

Institution: University of Oxford
Unit of Assessment: 30
Title of case study: Rethinking National Defence Strategy for the Twenty-First Century
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Key questions face Western military establishments and governments concerning the likely form of future defence needs and, consequently, the size and shape of their armed forces. Following dashed hopes of a long-term ‘peace dividend’ after the collapse of the USSR, came recognition that defence remained a fundamental concern, but that military needs might be manifested in different ways. The debate about a ‘war on terrorism’ post-9/11 further intensified questions about the nature of future conflict. Through his research on strategy, and his guiding role in the Oxford “Changing Character of War” programme, Sir Hew Strachan, Chichele Professor of the History of War (since 2002), has made a major contribution to these debates and has helped to shape military policy making in the UK and the USA.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Hew Strachan has worked extensively on Clausewitz’s ideas about war and their reception from the late 19th to early 21st centuries. He has published extensively on conflict and strategic thinking from the 18th century through to his substantial project on the First World War. Since 9/11, influential commentators on military strategy have argued that the rise of international terrorism and insurgency have made non-state actors centrally important and drawn the conclusion that classical military theory and the history of earlier wars cannot tell us much. . Strachan has consistently maintained that the primacy of the state in war has not been eclipsed. As Clausewitz argued, the adversarial business of war has an inherent element of reciprocity: the exchanges between two (or more) sides is also what gives war its independent and dynamic quality, ensuring that individual decisions taken within it do not stand in isolation, but have effects which are exponential. Larger questions of the relationship between mobilizing resources and waging war have been central to Strachan’s thinking and writing.</p> <p>While Strachan’s own research and publications have had a major impact on military policy-making, he has consolidated this influence through his role as Director of the Oxford Changing Character of War Programme (CCW), established in 2004. The CCW programme links academic research with military practice and policy-making via seminars, conferences and other fora for debate. Members of the programme share the conviction that understanding past conflict and formulation of strategy in previous wars are of direct and immediate relevance to contemporary issues of defence and strategic thinking. The benefit of a historical awareness has been its provision of benchmarks and analytical tools, precisely the better to distinguish what is really new from what may just appear to be new. They also agree that it was the end of the Cold War, rather than the 9/11 attacks, which marked the most decisive shift in the international system. Strategic thinkers since then have been struggling to develop a new vocabulary and an analytical framework to reflect this shift – a process of rethinking clearly evident in many of the CCW publications. The central contention of the CCW Programme is that states remain the most significant actors in war. Those involved in the CCW Programme realised that it was crucial to distinguish between the nature of war, namely those larger features and constants of war in general, and the character of war, namely those features which are peculiar to particular wars. This methodological distinction has proved key to understanding the relationship between past and present warfare, because it provides an analytical framework for assessing the impact of technological innovations and political and social transformations in contemporary wars. Whereas many contemporary contributors have argued that nothing in the previous history and understanding of war can provide useful guidance or patterns to the present and future, one of the most influential and creative consequences of the CCW programme has been to stress the importance of historical comparison and interpretation to elucidating present challenges. So, for example, the programme has shown that the challenge of insurgency and terrorism by ‘non-state actors’ is not new and nor is the motivation drawn from</p>

religious belief or political ideology. Rather, both are expressed by the notion of 'change back'.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- "Clausewitz and the First World War", *Journal of Military History*, LXXV (2011), pp. 367-91. <http://www.clausewitz.com/bibl/JMHarchives/Strachan-ClausewitzAndTheFirstWorldWar.pdf> (refereed journal)
- *The Direction of War: contemporary strategy in historical perspective* (CUP, 2013, 135,000 words) = collected essays on strategy. (major university press)
- "The strategic gap in British defence policy", *Survival*, vol. 51, no.4, August-September 2009, pp 49-70. DOI:10.1080/00396330903168840 (refereed journal)
- "The armed forces and the British people", in Michael Codner and Michael Clarke (eds.), *A question of security: the British defence review in an age of austerity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), pp. 273-284. Available on ProQuest ebrary via institutional account. (respected academic press)
- *The Changing Character of War*, ed. with Sibylle Scheipers (Oxford University Press, 2011). (introduction and chapter: "Strategy in the 21st century". Available on request. Chinese translation forthcoming. (major university press)
- *British Generals and Blair's Wars*, ed. with Jonathan Bailey and Richard Iron (Ashgate, June 2013). Available on Request. (Respected academic press)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Hew Strachan has brought his knowledge of warfare and strategy to bear on many aspects of current strategic thinking, and has influenced policy both through publications examining contemporary strategic dilemmas, and through direct policy input.

Contemporary Strategic Dilemmas

The importance of Strachan's contribution to strategic thinking and the contemporary debates about political-military priorities is widely acknowledged. General Jim Mattis, the former US Joint Forces Commander and now US Centcom Commander, is reported as saying that he regards himself as Strachan's student in matters of strategic thinking, while the same issue of *Foreign Policy* which reported the comment by Mattis, recognized Strachan as one of the "global thinkers" of 2012.^[i] Media commentators such as Max Hastings and Tom Ricks draw public attention to Strachan's insights into contemporary strategic dilemmas.^[ii] He is cited in other works that have had a decisive impact on military thinking and resource allocation in the last five years.^[iii] Hew Strachan has been an invited speaker at the US National War College and at the US Naval War College each year for the last three years. In the UK, Sir Jock Stirrup, the Chief of the Defence Staff, invited Strachan and three others to help him shape his thoughts on strategy and draft two speeches which he delivered in December 2009. As a result of those speeches, a Strategic Advisory Panel was set up by the CDS, on which Strachan now serves, as well as regularly speaking on strategy to the annual conferences of the Single Service Chiefs and also to the Royal College of Defence Studies and the Higher Command and Staff Course.

