

THE TRENCH GASCOIGNE ESSAY PRIZE 2009 WINNER

STRATEGIC THINKING FOR THE AGE OF AUSTERITY

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In this year's Trench Gascoigne Essay Prize winning essay, David Blagden assesses the fundamental assumptions underlying opposition to the retention of major war-fighting capability within the UK armed forces, arguing that the case has not been made for a solely counter-insurgency-based future. Despite the prospect of far-reaching budgetary cuts, Britain needs to retain a balanced range of capabilities in order to hedge against an array of possible future threats.



A Royal Scots Dragoon Guards Challenger II main battle tank on a training exercise, November 2008, Basra, Iraq. Photo courtesy of Sgt. Gustavo Olgiati/US DoD.

The United Kingdom's defence and security community has entered the early stages of the most important and fundamental debate on British military procurement, planning and grand strategy to have taken place in a generation. This debate will see every aspect of Ministry of Defence (MoD) expenditure and policy come under considerable scrutiny, as the country's urgent need to improve the state finances coincides with the political imperative to minimise cuts in public services immediately before and after a general election.¹ Defence budgets being squeezed by fiscal pressures and political concerns is nothing new. However, this need for budgetary consolidation comes at a time when Britain's military and strategic commitments arguably stretch further than they have done at any time since the unwinding of the Empire. Most critically, a division-sized force is locked in a protracted counter-insurgency campaign in Afghanistan – a commitment that the new Chief of the General Staff, General Sir David Richards, recently argued could last thirty to forty years in some form or another.² The combined operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have seen 415 UK armed forces personnel deaths at the time of writing, with eight years of continuous warfare since 2001 having taken a severe toll on both equipment and servicemen.³ In short, a budget cut of swingeing proportions is about to take place just as Britain's armed forces are under more pressure than they have been in decades.

It is against this backdrop that the already-contentious debate over British grand strategy is beginning to unfold, leading towards a future Strategic Defence Review (SDR) by the new government that will take office by June 2010.⁴ The purpose of this essay is to contribute to the unfolding debate – a debate that will have profound implications for Britain's ability to protect its vital interests in the twenty-first century. Specifically, I set out to critically evaluate a number of recent contributions to the current UK defence discussion. Of course, a wide array of analyses by a diverse range of eminent strategists is welcome. Yet several such thinkers appear to share a conviction that the need to consolidate the budget whilst

prosecuting the Afghan campaign at the highest tempo possible necessitates a radical rethink of British grand strategy. These opinions are by no means homogenous, but a recurrent unifying theme – encapsulated most clearly in the June 2009 report of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) Commission on National Security – is that the United Kingdom can no longer seek to retain 'balanced' armed forces with the capacity to conduct conventional major warfare.⁵ Such profound conclusions, with such fundamental implications, deserve to be probed at the level of their underlying assumptions. That is my task here.

The Tide Turns Against a Balanced Force Structure

With the UK economy struggling to emerge from recession, the public finances in their worst shape since the Second World War, an intractable counter-insurgency campaign underway in Afghanistan and a new government on the horizon, commentators of all stripes have waded into the debate on the future of British defence policy. Journalists, serving and retired forces personnel, think tank analysts, academics, private sector consultants and politicians have all joined the fray. Such a lively exchange is important – with so much at stake, it is essential that all perspectives and insights are assimilated.⁶ Yet as Paul Cornish and Andrew Dorman have observed, it is also imperative that the new defence debate takes place not on the back of hysterical media commentary, inter-service and campaign 'totemism', or a politically driven cuts agenda, but rather after measured consideration of what the United Kingdom's strategic needs will actually be in the coming decades.⁷ Quite simply, providing for Britain's security in the twenty-first century is too important to get wrong.

With this in mind, it is worth turning the spotlight on one recurrent theme of much of the commentary so far. Analysts from across the spectrum variously accuse UK grand strategy, and particularly MoD procurement programmes, of being wedded to a 'Cold War mentality', 'preparing for the last war', trying to 'punch above our weight' and neglecting new 'realities'. On this view, the more

desirable alternative is to focus British military spending and strategic priorities predominantly around current operations – which in practice means the war in Afghanistan – while achieving fiscal improvements through abandoning efforts to preserve 'balanced' major war-fighting capabilities.

