

# WARRIOR NATION

War, Militarisation  
and British Democracy

By Paul Dixon

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ForcesWatch is a small independent organisation which questions the ethics of armed forces recruitment practices and challenges efforts to embed militarist values in civilian society. It focuses on the UK and is based in London.

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I am alone responsible for the arguments of this report.

## SUMMARY

This report argues that a 'Militarisation Offensive' was launched in 2006 by a loose and diverse group of politicians, military chiefs, newspapers and pressure groups to generate support for the 'good war' in Afghanistan and to repair the damage caused to the military's reputation by the 'bad war' in Iraq. This 'Offensive' was most clearly seen in the *invention* of the 'Military' or 'Armed Forces Covenant' in 2000. This was claimed to be a historic understanding which dated back at least to the early nineteenth century. The Covenant was referenced in the Armed Services Act 2011.

The 'Militarisation Offensive' had four elements:

1. To transform strong public support for the troops into support for the wars they were fighting.
2. To promote a strong conservative, 'Christian' and assimilationist British nationalism over multiculturalism in order to fight the global, ideological war against 'Islamism'.
3. To promote the power of the military and recruitment by militarising education and further increasing the prestige of the military in civilian society.
4. To increase the power of the military over politicians.

The 'Militarisation Offensive' failed to produce majority support for the war in Afghanistan but, arguably, deepened the militarisation of British politics and society. Since 2006 the military have broken constitutional convention and made public attacks on politicians, leading to the most severe tensions in political-military relations since the Second World War.

The key findings of this report include:

- The British public's reluctance to sacrifice its soldiers is apparent in opinion polls that show consistent support for withdrawal from Northern Ireland (1974-96), strong opposition to the Iraq war 2003 (apart from the initial invasion period) and consistent opposition to the Afghan war from Britain's escalation in 2006.
- A range of rhetorical devices are identified to justify war: 'moral panic' and victimhood, personalisation and deflection, dissociation, anti-politics, the 'sacrifice trap' and the invention of tradition.
- The Army's invention of the 'Military' or 'Armed Forces Covenant' in 2000. This 'Covenant' between British society and the military was claimed to date back to the time of Wellington in the early nineteenth century. The Covenant was referenced in the Armed Forces Act 2011.
- 'Moral panic' was generated through the invention or exaggeration of public 'insults' to the military. It was claimed falsely that 'Middle England' didn't turn out for a military 'homecoming parade' in Abingdon and that civilians abused disabled veterans in a Leatherhead swimming pool. Further militarisation was then justified as a defensive response to these 'attacks'.

- A range of militarisation initiatives have been launched since 2006, including 'Veterans Day' (2006) which transformed into 'Armed Forces Day' (June 2009), the phenomenal growth of military charities, the commemoration at Royal Wootton Bassett (2007-11), the promotion of the 'military ethos' in schools (including the Cadet Force), and increasing the visibility of the military domestically.
- Opinion polls suggest that the favourability rating of the Army went from a 'low' of 54% favourable in March 2005 to a high of 89% in September 2011. From 2006-14, the military went from being very popular to spectacularly popular.
- British public opinion supported the troops but consistently opposed the war in Afghanistan from its escalation in 2006.
- Paradoxically, the militarisation and 'sacralisation' of the troops may have reinforced the public's reluctance to sacrifice its troops in 'wars of choice'. This reluctance to lose troops constrained the military's operations in Afghanistan.
- The Chilcot report found that the military used its influence to exert pressure on Prime Minister Tony Blair to adopt the highest level of British military involvement in the Iraq war, 2003.
- The military also pushed for an escalation of Britain's involvement in the 'good war' in Afghanistan. They assured politicians that they were capable of simultaneously fighting two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. When the military became over-stretched by the deployment to Helmand in 2006 they deflected responsibility onto the politicians.
- The Conservative coalition government 2010-15, like its Labour predecessors, also had problems containing the power of the military. This culminated in Prime Minister Cameron telling the military: "you do the fighting, I'll do the talking".
- After Jeremy Corbyn was elected leader of the Labour party in September 2015 his opposition to nuclear weapons was publicly criticised by the head of the military and the navy. A 'senior serving general' threatened an effective mutiny if Corbyn downgraded the military.
- The militarisation of British politics and society threatens the democratic and liberal values that the Iraq and Afghan wars are supposed to defend and promote.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2006 a 'Militarisation Offensive' was launched by a loose and diverse group of politicians, military chiefs, newspapers and pressure groups to generate support for the 'good war' in Afghanistan and repair the damage caused to the military's reputation by the 'bad war' in Iraq (Ware 2010; Walton 2014). Militarisation – the promotion of military power and values – was supposed to transform the British public's strong support for the troops and the military institution into support for the war in Afghanistan, where the Army had become involved in intense fighting. Within a few months of the escalation of Britain's involvement in 2006, polls were suggesting that a majority of the public did not support the war. The military were also involved in the 'bad war' in Iraq; which had been launched in 2003 using deception over the presence of 'Weapons of Mass Destruction' and had alienated British public opinion (Robinson 2017; Kettell 2006; Chilcot 2016a). The 'Militarisation Offensive' failed to produce support for the war in Afghanistan (there was a persistent majority against the war) but it did deepen the militarisation of British politics and society. There were four elements to the 'Militarisation Offensive':

1. Transform public support for the troops and the military institution into support for the war in Afghanistan. This would demonstrate the 'political will' necessary to defeat the enemy in a 'long war' that might last a generation.
2. Replace multiculturalism with a conservative, assimilationist 'British' and 'Christian' nationalism that would fortify the nation in the ideological war against 'Islamism'.
3. The militarisation of education and civilian society would raise the prestige and power of the military, and this would help to ease the Army's perennial recruitment problems.
4. The military would gain increased power in their relations with politicians. Enhanced influence over defence policy would lead to growing military expenditure.

This report focuses on the failure of the 'Militarisation Offensive' since 2006 to generate support for military intervention in Afghanistan. The legacy of this has been the further militarisation of British society and the increased power of the military.

At the turn of the century the Army leadership were trying to preserve the 'civil-military gap' and defend a conservative interpretation of the 'military ethos' against what was seen as the growing threat of 'liberalisation' from civilian society. After 2006, the Army went on the offensive, attempting to close the 'civil-military gap' by promoting a conservative 'military ethos' to 'liberal' civilian society. The Army *invented* the 'Military Covenant' in 2000 and not, as was declared, the early nineteenth century. This claimed that a contract existed between the military and society. In 2006 it was asserted that British society had broken this contract and, therefore, the power of the military should be increased and the militarisation of society promoted to restore this contract. Multiculturalism was criticised for weakening 'British values' and the resolve of the nation. The militarisation of education would bolster conservative 'British values' and provide recruits for the military. Since the military were already very popular in British society a number of 'insults' had to be exaggerated and, in some cases, invented in an attempt to justify further militarisation and to generate even greater support for the military.

War has, arguably, pervaded British history and culture to the extent that Britain has been described as a 'warrior nation' (Paris 2000). Britain has been continuously at war since at least 1914 and, given its' colonial engagements, some argue this stretches back to the creation of the British Army in 1707 (*The Guardian* 11 February 2014). The post-Cold War period, rather than heralding peace, has seen Britain continuously fighting 'wars'. The head of the military declared in 2015: 'There is no longer a simple distinction between war and peace' (*The Guardian* 16 September 2015). The political and military elite has struggled to generate sustained public support for war. This was most starkly apparent in the consistent support of the British public for withdrawal from Northern Ireland during the recent conflict (1969-2007). The importance of domestic public opinion to the conduct of war was *publicly* played down to minimise the mobilisation of anti-war protest. *Privately*, some policy-makers acknowledged public opinion as an important influence. The importance of public opinion was implied by the state's use of propaganda (Dixon 2000). In the post-Cold War era there has been a growing public acknowledgement of the impact of British domestic public opinion on the conduct of war but, in contrast to the US and Israel, little on the impact of fighting war on the power of the military and the militarisation of society and democracy (Bacevich 2005; Levy 2012).

There is a perception that democracies are vulnerable in fighting wars because of the influence of public opinion and their aversion to casualties. The most prominent example of this is the United States' so-called 'Vietnam Syndrome', which inhibited US military operations prior to 9/11. Since the turn of the twenty-first century there has been a transformation in British political and military elite public attitudes towards the impact of public opinion on the conduct of war. Previously, political elites tended to publicly deny popular influence on policy in order to contain it and strengthen arguments for military intervention. For example, former Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd turned to fiction to express his concerns about the power of domestic public opinion on military intervention.