Direct Policy Input

Outside of the armed forces, Strachan has given evidence to the House of Commons Defence Committee on strategy and to the House of Commons Public Administration Committee.^[iv] In 2005, Strachan was asked to serve on the defence and international relations committee set up by the Conservative Party to consider possible policies if it were to win the 2010 election, and out of which the recommendation to form a National Security Council emerged. As a result of this earlier involvement, in 2009 Strachan briefed the shadow Defence Secretary, Liam Fox, in the run-up to the 2010 election, and was involved as a member of the 'red team' which tested the assumptions of the Green Paper on Defence produced by the Labour government in advance of the election. After the election, Strachan was part of a group called in to discuss Defence Reform in preparation for the Levene Committee Report on the reform of the Ministry of Defence. The 2010 Strategic and Security Defence Review was based on a paper produced by the Defence Concepts and Doctrine Centre on 'The Future Character of Conflict' the previous year. The authors of that report

discussed their thinking in all-day workshop convened by Strachan in Oxford, and he was the academic on the senior group to monitor a series of seminars which tested its assumptions against four possible future defence scenarios. When General Sir David Richards took over as Chief of the General Staff in September 2009, he decided to hold a first-ever Army Board away day and asked Strachan to contribute the context-setting paper and to arrange for it to be held in Oxford. The First Sea Lord, Sir Mark Stanhope, asked Strachan to join a group to monitor the Royal Navy's approach to the defence review. Strachan's other related commitments include membership of the Defence Academy Advisory Board and, since the beginning of 2011, serving as a specialist advisor to the Joint (Lords and Commons) Committee on the National Security Strategy. Strachan's services to defence policy and to the Ministry of Defence were explicitly recognized in the citation for his Knighthood in January 2012.^[v]

The Armed Forces Covenant

As a result of his writing and lecturing on civil-military relations, Strachan was invited to play a role as the only truly independent member (the other outside members were drawn from the service charities and the service family federations) to serve on the External Reference Group that would contribute to the drafting of the Labour Government's Service Personnel Command Paper. When the Coalition government was formed, legislation on the so-called 'Military Covenant' (now the 'Armed Forces Covenant') was one of the heads of agreement between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats. As a result, in July 2010 Strachan was asked to chair a Task Force, under the auspices of the Cabinet Office, to report to the Prime Minister on low-cost ways of implementing this covenant. The Task Force submitted its report in September, and it was published by the government in December 2010. Following publication the government published its response to the report, and this was debated in Parliament and examined by the House of Commons Defence Committee.^[vi] The External Reference Group, subsequently renamed the Covenant Reference Group, continues to make proposals and develop its initial brief. The role of Strachan in chairing the Task Force was explicitly recognized by the Prime Minister in December 2010.^[1] One of the principal recommendations of the Task Force, a Community Covenant, has been backed by the government with grants of £30 million, and Strachan has been involved in the launch of the scheme, including locally in Oxfordshire.

CCW Programme

By establishing this forum wherein military practitioners, theorists and historians exchange and discuss ideas about the character of warfare, Strachan has provided a platform from which high-level debate about defence priorities and the shape of armed forces has had a direct input, through military practitioners, administrators and politicians, on military policy. The CCW Programme has run two series of seminars, in addition to a number of conferences and workshops. One seminar has brought practitioners to Oxford to speak about their recent command and operational experience: it has focused on Iraq, Afghanistan and – more recently – Libya. The programme has also used Visiting Fellowships to bring practitioners, as well as academics, to Oxford. All three of the British armed services have participated, as have members of the armed forces of Australia, Canada, China, France, Norway, Turkey and the United States.^[vii] The current Chief of the General Staff, Sir Peter Wall, said that coming to Oxford was when he was able to think through what he was doing and to take stock.

In sum, Strachan's research has had a major impact on current strategic thinking. He has influenced policy both through publications, examining contemporary strategic dilemmas, and through direct involvement in the formation of policy.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Testimony

[1] Letter from the Prime Minister

Impact case study (REF3b)

Other Evidence Sources

[i] *Foreign Policy*, vol. 197 (Dec. 2012), pp. 88-90.

[ii] For example, *The Guardian*, 17 March 2008 (Max Hastings); ricks.foreignpolicy.com/node/197091; ricks.foreignpolicy.com/node/665266 (Thomas Ricks)

[iii] Frank Ledwidge, *Losing small wars: British military failure in Iraq and Afghanistan* (Yale UP, 2011) pp 124, 158-61, 164, 263.

[iv] Evidence given by Hew Strachan to House of Commons Committees:

- Recruiting and retaining Armed Forces Personnel: Defence Committee 2007-8, 1 April 2008.
- The Strategic Defence and Security Review: Defence Committee 2010-11, 15 September 2010.
- The National Security Strategy: Defence Committee, 16 February 2011.
- Who does UK National Strategy? Public Administration Committee 2010-11, 9 September 2010.
- The Referendum on Separation for Scotland: Scottish Affairs Committee, 23 May 2012.

[v] Citation for Knighthood, *The London Gazette*, Supplement 1: 28 January 2012.

[vi] Military Covenant

House of Commons, debates and references on the Task Force report: a sample from 8 December 2010- 16 May 2011.

- <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110216/debtext/110216-0003.htm>
- http://www.nff.org.uk/pdfdocs/select_committee_on_the_armed_forces_bill_march2010.pdf
- http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/E623AFE1-2BE3-467A-BD85-25B7751F265D/0/Armed_Forces_Covenant_Taskforce_Government_response.pdf
- <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/debates/?id=2011-05-16c.25.0>

House of Lords Debate, 27 January 2011, c1153.

- <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?id=2011-01-27a.1153.0>

[vii] Past Events <http://www.ccw.history.ox.ac.uk>