A budget cut of swingeing proportions is about to take place

Such arguments are prevalent within the IPPR's *Shared Responsibilities* report. This comprehensive document states that the route to UK security in the twenty-first century will be bolstering international co-operation and legitimacy, increased attention to 'new' security challenges such as climate change and disease pandemics and increased state-building assistance to Afghanistan and Pakistan.⁸ Conspicuously, a whopping £24 billion of potential cuts are identified in key MoD procurement programmes, with major-force assets such as the *Queen Elizabeth*-class aircraft carriers, F-35 Joint Combat Aircraft, Type 45 destroyers and *Astute*-class submarines all suggested for reconsideration.⁹ The report's authors call for power to be shifted to multilateral institutions at the expense of UK-controlled forces, and summarise their position thus: 'The attempt to maintain the full spectrum of [UK] conventional combat capabilities at current scale ... cannot be sustained'.¹⁰

While the IPPR Commission's report represents the most comprehensive voicing of this position, they are certainly not alone in their arguments, with many analysts going further (notably in calls for the cancellation or rethinking of the submarine-based nuclear deterrent replacement).¹¹ Menzies Campbell and Ben Jones have called for a fundamental reassessment of the role and structure of Britain's armed forces, suggesting that the UK may have reached a second 'East of Suez' moment, and advocate greater reliance on EU capability as their core solution.¹² Allan Mallinson has demanded that the MoD refocus on counter-insurgency-ready infantry, at the expense of major force projection programmes.¹³ Max Hastings also turns

his guns on the carrier programme and Typhoon jet, while dismissing the security case for replacing the Trident nuclear deterrent as 'nationalist sentiment' for good measure.¹⁴ A former Chief of the Defence Staff, Charles Guthrie, argues that a submarine-based nuclear deterrent could be replaced with a much cheaper land-based system, and called for the cancellation of the carrier programme and the scrapping of many fast jets.¹⁵ Douglas Carswell suggests that balanced Western militaries are redundant in the face of 'improper' asymmetric threats, and subsequently questions the need for carriers or jet fighters.¹⁶ Nick Ritchie states that the UK nuclear deterrent will not improve British security in an interdependent future, and should therefore be scrapped.¹⁷ David Davis has also voiced his opposition to Trident replacement, primarily on cost grounds.¹⁸ Even Richard Dannatt, whilst still Chief of the General Staff, spoke out against maintaining 'balanced' forces and in favour of improving capabilities for current counter-insurgency operations (although his preoccupation with the Afghan campaign is understandable, given that the troops he led were fighting and dying in that theatre at the time).¹⁹

Providing for Britain's security in the twenty-first century is too important to get wrong

Moreover, this tide of opinion appears to be gaining political traction. Gordon Brown's Labour government has already announced the deferral of a decision on Trident replacement until after the next election, despite assurances that the deterrent will be safe amidst inevitable cost-cutting.²⁰ Meanwhile, David Cameron has so far given little away on what his defence priorities will be should his Conservative Party take office in 2010, but pressure to pursue fiscal consolidation at the expense of the defence budget from within his own ranks would in all likelihood be intense.²¹

The Underlying Assumptions: Making Premises Public

Given the political clout that these views are acquiring, it is vital that we question the premises on which they rest. Here, I identify three fundamental assumptions on which the recent groundswell of anti-major force thinking is built.²² In some cases, these assumptions have been made explicit (a practice which is commendable); more often, they have been left implicit, and subsequently need exposing.

Assumption 1: The United Kingdom does not face any threats to its vital interests from militarily-capable major powers, and crucially, it will not do so during the time period impacted by the procurement decisions and strategic choices made in the forthcoming SDR.

The IPPR Commission makes its adherence to this position explicit, arguing that 'weak and failing states are a bigger security threat than the actions of strong ones in the period ahead', (although note that they concede the existence of a potential major power threat by stating that, in their view, such a threat is *smaller* rather than *non-existent*).²³ This position in turn rests on two premises. Either, its adherents must believe that major power security competition will be absent from the international system for the next thirty years or so (since forthcoming decisions on the carrier programme, Trident replacement, F-35, and so forth, will have repercussions for at least this long). Or its adherents must believe that defence guarantees from major allies – which in practice means the United States – are so rock-solid that these allies will always put themselves in harm's way in defence of our vital interests. If either of these two conditions holds, then the UK is indeed free to abandon balanced defence capabilities, and instead focus on 'hybrid war' capabilities for theatres such as Afghanistan.