Since the turn of the century politicians and the military have increasingly *publicly* acknowledged the importance of the battle for 'hearts and minds' of domestic public opinion in winning the 'global war' on 'terror' or 'insurgency'. In this way, the remaking and further militarisation of British society and politics can be justified as a necessary part of the global ideological struggle for defeating the enemy (and resisters to this as either 'appeasing' or 'collaborating' with the enemy) (Dannatt 2011; Khudnani 2014).

Diverse groups promoted the 'Militarisation Offensive' for a variety of reasons and, sometimes for contradictory, ends (the Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, for example, supported the 'Military Covenant' but opposed Britain's wars). This campaign has met with mixed success; it did not produce majority support for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The public's appetite for risking military personnel in future foreign wars fluctuates but seems to have declined, and the Army's historical difficulties with recruitment continue (Hines et al 2014; Ware 2012).

On the other hand, the militarisation of society and politics does seem to have enhanced the power of the military. Since 2006 the military elite has made strong *public* attacks on the Labour and

*The public's appetite for risking military personnel in future foreign wars fluctuates but seems to have declined, and the Army's historical difficulties with recruitment continue. On the other hand, the militarisation of society and politics does seem to have enhanced the power of the military.*



Conservative/Liberal coalition governments. These broke and have, perhaps, destroyed the constitutional convention that the military do not publicly criticise their political masters. The growing power of the military has led to the most severe tensions in political-military relations since World War 2. These represent a challenge to the democratic control of defence policy as they have in other liberal democracies (de Waal 2013).

A conservative, assimilationist, British nationalism has been promoted as a means of dealing with an existential security threat. General Sir Richard Dannatt and Prime Minister David Cameron (2010-16) have both attacked multiculturalism and argued for a stronger, or 'muscular', assertion of an assimilationist nationalism, which called for a greater British 'self-confidence' about its imperial past (a narrative that finds its echo in the Labour party too). They reject 'multiculturalism' for its pluralism and 'segregationism' that undermine 'British (Christian) values' in the global ideological struggle against the enemy. Muslims should conform to this conservative nationalist vision in order to defeat the domestic and global terrorist threat. The military becomes the model and 'school for the nation', promoting conservative values (such as discipline, loyalty, self-sacrifice) and 'integration' through national assimilation. The failure to assimilate is presented as a national security threat. In 2015, the head of the British Army, General Sir Nicholas Carter, claimed that the Army had 'an increasing role to play [at home] in terms of trying to integrate our society' (Carter 2015: 3).

This report:

- First, describes the growing public acknowledgement of the influence of domestic public opinion on war, particularly after 9/11.
- Second, defines militarism and some of the rhetorical ways used to promote it.
- Third, explains the 'Militarisation Offensive' and analyses the mythmaking and 'moral panic' generated to promote militarism.
- Fourth, describes the failure of militarisation to produce support for the war in Afghanistan and the operational constraints public opinion places on the military.
- Finally, there is an assessment of the impact of militarisation on increasing the power of the military over politicians and the impact of this on British democracy.

## BRITISH PUBLIC OPINION AND WAR: THE HOME FRONT IS THE FRONT LINE

The influence of public opinion on British military intervention has gone from being largely denied to being publicly acknowledged as a vital arena for defeating the enemy. The 'home front' has become the 'front line' in 'global wars'. On taking up his post in 2006, General Sir Richard Dannatt, Chief of General Staff, emphasised the importance of popular support at home to winning the war in Afghanistan. He told the Minister of Defence, 'Losing popular support at home is the single biggest danger to our chances of success in our current operations' (Dannatt 2011: 307, 430). The support of public opinion was seen as essential in order for the West to project the will necessary to defeat the enemy.

The influence of public opinion on policy has been privately acknowledged but publicly denied in order to discourage the mobilisation of public opposition to war. The assumption is that public debate on policy leads to controversy and the politicisation and mobilisation of public opinion, which is an unwelcome influence on policy makers. Privately important sections of the political elite perceived public opinion and the impact of military casualties as an important constraint on policy during the retreat from Empire. The political and military elite's concern with popular opinion has probably been a consistent element through history. The military strategist, Carl Von Clausewitz (1780-1831) considered 'The people' to be part of his trinity that is essential to war fighting, along with 'the government' and 'the military'. The British political parties sometimes took an agreed, bipartisan approach to foreign policy issues in order to contain the influence of public opinion. The *public* denial of the importance of public opinion appears to have been part of a strategy to prevent or contain the influence of domestic opinion on foreign policy. This contrasted with some evidence of *private* acknowledgement of its importance and is implied by the state's use of propaganda.

*'Losing popular support at home is the single biggest danger to our chances of success in our current operations.'*

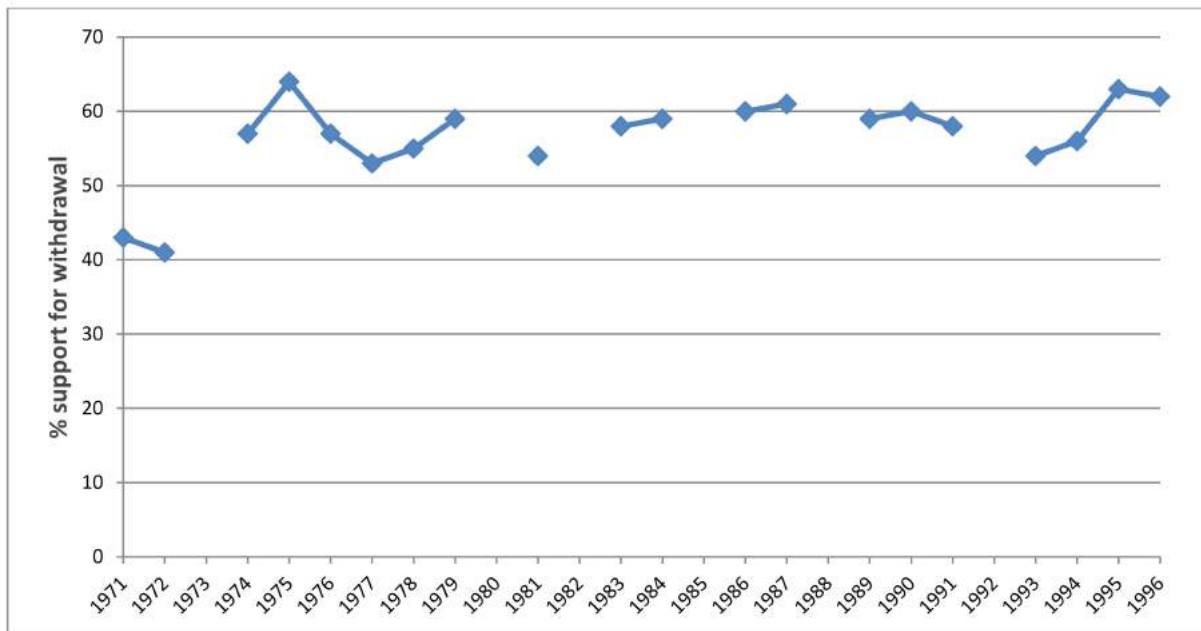
The difficulty of generating public support for war was demonstrated during Britain's 'Long War' in Northern Ireland 1969-2007. The British presence was sustained even though from 1971, just two years after the deployment of troops onto the streets, opinion polls began to show majority support for withdrawal – along with hostility to the IRA and support for repressive policies. From 1974 there were consistent majorities in favour of withdrawal, in spite of the opposition of all the major political parties and most of the media (see Graph 1). The Conservative government saw Northern Ireland as a reason not to become more deeply involved in the conflict in Yugoslavia in the early nineties. The dominant tendency in British public support for withdrawal from foreign wars was a reluctance to lose British lives rather than any sympathy for the insurgents (Dixon 2012a: 104-06).

During 'Blair's wars' (Iraq 1997, Kosovo 1999, Sierra Leone 2000, Afghanistan 2001, Iraq 2003) the importance of domestic opinion as a constraint on foreign military intervention became more publicly acknowledged. Prior to 9/11 British military interventions were to be conducted on the basis of 'Go First, Go Fast, Go Home'. After 9/11 General Dannatt argued for the military 'to go strong and go long', although the military did want to get out of Iraq as soon as the invasion was complete. The British military became involved in protracted campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan,

'... conducting operations 'among the people', 'about the people' and 'for the people'. We have to win 'the hearts and minds' of the people, but 'the people not just of Iraq and

Afghanistan or Pakistan, but also for the people of the United Kingdom, the United States and the West generally' (Dannatt 2009).

