign policy paradigm for the South Atlantic and, by inference, South America will be proposed, based on a shift from hard to soft power influence in the region. The potential benefits of this proposal and resultant implications for the RAF and wider Defence will be analysed, before assessing the challenges of implementing such a policy. Finally, the research will propose a way forward for UK foreign policy in the region, based on the preceding analysis.

This area of study is not new; indeed, a wealth of literature considers UK policy towards the South Atlantic. Nevertheless, the majority of this research is somewhat 'stale'; conducted in the immediate aftermath of the Falklands War. The waning of UK interest in the region is reflected in academia, with scant literature to challenge the current paradigm or re-energise discourse. Likewise, an array of academic literature discusses the rise of Latin America, Brazil in particular. However, the lack of a persuasive or coherent UK foreign policy towards the continent is again reflected in current academic interest regarding bilateral relationships. Nevertheless, in terms of research material, HM Government documentation will inform the study as well as interviews with officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Ministry of Defence, UK Ambassadors in the region and Defence Attaches as well as academics specialising in Latin American affairs.

¹ Fujita, E. "Brazilian Defence Policy: balancing civil and military needs." *International Affairs* 74, no. 3 (1998): 577.

² Dodds, K. "Towards Rapprochement? Anglo-Argentine Relations and the Falklands." *International Affairs* 74, no. 3 (1998): 630.

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The Relevance of Technological Superiority for UK Airpower: Can technical agility provide the edge and what lessons can be learnt from other technology-intensive organisations?

It is a common misconception of warfare that technological superiority over an adversary will automatically provide a decisive edge on the battlefield. Whilst it cannot be disputed that technology is a significant factor in conflict, particularly conventional warfare, history is littered with examples where technological superiority has not provided the assumed victory. Much of Western military culture and legacy doctrine has been based on the theory that Western forces are technologically, if not quantitatively, superior to their adversaries. However, in an age of austerity and decreasing resources, predominately fiscal, maintaining technological superiority can no longer be assumed. Indeed, with rising technology in the East, including Chinese development of the J-20 and J-31 Stealth fighters and the successful launch of anti-satellite missiles¹, it could be argued that the edge has already been lost.

The study of technological impact on warfare is not new and since the 1990's much of this research has been focused on the concept of a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA). RMA theorists proposed that technological developments in areas including Network Enabled Capability, sensors and Remotely Piloted Air Systems and subsequently the gathering, processing and distribution of information, combined with precision-strike technologies, would fundamentally change how wars were fought². However, the shift from conventional State threats which shaped policy during the Cold War to a dominance of asymmetric and counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan has challenged this concept. Whilst such technical developments have provided new capabilities, the network centric RMA seems to have failed to come to grips with the realities of the contemporary battlespace³.

Faced with the growth of Eastern powers, a shift from conventional to asymmetric conflict and threats and declining homeland economics, UK Defence has undergone a radical rethink of its reliance on, and use of, technology. However, whilst the relevance of technology in 'Hearts and Minds' counterinsurgency operations and from a ground perspective is appreciated, the implications of a shift in technological superiority in airpower appear less well understood. There are differing views on the relative importance of technology to airpower. A common argument is that air and space power is inherently dependent upon the power of science and technology and must reflect progressive technological change to remain relevant⁴. Conversely, it is generally acknowledged that it is not only technology which drives the impact and effectiveness of airpower; mastery of technology and organisational practices are essential to employ airpower effectively⁵. Of all military capabilities, airpower has traditionally been considered the most technologically reliant. Therefore it should be considered if there is a base-level of technology which the UK must achieve to protect itself against emerging technological threats, present a meaningful deterrence and coercive tool to adversaries and to remain interoperable with allies. During Op ALLIED FORCE in 1999 and the early stages of Op TELIC in 2003 the UK struggled to operate with US counterparts due to their advanced C2 and communications technology⁶. Without a comparable system, the passage of information and intelligence between US forces and the RAF was severely delayed and exacerbated the problems of operating in a multi-national environment. With the prospects of unilateral operations diminishing, the maintenance of technological parity with allies becomes increasingly important.

¹ Office of the Secretary of Defense (2013) 'Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments involving the People's Republic of China 2013.'

² Stone, J. 'Politics, Technology and the Revolution in Military Affairs.' *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27:3 (2004): 408-427.

³ Piefer, D. 'Risk-Free Coercion? Technological Disparity and Coercive Diplomacy.' *European Security*, 18:1 (2009): 7-31.

⁴ Hallion, R. 'Air and Space Power: Climbing and Accelerating' In: Olsen, J.A. ed. (2010) *A History of Air Warfare*. Potomac Books Inc. pp. 371-393.

⁵ Horowitz, M.C. (2010) *The Diffusion of Military Power: Causes and Consequences for International Politics*. Princeton University Press.

⁶ Olsen, J.A. (2011) *Global Air Power*. Potomac Books Inc.

Current UK doctrine states that technological and equipment superiority can no longer be guaranteed and 'The UK must make its people the edge'⁷. This study intends to examine this policy and consider its applicability to airpower. In doing so it will consider the importance of cutting-edge technology to airpower, the strategic choices available when faced with new military innovations using models such as Horowitz adaption-capacity theory⁸, and how technology is implemented in other high technology industries. It will propose that even with exceptional people at the helm, airpower will require a certain level of technology to remain relevant and enable the UK to successfully operate with our allies. However, rather than generating new or advanced capability through expensive, drawn-out development and procurement programs, this study will suggest that technological agility will be critical to the identification, development and exploitation of emerging technologies and capabilities. Recommendations based upon lessons learnt from technology-intensive organisations in the public and private sector in implementing technology policy will be made; the benefits of adopting such lessons will be analysed and considered as a strategy to ensure that UK Airpower remains adaptable and relevant in an age of increasingly limited resources and changing human and technological threats.