Assumption 2: All wars in the time period affected by the forthcoming SDR will look like the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns. Moreover, since the early stages of these wars actually involved quite a lot of major force capability, all future wars will look

like the latter stages of the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns.

Many of the commentators cited above are of the opinion that 'war has changed' (to quote Allinson) in a fundamental and irrevocable way since 2003.²⁴ According to this view, the United Kingdom could only conceivably find itself confronting insurgents in Middle Eastern cities, South Asian mountains or perhaps African jungles in the coming thirty years. Being forced to deter – or, if necessary, fight – a well-equipped, powerful, conventional military force at sea, on land or in the air is seen as so unlikely as to be unworthy of significant resource commitment or strategic consideration.

Assumption 3: Winning 'small wars' matters as much as winning 'big wars'. Prevailing in current operations – notably the Afghan campaign – is as vital to our national security as winning (or deterring) a future major power war.

This view in turn drives home the conclusion that since resources are tight and we are already locked in a serious 'hybrid' conflict in Afghanistan, we cannot afford to commit resources to hedging against uncertain future threats. Proponents of this view do not necessarily have to subscribe to assumptions 1 or 2, but rather, they could have concluded that current operations are too important to merit anything other than maximal national defence effort.²⁵ In short, for such thinkers, Afghanistan has become *The War*, rather than *a war*.²⁶

Challenging the Assumptions: Did History Really End?

With the assumptions that lie behind the recent groundswell of opinion made explicit, we are free to consider how well they stand up to scrutiny. This is important, as it allows us to test the strength of competing claims in the debate. I find that all three of the assumptions are at best circumspect, if not downright incorrect, which calls into question the validity of many of the arguments listed above in favour of abandoning 'balanced' major force defence.

First, let us consider the assumption that no threats to our vital interests

will emanate from powerful countries in the next three decades. It is striking how commonplace this assumption has become in the post-Cold War world. Britons still tend to alternately believe that great power security competition belongs to a past historical age, or that if such competition does reassert itself in the international system, the United States will 'catch the buck' for Western Europe in the way that it did pre-1990.

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Yet neither of these beliefs stand up to scrutiny. Great power competition is already returning to the international system, as the inexorable rise of China and India – and, to a lesser extent, Russia and Brazil – continues *vis-à-vis* Western states.²⁷ The conflict and war potential generated by such a rapid shift in the balance of power is well-documented.²⁸ Moreover, Russia's incursion into Georgia in 2008 demonstrated that great powers remain willing to use force even in Europe in pursuit of perceived vital interests, if such a reminder was needed, and Moscow's ongoing efforts to qualitatively rebuild its armed forces should generate serious pause for thought in Whitehall.²⁹ Even David Kilcullen, a leading thinker on the War on Terror, concedes that robust state-based threats – both nuclear and conventional – remain prevalent.³⁰

Bizarrely, however, while the IPPR report identifies that a shift of power to emerging nations will happen over the coming decades, it seems to surmise that, rather than needing top-tier military power to protect our interests in such a world, we should instead abandon the effort.³¹ In this, they are motivated by a belief that our geopolitical 'influence' will fall as other states rise, making independent power-projection harder. Yet while this may be true, such a fuzzy conclusion does not negate the need for forces capable of ensuring our security and economic wellbeing in a dangerous and strategically uncertain world; after all, influence is a lot less important than

survival.³² Indeed, the IPPR's argument – which amounts to saying 'there will be more major powers in the world, therefore we should abandon major war-fighting capabilities' – looks strange when viewed in this light.