**Graph 1: The support of British public opinion for withdrawal from Northern Ireland, 1971-2001<sup>1</sup>**



This was problematic because these wars were seen more as 'wars of choice' than of 'national survival'. The threat of Iraq and Afghanistan to the UK and British citizens was exaggerated in order to mobilise support for war. There were questionable attempts to claim that fighting in Helmand prevented terrorism on the streets of Britain.

The 'new', 'global' nature of the 'war on terrorism' or 'insurgency' means that rather than trying to publicly minimise the impact of domestic public opinion on war, the importance of winning the 'hearts and minds' of the public is now seen and publicly acknowledged as an essential ideological battleground (Mackinlay 2009; Prins and Salisbury 2008). Fighting the 'Global War on Terror' was used to justify the securitisation of national identity and the remaking and militarisation of British society. Major General Jonathan Bailey has argued that after 9/11,

'... it became clear that the 'home front' was also the 'front line'; and the concept of campaigns being 'amongst the people' might indeed also apply to the home front and to the people of the UK. Ideas about domestic multiculturalism were thus directly relevant to the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, because concern about the reactions of Britain's minority communities became a common feature of the debate about the purpose, justification and consequences of those campaigns.' (Bailey 2013: 17; see also Dannatt 2011)

Bailey claims that Blair abandoned multiculturalism as it became clear that assimilation was necessary for taking on religious 'extremists' (see also Danilova 2015: 85-88). In 2014 it was claimed that 'the MoD' saw 'multicultural Britain' as responsible for resistance to seeing troops deployed in countries from which UK citizens, or their families, once came (*The Guardian* 22 January 2014). At the same time, the head of the Army saw black and Asian minority/ethnic communities as a key source

of future recruits (Carter 2015: 6; Ware 2012). Military schools and the Army itself, were seen by some as institutions that could promote assimilation by eradicating cultural difference.

Domestic divisions and controversy over the Iraq War could affect soldiers' morale. According to 'Soldiering: The Military Covenant' the moral component of war was much more important than the physical: 'British soldiers must know that what they are called upon to do is right as well as militarily achievable, and has the support of the nation, society and the government'. It was 'Only on this basis of absolute confidence in the justice and morality of the cause, can British soldiers be expected to be prepared to give their lives for others' (CGS 2000: 1-2; 3-4; see also 3-1). The lack of public support for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan suggested that the military should not embark on 'wars of choice'. Or else the public would have to be persuaded or manipulated into supporting these wars.

There was substantial British public opposition to the invasion of Iraq and this may also have rubbed off on attitudes towards the military, leading to a less positive public attitude (see Table 2 and the discussion below). Although public opposition could not prevent the Labour government invading Iraq, it did constrain the Prime Minister's conduct of that war (Robinson et al 2010). A 'senior US officer familiar with General Petraeus's thinking' argued that Britain's operations in Basra were constrained by the lack of political support at home and the need to avoid casualties' (*Daily Telegraph* 19 August 2007). Military sources were reported as saying that while the military would obey their political masters, involvement in an unpopular war, such as that in Iraq, put at risk the military's relationship with British society (even though the military had lobbied for maximal involvement, see Box 1).

The 'Militarisation Offensive' was intended by some to have a positive impact on recruitment. In the wake of the invasion of Iraq there were signs of recruitment problems. This seems to have been particularly affected by the 'mum factor' – mothers who did not want their children to join the Army and are thought to be particularly influential on enlistment (*Daily Telegraph* 3 June 2006; *Daily Telegraph* 24 February 2008). Women, particularly military mothers and wives, had played an important role in support of the movement for withdrawal from Northern Ireland and they were also active in the US and Israel (Dixon 2017; Managhan 2011; Levy 2012).

The military elite actively pursued the escalation of Britain's role in the 'good war' in Afghanistan by deploying to Helmand in 2006. The aim was partly to restore the British military's reputation and credibility with the US, after Britain's perceived failure in Iraq. This deployment also promoted the military's interests, particularly the

*The military reassured the politicians that they would not be over-stretched by simultaneously fighting two wars.*

Army, on the basis that if military assets were not deployed they would be subject to defence cuts. Maximum involvement in the Iraq war and escalation in Afghanistan would increase the military's prominence in national life giving it a greater claim for financial, popular and political support (Cowper-Coles 2011; King 2011; Seldon and Lodge 2010; Chilcot 2016a; Elliott 2015). The military reassured the politicians that they would not be over-stretched by simultaneously fighting two wars. Generals Dannatt and Richards (later Chief of the Defence Staff) argued that Afghanistan was 'pivotal' in restoring British credibility with the US after the debacle in Iraq (*The Independent* 1 June 2009). The Helmand deployment was supposed to engage in reconstruction and development but quickly became involved in serious fighting with the Taliban. In contrast to Iraq, the war in Afghanistan had the united support of the major British political parties and the media. In spite of this, by September 2006, just six months into operations, public opinion polls were already suggesting that a majority of the British public, and particularly women, opposed the war in Afghanistan.

### Box 1: Militarism and Militarisation

The term 'militarism' is used to refer to military power and the spread of military values. Militarisation refers to the growth of militarism. Military power can increase as the spread of military values decreases. Military values can become more widespread while the power of the military declines. The spread of military values are often thought to create a more permissive culture for the use of force. A narrow definition of militarism could focus on military institutions alone. Here a broader definition is preferred because it draws attention to the more subtle and 'everyday', or 'banal', nature of militarism which can sustain military power and the use of force.

Anna Stavraniakis provides five sets of definitions of militarism (Stavraniakis 2015: 490-94). She argues that militarism needs to be considered across different local, national and international levels and take account of the ways these levels interact. This broader perspective is adopted here because it acknowledges both the importance of elites in generating militarism but also its reproduction and resistance in everyday life.

- *Ideological* - this refers to militarism as an ideology that glorifies war. However war may not be glorified and it is possible to 'glorify war' by translating it, for example, into the language of cosmopolitanism, humanitarianism and human rights (Dixon 2017).
- *Behavioural* – or the propensity to use force. The frequent use of force by Labour governments (1997-2007) was not accompanied by the explicit glorification of war but it was legitimised as cosmopolitan, 'humanitarian intervention'. Definitions of militarism relying on 'directly observable phenomena' can 'underplay' the wider role of military power in society.
- *Military build up* - this can be measured statistically by measuring weapons production and imports, military personnel and expenditure.
- *Institutional* - the excessive influence of the military, military-industrial complex or 'military-industrial-media-entertainment networks' (MIME-NET). Political-military relations are highly interpenetrated rather than completely separate and part of a broader international context, where there is US pressure for British military participation and defence spending. MIME-NET emphasises the range of institutions that sustain militarism; academia and various pressure groups might be added to this list.
- *Sociological* - the influence of military relations on social relations. Ideology, military build up, political-military relations are seen as embedded in a broader social context: 'It is this wider social context that is crucial for understanding the way that not only war preparation and military power, are produced, reproduced, and, at times, challenged' (Stavraniakis 2015: 492). As 'military relations exercise greater influence on social relations in general, militarisation increases' and as its influence decreases demilitarisation occurs. Feminist analyses have emphasised the gendered construction of war and militarism, for example how militarisation impacts on notions of femininity and masculinity, reinforcing 'Warrior' models of masculinity (Duncanson and Cornish 2012).

## Militarism and Militarisation (continued)

Bernazzoli and Flint present twelve core tenets of militarism that are embedded in society through militarisation (Bernazzoli and Flint 2009: 400-01):

1. That armed force is the ultimate resolver of tensions;
2. That human nature is prone to conflict;
3. That having enemies is a natural condition;
4. That hierarchical relations produce effective action;
5. That a state without a military is naive, scarcely modern, and barely legitimate;
6. That in times of crisis those who are feminine need armed protection;
7. That in times of crisis any man who refuses to engage in armed violent action is jeopardizing his own status as a manly man;
8. That soldiers possess certain values and qualities that are desirable in civil society;
9. That military superiority is a source of national pride;
10. That those who do not support military actions are unpatriotic;
11. That those who do not support military actions are anti-soldier;
12. That for a state to engage in armed conflicts is to serve the will of God.

An institutional view of militarism can lead to the conclusion that Western society is becoming 'post-military'. Martin Shaw argued that as industrial development progressed and mass conscription ended young people were no longer socialised into the military. The UK and US were demilitarising and becoming post-military societies (Shaw 1991: 86, 93, 164). A broader, multi-dimensional definition of militarism allows for the possibility that a *decline* in direct experience of the military can lead to an *increase* in militarism. Whereas an increase in the direct experience of the military might lead to a *decline* in militarism, for example after World War One.