⁷ Developments, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, Strategic Trends Programme. 'Future Character of Conflict.' (2010) Ministry of Defence.

⁸ Horowitz, M.C. (2010) *The Diffusion of Military Power: Causes and Consequences for International Politics*. Princeton University Press.

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Enhancing the upstream conflict prevention strategy through commitment to an integrated approach – to what extent could and should the RAF invest?

During this period of financial stress there has been necessary emphasis on achieving greater efficiencies, and ultimately on identifying what we can afford not to do. However, as Defence reconfigures after over a decade of enduring stabilisation operations and despite the landscape of austerity, there is opportunity. A key theme which runs through the National Security Strategy, reflected in the 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review and amplified within the tripartite Building Stability Overseas Strategy (BSOS) and International Defence Engagement Strategy is that of upstream activity. The economic, political and moral logic of early engagement to enhance global stability, championing a proactive rather than reactive stance, is compelling. However, key challenges include the limits of resource, the nature of influence and the difficulty of employing counterfactual arguments to prove the success of a preventative strategy. Such a strategy does not diminish the requirement for the ultimate insurance to UK interests in the form of adaptable and capable Armed Forces. It does however challenge the Armed Forces to invest further in the multi-agency space of conflict prevention. The purpose of the proposed research is to assess how the RAF could further contribute to upstream prevention and whether the potential investment would be worth the return.

An important pillar in strengthening conflict prevention is an integrated cross-government approach. This is not new, but there is a question as to the extent of investment and commitment, financial, structural and intellectual, that the MoD has truly made to the interdisciplinary security agenda. The Army has re-entered the debate proposing the utility of the Adaptive Forces as agents of defence engagement and conflict prevention.¹ One of the three cores to British maritime doctrine is international engagement, achieved through long-term 'habitual engagement'.² Gray states that the, 'greatest value [of the Navy] will be found in events that fail to occur because of its influence'.³ UK Air and Space doctrine acknowledges that, 'preventing conflict involves identifying and managing threats before they materialise. This demands an integrated, cross-government approach...'.⁴ The RAF should consider the value of investing further in upstream activity by potential enhancement to existing programmes and capabilities,⁵ but also through more novel means.

The Government aims to focus its efforts where national interests are considered to be most at stake and where the greatest effect can be achieved.⁶ Given this commitment there are some important questions for the Armed Forces and the RAF if they are to be seen as more than an insurance policy and retain relevance beyond. For example, in the aftermath of Iraq and Afghanistan, has the reputation of the UK Armed Forces been damaged or do we retain a unique Defence brand which is globally marketable and influential? What is the role of Air Power and the RAF in supporting 'active expeditionary diplomacy'⁷ and development? Does the RAF have a significant role in treating causes upstream rather than dealing with consequences? These questions should not be

¹ Project MARIUS, *Permanently Committing the Adaptable Forces*, Strawman, Army Directorate for Operations and Contingencies, Nov 2012.

² *British Maritime Doctrine*, Joint Doctrine Publication 0-10, Ministry of Defence, Aug 2011, p2-21.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *UK Air and Space Doctrine*, Joint Doctrine Publication 0-30, Ministry of Defence, Jul 2013, p2-2.

⁵ Including, Defence Attaches, training teams, overseas exercises and exchanges.

⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/73171/defence_engagement_strategy.pdf, International Defence Engagement Strategy.

⁷ DfID, FCO and MoD Paper, *Building Stability Overseas Strategy*, Jul 2011, p4.

addressed in isolation, but as part of a broader review of the true commitment of the MoD and the RAF to the continued development of an integrated approach.

From Whole of Government approaches to the difficult birth of the UK's Comprehensive Approach, now morphed into an integrated approach, recent attempts to strengthen the interdependence between defence, development and diplomatic activities have had mixed results. The aim to, 'enhance the likelihood of favourable and enduring outcomes'⁸ is laudable, however it requires an element of trans-departmental and organisational understanding, accommodation and empathy which has proven challenging. Arguably achieving successful integration is hardest at a time of economic austerity, when individual budgets are staunchly defended and appetite for risk is low, however perhaps this is the time we can least afford not to invest in integrated efforts. In a governmental structure which has been described as a, 'federation of departments'⁹ the question of barriers and incentives to integrated working needs to be well understood. Armstrong observes that a comprehensive approach is, 'a philosophy and framework that needs to be adapted for each situation'.¹⁰ As we reset post Afghanistan, now is the time for a review and adaption. The civil-military nexus will be never more relevant.

The start point for the proposed research is a brief examination of the future strategic environment with a review of extant policy and strategy, to establish the validity of the assumption of the viability and value of upstream conflict prevention. It will then précis past and proposed methods to achieve upstream prevention or stability, including case studies¹¹ and interviews. Specifically, the nature of influence, the cost-benefit of defence engagement and the practicalities of an integrated approach will be analysed. A review of the implementation of the Defence International Engagement Strategy will then focus on the investment and potential enhancements of the RAF contribution to this policy. Finally, the potential for read across to UK resilience will be considered.

Through Project MARIUS the Army is actively developing its conflict prevention strategy and the RN commitment to international engagement is enshrined as a doctrinal core. The RAF needs to consider the extent to which it could and should invest further.

⁸ *The Comprehensive Approach*, Joint Discussion Note 4/05, Jan 06, Ministry of Defence, p1-5.

⁹ Armstrong, Sir William, *The Civil Service and its tasks*, O and M Bulletin, vol.25, No2, HMSO, p63-79.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p2.

¹¹ Case studies currently considered include Yemen and Libya (post 2011).

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