As for the belief that the United States will always defend Britain's vital interests against major power threats, leaving us free to focus on 'small war' capability, this too fails the common sense test.³³ The US commitment to the United Kingdom during the Cold War was unshakeable principally as a result of Western Europe's pivotal role as a centre of industrial power; had the USSR come to dominate the whole Eurasian landmass, the balance of power would have shifted decisively against the United States. Today, by contrast, containing Russia is not Washington's principal strategic concern. Given the far greater power potential of China and Washington's probable efforts to balance against Beijing, the US will likely prove increasingly unwilling – *and eventually unable* – to shoulder Western Europe's defence burden.³⁴ This leaves the UK in the perverse situation where containing resurgent Russian power in the twenty-first century could be a more serious challenge for us than it was in the Cold War, despite Russia actually being much weaker *vis-à-vis* the United States than it was for a large part of the twentieth century. Of course, none of this is to suggest that failed states or terrorists do not represent *a* security risk, or that our long-standing alliances are suddenly set to fracture; however, these arguments *do* undermine the notion that hedging against major power threats can be disregarded in contemporary defence planning.³⁵

Second, let us turn our attention to the proposition that all future wars – or at least, all wars in the period affected by the forthcoming SDR – will look like the Iraq and Afghanistan campaigns. To be sure, there is little doubt that there will be a role for British forces in Afghanistan as long as political leaders decide to keep them there, and a security deterioration (and subsequent military re-entry) of Iraq is not wholly inconceivable. Yet beyond these campaigns, it is not necessarily clear that future operations will *all* be of a similar character. For one, given the

grievous human and economic cost of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the United Kingdom is likely to be more cautious about direct military intervention in foreign countries over the coming years. Unsurprisingly, states that do less military intervention also tend to find themselves locked in fewer counter-insurgency campaigns.

Moreover, with Iraq and Afghanistan 'ticked-off', it is not clear where else the 'Afghan model' would be applied. Ground-force intervention in Iran or Pakistan would likely be a strategic disaster, especially given the risk of destabilising the latter and subsequently allowing its nuclear arsenal to fall into the wrong hands. There would also be little public appetite for such interventions. Some African states are conceivable candidates, but it is doubtful whether any such country is of sufficient strategic importance to justify a near open-ended state-building and counter-insurgency effort of the kind seen in Afghanistan.

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Most fundamentally, there are major questions to be asked about the strategic relevance of the Afghan campaign itself, especially given its mounting costs.³⁶ It is no longer the principal haven that Al-Qa'ida (AQ) operates from, with Western intervention there apparently having shifted the core AQ leadership into Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).³⁷ In doing so, Pakistan has already suffered severe destabilisation by such actions as cross-border drone strikes. A policy that drives terrorists into a nuclear-armed country, only to destabilise that country by infringing its sovereignty, can be challenged on many fronts. To be sure, Afghanistan certainly *was* AQ's favourite safe haven, and there is therefore plenty to be said for denying them this operating base. But whether the mission there should remain for so long and on such a scale as to constitute the *sole focus* of British defence planning is seriously doubtful.³⁸

Of course, engaging in strategic prediction is always difficult; none of us can really know where conflict will next occur. My point here is simply to illustrate that to assume that *all* conflicts for which we should be planning will be 'Afghanistan-like' is itself a dangerous business (especially in light of my challenge to assumption 1). This being the case, rejecting all semblance of balance from our defensive portfolio would be folly of the highest order; when the MoD is accused of 'preparing for yesterday's war', it can legitimately retort that it is actually hedging against tomorrow's.³⁹ States have militarily coerced other states as a means of advancing their interests for as long as there have been state-like political communities. The claim that this has fundamentally changed in the last five years should be treated with scepticism.

Great power competition is already returning to the international system

Finally, let us consider the merit of assumption 3: that prevailing in current operations is as important as winning a potential major power war – or, just as crucially, being capable of deterring a major power threat to our vital interests – at some point in the future. This is arguably the weakest of the three assumptions. Terrorists simply do not constitute an outright existential threat in the way that the military forces of other major powers have done in the past *and still do today*. Of course, this would change dramatically if terrorists acquired a nuclear weapon or perhaps a sophisticated biological weapon. Yet even this terrible scenario is not necessarily made less likely by devoting our entire strategic effort to prosecuting 'hybrid' wars across the globe.