British politics and culture now seem less tolerant of critical voices of the military than in the twentieth century, when more civilians had direct experience of the military. Tony Blair's generation of politicians, for example, had little or no military experience but were enthusiasts for the military and the use of force (Vinen 2014; de Waal 2013; Cowper-Coles 2012; Kampfner 2003). Successive British governments have presided over the military elite's increasing power. They supported a 'militarisation offensive' in 2006 to generate public support for war. While the public refused to support the war in Afghanistan, British politics and society were militarised and social support for the military increased considerably (see below). This power can then be used to generate further support for militarism.

The term 'militarism' has been used in a pejorative sense to criticise the excessive influence of the military on civilian life. Even prior to 'Blair's Wars', Professor Hew Strachan concluded his book *The Politics of the British Army* (1997) that if the term 'militarism' was 'interpreted as a veneration of military values and appearances in excess of what is strictly necessary for effective defence...' then it was applicable to Britain. He argued that 'Rather than the civilians colonizing the military, the military have colonized the civilians' (Strachan 1997, 264-65). Those on the Left who are not pacifists or anti-state would need to develop a 'progressive militarism' to sustain the military and justify the use of force.

## MILITARISM AND THE RHETORIC OF WAR

Powerful sections of the British political, military and media elite have used a range of rhetorical techniques to promote militarisation and war. These have been used in an attempt to transform widespread support and sympathy for the troops and military institutions into support for their missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, while attempting to marginalise anti-war opinion. These techniques include:

1. *'Moral panic' and victimhood* – the high prestige and popularity of the military in British society made it difficult to generate further support for the armed forces and translate this into support for the Iraq and Afghan wars. Therefore, 'insults' and 'attacks' on the military had to be invented or exaggerated (there have been genuine shortcomings and problems in the provision of support for the military) in order to produce 'moral panic' and the desired protective response from the public (see 'Mythmaking and militarisation in Britain' below).
2. *Personalisation and deflection* – the *personalisation* of war refers to the focus on human stories and the plight of the troops. This may serve militarists well in 'depoliticising' the war (which is, ironically, to conceal the highly political motivations of those behind the war) diverting attention from wider questions as to why it was necessary to fight these wars. Personalisation can be combined with deflection in which opposition to the war is presented as opposition to military personnel, militaristic ideals and the nation. War becomes 'a fight to save our own soldiers... rather than as a struggle for policy goals external to the military.'

Personalisation is, however, a double-edged sword: encouraging a focus on the human side of war and the sacralisation of the military; for example, the commemoration at Wootton Bassett (see below), may have had the unintended consequence of increasing opposition to the mission and support for withdrawal. This is because citizens identify with and value the lives of their soldiers over the lives of foreign citizens and the objectives of the war. This sacralisation makes it very difficult for the lives of military personnel to be put at risk, whether to conduct a 'just war' and fight legally, to win the 'hearts and minds' of the foreign population or to protect foreign civilians (Tirman 2011).

The peace movement has been able to turn around the personalisation of war by calling to 'Support the Troops: Bring them Home' (Stahl 2009: 533, 535; Lembcke 1998). This slogan, however, demonstrates the limits of dissent in that criticism of the troops themselves is seen as largely beyond the bounds of legitimate debate. The organised British anti-war *movement* has avoided criticism of military personnel but seems to be, nonetheless, unpopular with public opinion (Managhan 2011; Tirman 2011; Yougov 25 October 2014; Robinson et al 2010: chapter 6).

3. *Dissociation* – the government and military attempt to *dissociate* or distance the citizen from the soldier so that public deliberation and dissent are presented as an attack on the soldier and 'an ultimate immoral act.' Dissent becomes 'not a political act but a personal attack on those who fill military roles'. Anti-war activists in Vietnam 'were often cast as anti-troop in spite of a near absence of such behaviour.' The image of the Vietnam anti-war protester spitting on the returning veteran was, according to Lembcke, a right-wing myth created to deflect blame for defeat onto anti-war protesters. The effect of dissociation may be to discourage debate and dissent about the reasons for war, so that citizens do not express the freedoms that the military are supposed to be protecting (Stahl 2009: 553, 554, 535; Lembcke 1998).

4. *The Politics of Anti-Politics* – Noam Chomsky has argued that the point of public relations slogans like ‘Support our troops’ is that they don’t mean anything: ‘You want to create a slogan that nobody’s going to be against, and everybody’s going to be for. Nobody knows what it means, because it doesn’t mean anything. Its crucial value is that it diverts your attention from a question that does mean something: Do you support our policy’ (Quoted in Kelly 2013: 730; see also Lewis and Hunt 2011: 176). The ambiguity of the ‘Military Covenant’ (see below) means that it can draw support across the political spectrum from militarists hoping to promote war, to those against war who believe that military personnel have been badly treated.
5. *The Sacrifice Trap* - refers to the situation in which the deaths of military personnel creates a reason to prolong war in order to justify these sacrifices. As more die this creates further reasons to justify their deaths by defeating the enemy. There is an incentive to put military personnel in harm's way so that their sacrifice leads to the justification of war. The state escalates or continues to fight in order to justify prior sacrifices. *The Sun* newspaper, for example, asserted that the deaths of troops are in vain unless the mission continues to victory (*The Sun* 23 May 2011; Ignatieff 1998: 188). In Vietnam John Kerry, Democratic US Presidential Candidate 2004 and later US Secretary of State, countered this argument: “How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?”

Survey and opinion poll evidence continues to suggest that the British public are able to demonstrate very strong support for the troops while at the same time opposing the wars that they are fighting (see Table 2; Park et al 2012; Hines et al 2014). This is at a time when the British public’s direct involvement with the military has reduced since the end of conscription in 1963. Support for withdrawal and opposition to the war in Afghanistan does not seem to be predominantly motivated by anti-imperialism or sympathy for the insurgents but more by a conservative realist (or isolationist) concern for the lives of ‘our boys and girls’ in ‘wars of choice’ that are not perceived to be vital to the ‘national interest’. This explains why policy-makers have emphasised the direct threat of Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria to British citizens and domestic security. The demonisation of anti-war opinion may have been more difficult after the widespread opposition to the Iraq war. This opposition was justified by the failure to find ‘Weapons of Mass Destruction’.

Politicians and senior military officers attempted to claim that the British people could only properly support ‘our boys and girls’ by supporting the wars that they were fighting. Opposition to the war was presented as anti-troop. The Prime Minister Tony Blair asserted, ‘They [the armed forces] want public opinion not just behind them but behind their mission. They want the ‘people back home’ to understand their value not just their courage’ (Blair 2007). In 2009 Air Chief Marshall Sir Jock Stirrup, Chief of the Defence Staff, argued that in order to avoid failure in Afghanistan the British had to focus first, on ‘Afghan political delivery’ and second, on ‘the will to see the mission through’. The greatest threat to morale was ‘declining will at home’: ‘... Support for our servicemen and women is indivisible from support for this mission. Our people know that they can succeed, that we’ll only fail if we choose to fail. We owe it to them, and to those we’ve lost, not to make that choice’ (Stirrup 2009). Sections of the media also tried to claim that only by supporting the war could the British people support the troops (*The Times* 24 September 2009; *The Independent* 30 November 2009). The ‘Militarisation Offensive’ launched in 2006 further encouraged the transfer of support for the armed forces to the wars they were fighting.



The military has been among the most popular institutions in Britain. Ironically the popularity of the military represented a problem for the militarist coalition in trying to translate support for the military into support for the war. How do you generate greater support for an already highly popular institution? In order to do this, militarists claimed that British society was not behind the military and then exaggerated or invented 'incidents' in order to demonstrate that this was true. Public and private opinion polling evidence, nonetheless, contradicted these negative assessments of British public opinion. There seems to have been a dip in public support after the invasion of Iraq (see below). The Chief of Defence Staff, Michael Walker, claimed that the armed forces were seen as 'guilty by association' with the Iraq war and this was effecting recruitment (*The Guardian* 18 December 2008). This was temporary and not a serious problem. At the lowest ebb 54% had a 'favourable' view of the Army as against 9% who had an unfavourable view (see Table 2). This still left the Army among the most popular of British institutions.

*How do you generate greater support for an already highly popular institution?*

By 2006 the British were over-stretched and fighting both the 'bad war' in Iraq and the 'good war' in Afghanistan. Public support for the military appeared to have dropped after the invasion of Iraq and early polls suggested there was no support for the escalation of Britain's involvement in Afghanistan (see Table 2 and Graph 2 below). General Sir Richard Dannatt emphasised the importance of the support of British public opinion to winning the war in Afghanistan. In a letter to the Minister of Defence, Des Browne, he stated, 'Losing popular support at home is the single biggest danger to our chances of success in our current operations.' He pursued a higher media profile to get the Army's message out. In his autobiography, *Leading from the Front*, Dannatt suggests that in 2006 the British nation was not behind its soldiers and their families and by the Summer of 2007 the public took a negative view of the mission in Afghanistan (Dannatt 2011: 307, 354, 321, 345-6, 416, 430, 434-5; Ware 2010). The opinion poll evidence suggests that the public were consistently behind the troops but not their mission. In 2008 the 'Report of Inquiry into National Recognition of Our Armed Forces' stated,

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'We have concluded that our Armed Forces enjoy immense respect and gratitude on the part of the nation, and that contrary sentiments are rare, though they exist. We have also concluded, however, that the foundation of familiarity and understanding on which that support is based has not only eroded, but is likely to continue to erode, unless countervailing measures are taken.' (Davies 2008: 4)

This statement does not seem to be borne out by the Ministry of Defence's private opinion polling (see below).

The 'Military Covenant' (also known as the 'Armed Forces Covenant') was a key part of the 'Militarisation Offensive'. This claimed that there was a contract between the military and British society, which had been strained or broken because of the failure of society to fulfil its obligations to the military. The Covenant required the promotion of a conservative militarisation in order to close the gap

between 'liberal' civilian society and the military. During 2006-07 powerful sections of the military, political and media elite, along with elements in civil society, such as military charities and think tanks, were involved in a range of initiatives to build support for the armed forces, sustain morale, improve recruitment and increase support for the war in Afghanistan. On 12 October 2006 General Dannatt gave a highly controversial interview to the *Daily Mail*, which claimed that the 'Military Covenant' between the nation and the armed forces had broken down. This interview broke the constitutional convention that the military do not criticise politicians in public. In September 2007, General Dannatt declared his concern 'about the growing gulf between the Army and the Nation' (Dannatt 2007). He argued that these words struck a chord and 'the general public began to get behind our troops in a very demonstrative way' but implied that the government was not behind the troops. *The Times*, declared, based on unpublished MoD polling, that during the period April to November 2008 the abuse of military personnel '... has been replaced by an unmistakable surge in public backing for the men and women of the Armed Forces' (*The Times* 1 November 2008).

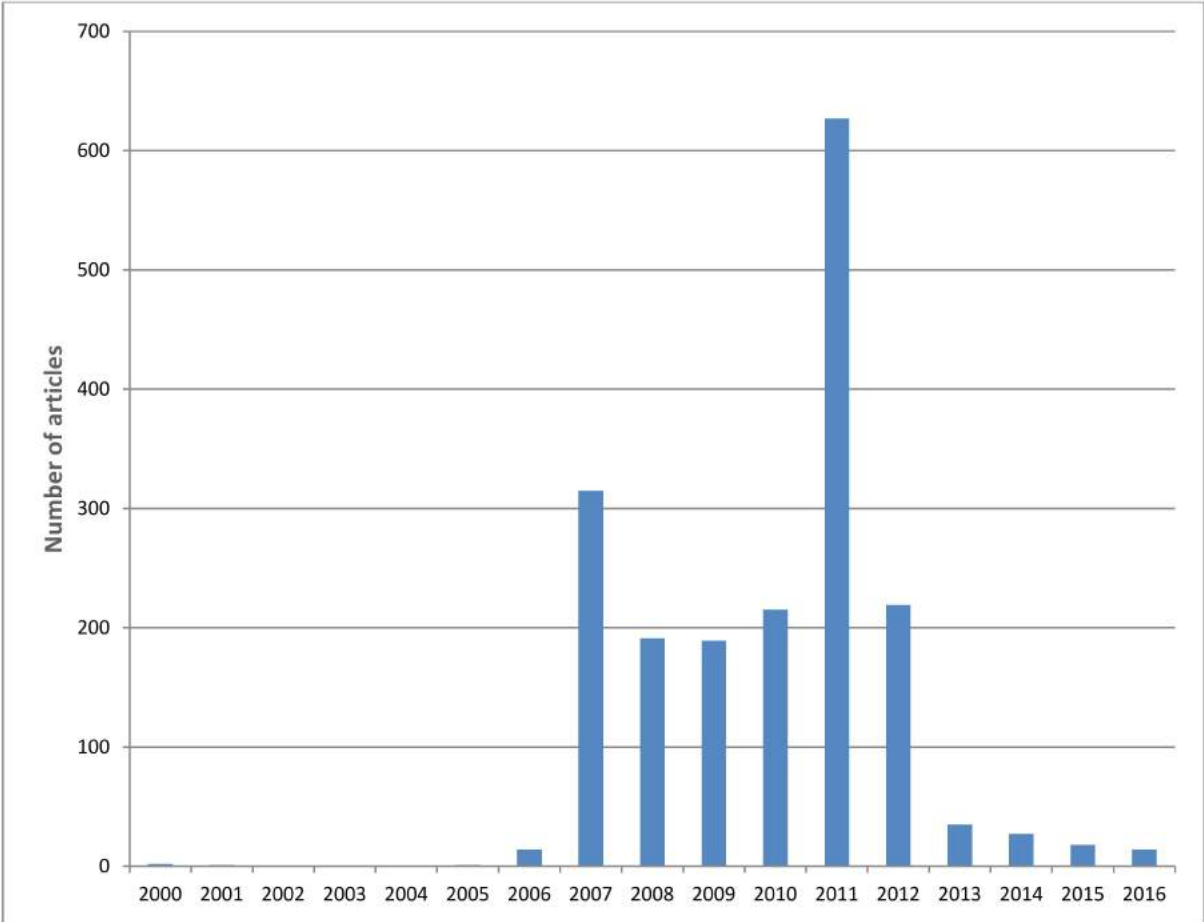
The 'Military Covenant' is ambiguous and it has been interpreted in a variety of ways. This is why both right wing militarists and left wing opponents of war, such as Jeremy Corbyn, have been able to endorse it (*Independent on Sunday* 11 March 2007). The Covenant (with its Christian overtones) is supposed to refer to the promise or sacred contract that the British nation, government, the military hierarchy and people make to provide fair treatment to the armed forces, who risk their lives and give up some of the rights enjoyed by civilians. There was ambiguity over whether the 'Military Covenant' was supposed to create a new package of rights and *privileges* for the armed forces that, some argue, elevates them above civilians, or whether it was aimed at removing disadvantage and putting the military on an *equal* footing with civilians (see Gee 2007 on some of the issues facing the military). Since the burden of fighting falls on the volunteer Army, rather than society as a whole, it may be considered that 'citizenship plus' is a legitimate reward for risk and sacrifice. This can also act as an incentive to recruitment by encouraging others to take on that risk (Levy 2012). Yet if the military are citizens plus this puts an even greater premium on their lives and a consequent increased reluctance to put them at risk.

The 'Military Covenant' is a good example of the 'invention of tradition' because the Covenant's existence was simply asserted in *Soldiering – The Military Covenant, Army Doctrine Publication, Volume 5* in 2000 (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992). Some claimed the military covenant dated from the days of Wellington, others that it was as old as soldiering itself. There is no mention of the 'Military Covenant' (or 'Armed Forces Covenant') in *The Times* newspaper from 1785 to April 2000, although the participation of the military in wars has often generated a sense of entitlement or privilege in the military. General Dannatt's controversial interview with the *Daily Mail* in 2006 claiming that the 'Military Covenant' had broken down and criticising the Labour government led to a rapid increase in media attention in the Covenant (see Table 1).