At the core of this argument lies a misreading of the relative-value equation that ought to lie at the heart of grand strategy. Saying that the military forces

of other major powers constitute an existential threat does not mean that major power war is *likely*. But multiplying a small number (probability of major power conflict) by a massive number (the destructive potential of advanced industrial states) still produces a large number. By contrast, multiplying a large number (probability of further involvement in 'small' wars) by a relatively small number (the destructive potential of failed states and state-less individuals with rudimentary weapons) does not necessarily produce a number that is so much larger as to justify being made the *sole* focus of defence policy. So, Max Hastings and Allan Mallinson are correct to argue that the wars of today do not require many aircraft carriers or fast jets. But to make the leap from this to arguing against the acquisition of such assets essentially represents a 'crystal ball' claim to a perfect knowledge of the future. The dangers of being proven wrong are very grave indeed, because the sorts of future conflicts that would require fast jets and major warships – which, coincidentally, are also the sorts of conflicts that would be made more likely by the absence of a secure second-strike nuclear deterrent – would matter a lot more than current operations.

Conclusion

This essay has sought to lay out the underlying premises on which the recent groundswell of support for ending the United Kingdom's balanced major force defence posture rests, which in turn opens those premises to public scrutiny. While the derivation of specific policy or procurement prescriptions lies beyond the scope of this paper, I believe that my analysis in turn shows that there is a strong case for retaining major force capabilities – including a secure second-strike nuclear deterrent – in the UK's strategic portfolio.⁴⁰ There is also a compelling case for winding down the Afghan commitment as quickly as is feasible, and for adopting a more cautious approach to future direct foreign military intervention: both necessary

steps towards conserving scarce defence resources, thereby permitting the retention of balanced forces in the face of MoD budget cuts.⁴¹

Yet I believe that even those who disagree with my conclusions will agree that utilising an analytical approach is an important step towards ensuring that such a crucial debate over our future security takes place on a mature, coherent and intellectually rigorous basis.⁴² Moreover, such efforts are vital if we are to heed Cornish and Dorman's call to think *strategically* about defence, through the disinterested lens of ideas about the foundations of national security: a crucial step if the forthcoming SDR is to produce grand strategy that actually serves Britain's vital interests.⁴³ At the very least, therefore, if this essay stimulates those who disagree with me to defend their position at the level of the bedrock assumptions on which they rely, then the subsequent progress in the British defence debate should yield future security benefits for us all. ■

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The author would like to thank Nuno Monteiro and John Schuessler for invaluable comments on a draft of this article, as well as Tom Shinner for numerous helpful discussions of the theme. He also thanks the UK Economic and Social Research Council and the Rotary Foundation for their financial support.

The Trench Gascoigne Essay Prize is the Royal United Services Institute's annual competition awarded for original writing on contemporary issues of national and international defence and security issues.