In September 2007 the Royal British Legion launched a public campaign to 'Honour the Covenant' and was supported by the *News of the World* and *Independent on Sunday* newspapers. The left of centre think tank, *Demos*, published a report in November 2007 claiming that 'The Military Covenant' had been 'damaged almost beyond repair' (Edmunds and Forster 2007). The campaign for the 'Military Covenant' received the support of the three main political parties and is referenced in the Armed Services Act 2011. There is an annual report to parliament on the Covenant. Every local authority in Great Britain has signed Community Covenants 'to support the service community in their area and promote understanding and awareness among the public of issues affecting the armed

forces community'. Many local authorities have an 'Armed Forces Champion' to make sure that commitments to the armed forces community are fulfilled.<sup>2</sup> By the end of 2017, over 2000 businesses and other organisations had signed the 'Corporate Covenant' pledging specific support for the Armed Forces Community.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1: Mentions of the term 'Military Covenant' in UK Newsstand Database 2000-2016<sup>4</sup>**



The 'Military Covenant' has been used in a variety of ways to pursue a range of agendas. For some it was an attempt to achieve 'fair treatment' for the armed forces while for others special privileges. There has been some association in history between military service and gaining citizenship rights and welfare entitlements. In the US, where the welfare state is weak, the military's welfare entitlements raise it above the general population and are a vital tool to recruitment. Recruitment difficulties have seen the US military relax recruitment requirements and allow Neo-Nazis, gang members and criminals into its ranks (see Kennard 2015). The rise of the 'military welfare state' after 1973 was accompanied by cuts to civilian welfare, marking out the military as 'a uniquely deserving vocation' or calling. Since the 1980s, those benefits have shifted to a market model. This cut to US military welfare, a sacrosanct class, did not bode well for civilian welfare (Mittelstadt 2015). British pro-war politicians probably hoped that the 'Military Covenant' would translate into support for the war and bolster recruitment. The Conservative party used the 'Military Covenant' to attack the Labour government for its allegedly inadequate support for the military, although the military itself bore some responsibility for these

inadequacies (Chilcot 2016a). The Conservative/Liberal government's 'Task Force on the Military Covenant' (2010) appeared to promote the 'Military Covenant' as a way of encouraging support for the Afghan war: '... the nation should respect, honour and endorse the sacrifices made by the Armed Forces on its behalf. This must be a two-way relationship, and just as the Armed Forces expect the nation to recognise their 'right to be different', so they must respect the values of the society that they represent and defend' (Strachan et al 2010: 7).

The 'Military Covenant' was also used to challenge civilian control of the military by redefining political-military relations. The Covenant distracted attention from the failure of senior military officers in Afghanistan by emphasising the responsibility of politicians (Forster 2012: 274, 284; Strachan 2011: 278; Hines et al 2014: 7; Ledwidge 2014). The military leadership also deployed the Covenant to protect themselves from what they perceived to be the Labour government's threat to 'liberalise' or 'civilianise' the military. In 1996, the military leadership had tried to preserve their autonomy and values against unwanted external liberal or civilian influences, which could undermine 'the core values of the military ethos' (APRC 1996: 6). The 'civil-military gap' was perceived by military leaders to be between a conservative 'military ethos' – which values duty, discipline, self-sacrifice, collectivism, public service, honour and integrity – against liberalising trends in society – selfishness, indiscipline, hedonism, individualism, decadence, lack of deference and being 'ultra-democratic' (APRC 1996; CGS 2000). The 'Values and Standards of the British Army', '...reflect, and are consistent with, the moral virtues and ethical principles that underpin any decent society' (Army 2008: para. 3). The Military Covenant was used to protect the military from externally imposed civilian change by arguing that the unique role of the military should prevent the imposition of legal changes and human rights standards, on sexual orientation, disability, women's rights, health and safety, values and standards. The Covenant and the military's exceptional role was also invoked to defend the military justice system from attack by those who argue that it does not properly hold the military to account. The Covenant was an important part of the 'Militarisation Offensive' after 2006 that attempted to close the 'civil-military gap' by bringing civilian society more into line with the conservative (but not so neoliberal) military ethos. British militarists seek the higher level of veneration of the military achieved in the United States (Sands 2007) and attempt to present armed forces personnel as 'ideal citizens'.

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The military elite's idealisation of the military institution contrasts with some of the treatment of military personnel. David Gee argues:

'... It is British Army policy to channel the youngest recruits and those from poorer backgrounds into the infantry, which uses the most coercive training methods, has the Army's highest drop-out rate, carries the greatest risks in war, and whose veterans face a particularly high rate of unemployment' (Gee 2017: 1).

There is little social mobility in the Army. An ex-Army officer and Labour MP argued: 'The simple fact is that few school-leavers today wish to join an institution steeped in snobbery and where a glass ceiling will be placed upon their career prospects on account of their social class' (Joyce 1999: 4, 9). When legal prosecutions of the military are brought they tend to be directed at ordinary soldiers rather than their officers and do not deal with systemic issues for which the higher ranks are responsible. In Iraq and

Afghanistan the military and political elites brushed aside the 'harmony guidelines' that are supposed to protect mental health. There is also resistance in the senior ranks to soldiers taking action under human rights law against the military. The failure of the military to look after ex-military personnel, particularly those suffering with PTSD, may be attributable to a reluctance to acknowledge a problem that might hinder future recruitment. The conditions of recruitment and service are also a cause for concern, as is the problem of transition from military to civilian life (Gee 2007; 2017).

In December 2007 the British Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, ordered a comprehensive review of military conditions of service and to: 'Identify ways of encouraging greater understanding and appreciation of the Armed Forces by the British Public.' It was argued that the military could only operate 'with maximum motivation and effectiveness if they are both morally and materially supported by the society they are defending' (Davies 2008: 3). The review made forty recommendations, many of which were subsequently implemented. These recommendations included: the wider wearing of uniforms, legal protection for the uniform, a more systematic approach to homecoming parades, a British Armed Forces Day, award ceremonies, revival of the Royal Tournament, military aid to the civil authorities to improve visibility of the military, proposals to improve contact between the military and civilians, and efforts to build understanding including the expansion of Combined Cadet Forces in state schools, putting military topics into the national curriculum, bringing the military into schools; encouraging support through military and veterans cards and military discounts (Davies 2008).

The promotion of military values and recruitment has been apparent in the implementation of some of the report's recommendations and other initiatives that have been developed:

- 'SkillForce' (2000) originated as a project of the Ministry of Defence putting 'military skills' at the service of society, targeting 'hard to reach' children.
- The creation of Veterans Day (2006) and its transformation into an annual Armed Forces Day (June 2009) that '...acts as a de facto military recruitment fair...' (Danilova 2015: 92). This generates a high level of visible support for the armed forces from civil society and the public.
- The commemoration for returning service personnel at Wootton Bassett (April 2007-11).
- The phenomenal growth in funding for 'Help for Heroes' (October 2007), 'Tickets for Troops' (2009, which Andy Coulson, adviser to Prime Minister David Cameron, helped to establish) and other military charities. Donations to armed forces charities rose by over 25% between 2008-10 while contributions to all other large charities fell by 4.3% (Danilova 2015: 110).<sup>5</sup>
- *The Sun* newspaper's First Annual Military Awards (the Millies), December 2008.
- Nataliya Danilova argues that the promotion of 'British values' in schools in 2007 'opened the door to the militarisation of British secondary school education. This militarisation has been developing, first, through the initiatives in citizenship and remembrance and, second, through the direct intervention of military institutions into the educational system' (Danilova 2015: 87). In 2008 the Ministry of Defence offered advice to teachers on what to include in history lessons (Danilova 2015: 88-89).
- The armed forces visit thousands of schools each year across the UK, mainly to promote military careers.<sup>6</sup>

- Promotion of 'military ethos' in schools by the Department for Education (2012), via the Cadet Expansion Programme, Troops to Teachers, and 'alternative provision with a military ethos'.<sup>7</sup> The government pumped nearly £90 million new funding into 'military ethos' projects between 2012-16, including £2 million for character-building projects with a military ethos.<sup>8</sup>
- The Cadet Expansion Programme promotes cadet forces in state schools with 100 new cadet units created from 2010-15, and a target of 500 new units by 2020. There are concerns that these recruitment initiatives are targeted at poorer children.<sup>9</sup>
- Advocates of the 'Troops to Teachers' initiative (2010), which brings military veterans into teaching, believed this '... could also relieve the chronic recruiting problems faced by our armed forces' (Burkard 2008: 9).<sup>10</sup> By 2016 only one sixth of applicants had completed the scheme.<sup>11</sup>
- 'Alternative provision with a military ethos' gave government funding to organisations mainly staffed by ex-military personnel, such as Commando Joe and Challenger Troop, as well as SkillForce and others. They provide activities for pupils at risk of becoming disengaged but also run whole-class and whole-school activities with a 'military ethos'.
- The planned opening of a new 'Phoenix' free school in Oldham, a 'racially' polarised town, whose teachers had all served in the armed forces. This proposed to demonstrate the best of 'martial values' and was to be a model for hundreds of schools. Suitable ex-Army staff couldn't be found and the school failed to get funding (2011-14).<sup>12</sup> The militarisation of education was supported by Conservative think tanks, ResPublica and the Centre for Policy Studies. ResPublica favoured a chain of Military Academies in 'our most troubled neighbourhoods' to instil 'foundational values' and reinvigorate the military's Reserve Forces (Blond and Kaszynska 2012: 5, 7, 16). Although this idea was not put into practice, the military and defence companies have become heavily involved in University Technical Colleges which provide careers-led education for 14-19 year olds.<sup>13</sup>
- Free resources and lesson plans to primary and secondary schools including the Government produced 'British Armed Forces Learning Resource' (2014). The armed forces have become significant providers of STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) education through free activities in schools.<sup>14</sup>
- The commemoration of the First World War was linked by politicians to forging patriotic feelings. In schools, the Army provides a 'soldiers to schools' programme to support teaching around the First World War and accompany pupil trips to cemeteries in Northern France.
- The Elizabeth Cross (2009) awarded to the next of kin of UK armed forces personnel to demonstrate national recognition for service families and their loss.
- The revival of the Royal Military Tournament (2010).
- High profile recruitment stalls in public spaces such as town centres and transport hubs.
- More visible domestic role for the military at: the London Olympic games 2012, selling poppies to the general public, protecting the Oxford Cambridge boat race, participating in Margaret Thatcher's funeral to the concern of both Buckingham Palace and the Labour opposition, and deployment on the streets of London after the London Bridge attack in 2017.