NOTES

- 1 Two respected analysts estimate that defence budget cuts of between £3-7 billion are likely: see Paul Cornish and Andrew Dorman, 'National Defence in the Age of Austerity', *International Affairs* (Vol. 85, No. 4, July 2009). To put this in context, the 2009-10 Total Departmental Expenditure Limit for the MoD has been set at £35.4 billion: see MoD, 'Defence Spending', <<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/Organisation/KeyFactsAboutDefence/DefenceSpending.htm>>, accessed 16 October 2009.
- 2 Michael Evans, 'General Sir David Richards: Afghanistan will take 40 years', *The Times*, 8 August 2009.
- 3 237 in Afghanistan and 179 in Iraq. This MoD casualty figure was correct as of 11 December 2009.
- 4 It is looking likely that a Labour or Labour-led government would term this a 'strategic review' of some kind, while the Conservative Party appears to be leaning more towards a 'national security review'. I use SDR here as convenient shorthand to describe the overall principles of what the review will seek to accomplish, and also to generate analytical continuity with the last SDR of 1998.
- 5 IPPR Commission on National Security in the 21st Century, *Shared Responsibilities: A National Security Strategy for the United Kingdom* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, June 2009).
- 6 This is especially true given the particular challenges involved in long-term strategic planning. Talbot C Imlay and Monica Duffy Toft, 'Conclusion: Seven Lessons about the Fog of Peace', in Imlay and Toft (eds), *The Fog of Peace and War Planning: Strategic and Military Planning under Uncertainty* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 250-51.
- 7 Indeed, the importance of heeding Cornish and Dorman's advice led me to tip my cap to them with my own title. See Cornish and Dorman, *op. cit.*
- 8 IPPR, *op. cit.*
- 9 Main battle tanks, anti-submarine warfare capability, air defence systems, defence infrastructure and Tornado jets are also earmarked for early retirement, while a minimum nuclear deterrent would be kept but its form reconsidered. IPPR, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-54.
- 10 IPPR, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
- 11 Note too that the views outlined in this section are but a small representative sample of a broader groundswell of like-minded commentary in the high-quality press, with newspaper articles and magazine op-eds voicing similar opinions numbering far in excess of what it is feasible to mention here.
- 12 Menzies Campbell and Ben Jones, 'No Choice but Change for Britain's Armed Forces', *RUSI Journal* (Vol. 154, No. 2, April 2009), pp. 42-48.
- 13 Allan Mallinson, 'War has Changed. We Need Men on the Ground, Not Aircraft Carriers', *The Times*, 8 May 2009.
- 14 Max Hastings, 'Arm Us for the Wars of Today, Not Yesterday', *Financial Times*, 14 May 2009. He develops these views in 'It is Time for Hard Choices on Defence Policy', *Financial Times*, 30 June 2009, and 'Opinion: What Britain must Sacrifice for the Soldiers it Needs', *Financial Times*, 14 July 2009.
- 15 Alice Thomson and Rachel Sylvester, 'Guthrie: Government "letting down troops", "misleading the public"', *The Times*, 25 July 2009. Note that Lord Guthrie was himself a member of the IPPR Commission, which may partially explain the overlap of views.
- 16 Douglas Carswell, 'More Bang for our Buck: Re-thinking Defence', *ConservativeHome.com*, 1 March 2007.
- 17 Nick Ritchie, 'Deterrence Dogma? Challenging the Relevance of British Nuclear Weapons', *International Affairs* (Vol. 85, No. 1, January 2009), pp. 81-98.
- 18 David Davis, 'Think Tank: We Tories will Make Your Eyes Water', *The Times*, 26 July 2009.
- 19 Richard Dannatt, 'A Perspective on the Nature of Future Conflict', speech at Chatham House, London, 15 May 2009.
- 20 Robin Pagnamenta and Philip Webster, 'Doubts Raised Over Nuclear Deterrent in Britain', *The Times*, 17 July 2009. That said, Mr Brown's delay is also clearly motivated, at least in part, by the new US administration's invigorated diplomatic focus on disarmament efforts (rather than solely 'domestic retrenchment' thinking). How far President Barack Obama's efforts will get remains to be seen.
- 21 Indeed, the commentary cited above from David Davis, a senior Conservative, and Douglas Carswell, a 'rising star' of the party, already illustrates the sorts of pressure that Mr Cameron is likely to face. See also Rachel Sylvester, 'Nice Cuts or Nasty Cuts, there will be Blood', *The Times*, 7 July 2009.
- 22 It is important to note, however, that assumption 1 is the overriding core of the 'radical rethinkers' case, since assumptions 2 and 3 follow at least in part from assumption 1.
- 23 IPPR, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
- 24 Of course, this idea has existed in academic circles for much longer; however, it is only in the post-Iraq War era that it has taken on such a prominent mainstream role in the popular media. For a seminal early statement, see John Mueller, *Retreat from Doomsday: The Obsolescence of Major War* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).
- 25 That said, holders of this viewpoint could alternatively concede that deterring major war would *hypothetically* be more important, but because they have wholly bought into assumption 1, they could conclude that second-order strategic threats can be given first-order salience. In these cases, my response to assumption 1 applies.
- 26 I am grateful to participants in a 'First Defence' seminar ('The Next Strategic Defence Review: Options for Change, or Options for Cuts?', House of Commons, London, 14 July 2009) for elucidating this distinction.
- 27 The US National Intelligence Council itself concludes that we will be living in a multipolar world in the next twenty