There are some in the military who argue for a more visible domestic role for the military in order to bond the armed forces to the public. There is polling evidence that familiarity with an institution leads to a favourable view of it (Ipsos/Mori 30 March – 3 April 2006). This could prepare the way for a more prominent role for the military in British society. Some argue that the military's counterinsurgency strategy could be deployed domestically in order to win the battle for 'hearts and minds' at home against global insurgency (Murrison 2011: 46-7, 211). The normalisation of the military's role domestically, including the growth of the reserves (although there have been problems with enlistment), might familiarise society with the soldier and, in this way, also help with recruitment and increase support for higher military spending (Gee 2007; Walton 2014: 9; Sangster 2013).

There is evidence that, in the last twenty years, the commemoration of the war dead has been used to promote nationalism, militarised citizenship and support for war. Nataliya Danilova argues that war commemoration is decontextualized and depoliticised and the moral complexity of war is replaced by 'the uncompromising call of 'support!'" (Danilova 2015: 113). She argues society '... is urged to forget the causes of these conflicts, while showing respect and support for the armed forces' (Danilova 2015: 93). Furthermore, '... In accepting the view that soldiers can be seen as individuals and victims of war, it is very difficult to discuss issues of political responsibility and ethical commitments with regards to wars.' Although this may be sensitive to the feelings of survivors and bereaved families it treats them as the subjects of compassion and inhibits them from raising political questions about the war (Danilova 2015: 8). Notable exceptions were Reg Keys and Rose Gentle, whose sons died in the Iraq war, and who were involved in 'Military Families Against the War'.

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Armistice Day has been 'reinvented'; the emphasis had initially been on the First World War experience but by 1995 this had changed to a focus on military service incorporating the fallen of current and future conflicts. This '... enabled a decontextualized framing of remembrance and allowed for the incorporation of the fallen of current and future conflicts' (Danilova 2015: 101). The Poppy Appeal presents the military '...as an embodiment of national values and an institution which cannot function without strong public support. ... Commemoration thus becomes defined as a demonstration of support for the armed forces, which in turn is one of the best ways to demonstrate unity and British national identity' (Danilova 2015: 107). Wearing a poppy is socially expected and those who choose not to conform can be subjected to considerable social pressure (Danilova 2015: 110; see Tweedy 2015 for a powerful critique of the use of the poppy from *Veterans for Peace UK*).

The party-political debate had shifted in favour of militarisation. The Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrats all supported the war in Afghanistan, championed the 'Military Covenant' and the promotion of military values in schools. Some commentators have argued that British political culture now seems less tolerant of critical voices of the military than in the twentieth century, when more civilians had direct experience of the military and were, therefore, less deferential. Tony Blair's generation of politicians, for example, had little or no military experience and combined this with strong enthusiasm for the use of military force (Raven 2012; Vinen 2014; de Waal 2013; Cowper-Coles 2012; Beckett 2011; Elliott 2015: 91).

Sport and entertainment have been used to promote militarism in the UK in a way comparable to the US (Kelly 2013). This normalises war and reduces citizens to spectators who do not consider the pro-war politics behind the 'Hero'-ification of the military. Kelly draws attention to the 'support the troops' message in X Factor 2008 and 2010 and Dancing on Ice 2011. 'The Trio' who were active soldiers, released a Christmas album in 2009 called 'Coming Home'. 'The Choir, Military Wives' released a Christmas single in 2011. Kelly describes the way the military has been brought into sporting events, such as during 'Help for Heroes' week and wearing the red poppy on football shirts; apparently apolitical events, in rugby and football, are used to create political opportunities for the public to 'appreciate' the work being done by the armed forces. Support for the troops becomes support for the policy (Kelly 2013: 731, 732). These initiatives are strengthened by a perception that they are spontaneous and initiated from below rather than the top-down invention of an elite, pro-militarist coalition.

There is also concern at the promotion of militarisation through other forms of popular culture. Militarism is, arguably, deeply embedded in British culture through a long history of involvement in war. Michael Paris has described Britain as a 'Warrior Nation' and shown how this has been promoted through culture and sold to boys and young men as a masculine ideal (Paris 2000). The Falklands War in 1982 could be seen as a resurgence of this banal or everyday militarism and Churchillism that awaited activation (Billig 1995). David Gee discusses the multiple dimensions of militarism and finds evidence that war films were among the main influences on the decision of British infantry recruits to enlist (Gee 2014: 50). Joanna Bourke shows how military practices, technologies, games, language, entertainment and symbols have invaded our everyday lives (Bourke 2014; Walton 2014).



The 'Military Covenant' and the accompanying militarisation offensive were supposed to generate public support for the military and the war in Afghanistan. The 'problem' was how to do this when armed forces personnel and the military institution were already so popular (see Table 2). United party-political support for the Afghan war and a lack of British sympathy for the Taliban meant that pro-war activists had no significant domestic audience to attack in order to generate outrage. The 'good war' in Afghanistan contrasted with significant political and widespread popular opposition to the war in Iraq. This may have made opposition to war seem more respectable, particularly when there was a strong perception that deception had been used to justify the invasion of Iraq.

Sections of the media, particularly the strongly pro-militarist *The Times*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Express*, *The Sun* and *The Daily Telegraph*, attempted to generate further support for the military and the wars they have been fighting, by highlighting, exaggerating or even inventing allegations of discrimination against or insults to military personnel. Isolated incidents, if not invented, were portrayed as if they represented some more general public attitude in society towards the military. Rudyard Kipling's poem 'Tommy' was quoted to suggest the timeless contempt of civilian society for the soldier. These 'insults' appear to have been used to orchestrate 'moral panic' and indignation among the public and a desire for 'something to be done', in order to justify further militarisation and generate increased support for war. This was a rhetorical strategy attempted in the US after the Vietnam War where the mistaken impression was created of widespread abuse of returning Vietnam veterans by anti-war protesters. However, Jerry Lembcke argues in *The Spitting Image* that Vietnam veterans were leading participants in the anti-war movement and actively courted by anti-war activists (Lembcke 1998; Stahl 2009).

The 'Report of Inquiry into National Recognition of Our Armed Forces' (2008) found very few 'unpleasant incidents' of discrimination against the armed services (Davies 2008: 4). Some 'insults' appear to have been the result of simple misunderstandings; some soldiers were not served in pubs while in uniform because the staff were concerned that those soldiers would be in breach of MoD regulations or else that the sale of alcohol to soldiers in uniform was illegal.<sup>15</sup> Other establishments either had a policy, or staff believed they had a policy, of not serving anyone in uniform, whether Army, fire service or police. A senior RAF officer's ban on the wearing of RAF uniform in Wittering because of public hostility, was based on the action of a very small number of people. The Conservative party's 'Military Covenant Commission' argued that Wittering was an isolated incident and 'we do not believe they are representative of British attitudes' (Conservative Military Covenant Commission 2008: 10). Yet *The Times* chose to take this incident as reflective of general public attitudes ('The Price of Defence' *The Times* 1 November 2008; see also Murrison 2011: 233-38).

Two key 'incidents' that led to media outrage were over the apparent failure of Abingdon to turn out for an Army 'homecoming parade' and allegations of civilians 'jeering' at injured military personnel in a swimming pool at Leatherhead Leisure Centre. It may be significant that these 'outrages' were alleged to have occurred in the heart of 'respectable', conservative 'Middle England' making them of particular concern. These 'incidents' came shortly after General Dannatt, the head of the British Army, had appealed for 'homecoming parades' and also helped established 'Help for Heroes', which campaigned for a swimming pool to be built at Headley Court rehabilitation centre to avoid military personnel having to use the Leatherhead Leisure Centre (Dannatt 2010: 346-349).