- years, as the Goldman Sachs economic research team had done before them. See US National Intelligence Council, *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World* (Washington, DC: Directorate of National Intelligence, November 2008). Also, Goldman Sachs Economic Research Paper No. 99, *Dreaming with BRICs: The Path to 2050* (New York: Goldman Sachs, 2003). On the overall convergence/conflict dynamic, see David Blagden, 'Globalization, convergence, and the balance of power', paper presented to the Programme on International Politics, Economics and Security, University of Chicago, 29 May 2008.
- 28 See, for examples, John J Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W W Norton, 2001), and Dale C Copeland, *The Origins of Major War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000).
- 29 In March 2009, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev announced a \$140 billion rearmament and military professionalisation programme to run between 2009 and 2011. That said, Russia has been severely impacted by the global economic crisis, which has significantly reduced Moscow's spending leeway. See *BBC News Online*, 'Russia Announces Rearmament Plan', 17 March 2009.
- 30 David Kilcullen, *The Accidental Guerrilla: Fighting Small Wars in the Midst of a Big One* (London: Hurst, 2009), p. 6.
- 31 IPPR, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.
- 32 Indeed, the recent Australian defence White Paper identified that a return of major power competition is likely to be a defining feature of the international security environment over the next twenty years, and correspondingly prescribes a build-up of Canberra's major-force capabilities. Australian Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asia Pacific century: Force 2030* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2009). Of course, one can retort that Australia's region is more likely to become an arena of major power conflict than the United Kingdom's, but then Asia-Pacific nations can also rely more fully on a comprehensive US balancing commitment, given the area's growing strategic salience.
- 33 To be fair to the IPPR Commission, they too argue that the United States cannot always be relied upon to backstop UK national security: IPPR, *op. cit.*, p. 11. As such, their argument falls squarely within the 'no major power threats' category rather than the 'Washington will save us' category.
- 34 On US relative decline, see Robert Pape, 'Empire Falls', *The National Interest*, 22 January 2009 and Christopher Layne, 'The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States' Unipolar Moment', *International Security* (Vol. 31, No. 2, Fall 2006), pp. 7-41. On the beginnings of US balancing behaviour towards China see, for example, Michael Pillsbury, 'China and Taiwan: The American Debate', *RUSI Journal* (Vol. 154, No. 2, April 2009), p. 84.
- 35 Indeed, it is a fundamental implication of the anarchic international system that no planner can afford to neglect the possibility of major wars between sovereign states. Monica Duffy Toft and Talbot C Imlay, 'Strategic and military planning under the fog of peace', in Imlay and Toft, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- 36 Sir Christopher Meyer, a prominent former British official, now voices this position forcefully: see Robert Watts, 'Tony Blair's envoy attacks Afghanistan war', *The Times*, 18 October 2009.
- 37 Kilcullen, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
- 38 Moreover, there is a strong case that even were the Taliban to regain control of Afghanistan, they would not permit the country to once again function as a benign operating base for AQ, due to the two groups' starkly divergent political and strategic goals. See Richard Barrett, 'Al Qaida and Taliban Status Check: A Resurgent Threat?', speech to the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 29 September 2009.
- 39 On the critical importance of hedging against future uncertainty in defence planning, see Toft and Imlay, *op. cit.* in note 35.
- 40 As the British government has itself identified, an undetectable submarine-based system of nuclear ballistic missiles represents the most assured possible guarantee of retaliation, which removes first-strike incentives and crisis instability. This makes such a system the ultimate credible hedge against the potential re-emergence of a major power threat. See UK Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *The Future of the United Kingdom's Nuclear Deterrent* (London: HMSO, 2006).
- 41 This is often called a grand strategy of 'offshore balancing' or 'strategic raiding'; on the former, see Robert Pape, 'To Beat the Taliban, Fight from Afar', *New York Times*, 14 October 2009; on the latter, see Michael Codner, 'A Force for Honour? Military Strategic Options for the United Kingdom', *RUSI Future Defence Review Working Paper 2*, October 2009. On the fundamental principles of offshore balancing – and the UK's suitability for such a strategy – see Mearsheimer, *op. cit.*
- 42 To be fair to the IPPR Commission, their report is rigorous and methodical; I simply take issue with a number of their conclusions. However, the same cannot be said for much of the fast-proliferating media commentary, and insofar as this commentary starts to influence policy-makers, there is more potential for unsound grand strategy to emerge from the forthcoming SDR.
- 43 Cornish and Dorman, *op. cit.*, p. 740.