## **'Middle England' doesn't turn out for homecoming parade in Abingdon?**

On 21 September 2007 General Dannatt spoke of the 'gulf' between the Army and the nation and appealed for soldiers to be honoured with homecoming parades. Just over two weeks later, on 6 October 2007, the *Daily Mail* published pictures purporting to show that the town of Abingdon had not turned out for the return from Afghanistan of a local regiment. Colonel David Kelly, the local station commander, was 'none too happy' with the *Daily Mail* since he had asked for a low-key event. This was because some of his soldiers were still serving in Iraq and the funeral of one soldier was being held on the day of the parade. The people of Abingdon had welcomed the soldiers and he was 'delighted' with their reaction and grateful for their support. But the national newspapers '...have used misleading photographs to indicate the opposite to what actually occurred'. The *Daily Mail* did report strong support for a homecoming parade in Abingdon on 13 December 2007 but then a year later contrasted Colchester's enthusiastic homecoming parade with Abingdon's poor turnout.<sup>16</sup>

## **'Middle England' abuses disabled veterans in Leatherhead swimming pool?**

During 2007 there were a number of media stories about the mistreatment of military casualties in civilian hospitals and demands for the return of military hospitals (Allan Mallinson, 'How much longer can the Army fight?' *Daily Telegraph* 7 August 2007). Headley Court near Leatherhead is a centre for the rehabilitation of injured military personnel. During 2007, 'The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association' (SSAFA) proposed to buy a property near the centre for use by visiting relatives. At least 87 residents objected because they were concerned that the result would be an increased risk of terrorism. The SSAFA project went ahead, after the issue hit the national press and 43,000 people signed a petition. Some of the residents received death threats (*Leatherhead Advertiser* 2 August 2007, 6 September 2007; *Evening Standard* 23 November 2007). There was also some difficulty with the council when Headley Court failed to comply with planning conditions for its new annexe (*Leatherhead Advertiser* 11 October 2007).

On 22 November 2007 the *Leatherhead Advertiser* reported that 'Injured soldiers were subjected to a humiliating encounter when they were jeered at a public swimming pool'. They were abused by a 'group of regular swimmers'. One woman was quoted: 'She said the men do not deserve to be in there and that she pays money to come in the pool and they don't.' Two groups of soldiers waiting to use the pool were ordered to leave by their instructor (*Leatherhead Advertiser* quoted in 29 November edition). The story was picked up by the *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Mail*, *The Sun* and *Daily Mirror*. The *Evening Standard* expanded on the story: 'Two women complained the soldiers would scare children and that they should not be given precedence over paying customers'. (*Evening Standard* 23 November 2007). *The Sun* wanted readers to call in with the name of the woman 'who forced our boys out of the baths' (*The Sun* 23 November 2007). Lord Admiral Boyce, the former head of the Armed Forces, called for the woman to be 'named and shamed' (*Evening Standard* 23 November 2007).

In 2011, Andrew Murrison a Conservative MP and ex-Royal Navy, was critical of 'the watery harridans of Leatherhead' for complaining that 'the men's broken bodies might scare the children'. He stated:

'What is genuinely frightening is the example apparently set to children in the heart of the stockbroker belt. If there is mitigation for such behaviour in Britain's less favoured districts, there is none to be found among the pony paddocks and leafy lanes of Surrey. The shame of

the prosperous and the privileged is so much greater. Lord Boyce was right [to want to get the women's names and publish them] but sadly the women concerned had found a stone to crawl under. They were nowhere to be found. Citizens need to be accountable for their behaviour... The swimming ladies of Leatherhead betrayed the military covenant.' (Murrison 2011: 233).

**Image: *The Daily Mail* contrasts Colchester's enthusiastic homecoming parade in November 2008 with Abingdon's poor turnout the previous year.**

Daily Mail, Wednesday, November 19, 2008 Page 3

# What a difference a year makes

Picture: CH. HUMBERT FRENCH

**IT IS a sight that will bring cheer to the battle-weary on those frontlines so far away.** Yesterday, the people of Colchester turned out in the streets in tribute to 16 Air Assault Brigade, returning after its second tour in Afghanistan. The welcome was in stark contrast to that in Abingdon, Oxfordshire, last year (inset) when the 4th Logistic Support Regiment marched home along empty, echoing streets. At the time, the head of the Army, General Sir Richard Dannatt, warned that those risking their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan were dismayed at the prospect of public indifference. Yesterday, those standing shoulder to shoulder in Colchester provided a perfect role model in how to say thank you to our serving soldiers.

The incident as it was reported generated understandable and widespread outrage. Ironically, the week before the local newspaper had reported big public crowds for Remembrance Sunday: 'Record numbers turn out to pay tribute to the Fallen' (*Leatherhead Advertiser* 15 November 2007; see also *Surrey Advertiser* 23 November 2007). The week after the alleged incident the *Leatherhead Advertiser's* front page stated, 'Community supports pool row soldiers'. The editorial stated that the paper had been inundated with calls and emails *unanimously* condemning the woman's comments. The *Advertiser* called upon Leatherhead to 'Back appeal for heroes' and provided a web address for donations: 'If any good can come of what happened, perhaps it will be to highlight the excellent fundraising campaign for Headley Court's much needed rehabilitation facilities.' (*Leatherhead Advertiser* 29 November 2007). The council passed a motion to allow injured servicemen and their families free use of the Leisure Centre and a cinema (*Leatherhead Advertiser* 29 November 2007; 7 February 2008). The 'shocking actions' of the women 'has fired up people from all across Britain to help out our military heroes' (*Leatherhead Advertiser* 6 December 2007).

The reporting of the swimming pool incident appears to have been less than accurate. There was not a 'group' of local swimmers but it is suggested that two women raised issues and one made insensitive comments. The council leader described this as a 'rare incident' where two members of the public queried the provision of swimming lanes and 'insensitive comments' were made (Letter to *Leatherhead Advertiser* 29 November 2007). Headley Court's executive officer, Major Andy Neaves, said the reaction was 'very rare' and that the local community was 'generally extremely supportive' (*Surrey Advertiser* 30 November 2007). The manager of the swimming pool, stated that the media reporting of the incident was inaccurate. Two customers engaged in a discussion with one of the instructors from Headley Court, one was reasonable but the other not. There was no jeering and the veterans did not scare children because there were no children in the pool at the time (*Leatherhead Advertiser* 29 November 2007). Inspector John Tadman from the local police investigated the 'incident' and spoke to the Instructor who took the decision to leave the pool. The Inspector reported,

*The reporting of the swimming pool incident appears to have been less than accurate.*

'I have established that the newspaper reports are not correct. There was a dispute with a customer which the leisure centre manager resolved at the time but in order to avoid involving Headley Court in the dispute the instructor decided to leave. ...

'The Instructor and men present were not verbally abused and did not witness any of the comments reported in the press or which would constitute an offence under the Public Order Act.

'RAF Headley Court have been using the Leatherhead pool for 20 years now without problems. ...'<sup>17</sup>

The incident at the Leisure Centre came seven weeks after the military charity 'Help for Heroes' (H4H) had been launched on 1 October 2007 at General Dannatt's apartment in Kensington Palace with the support of the *Sunday Times*. General Dannatt had by then visited Headley Court and the commanding officer there had told him that on his 'dream list' was a swimming pool because 'he was forced to bus his patients to a local swimming pool and fight for time among all the other legitimate users of this public service' (Dannatt 2010: 347). The funding of a swimming pool became H4H's 'primary target' (Dannatt 2010: 348). A new rehabilitation centre at Headley Court was opened in 2010 but is due to close by 2018 and move to Loughborough.

## WOOTTON BASSETT: SOLDIERS AS HERO-VICTIMS?

The spontaneous behaviour of the people of the Wiltshire village of (now Royal) Wootton Bassett (2007-11) symbolised the military's uneasy relationship with public opinion. The townspeople paid their respects to returning dead British soldiers by lining the route of their funeral cortège as it passed through the town from RAF Lyneham on its way to Oxford. The commemoration had a strong 'anti-political' flavour in that it was supposed to be about the troops rather than political debates about the wars they were fighting. This has prompted debate over whether the public's strong support for, even sacralisation of, the troops, such as that at Wootton Bassett, creates or inhibits support for war. The further danger of sacralisation is that it risks putting war beyond 'party politics' and, therefore, democratic debate, scrutiny and accountability.

Those arguing that the Wootton Bassett commemoration generates support for war point to the personalisation and depoliticisation of the commemorations in which the dead are commemorated as lost kin and honoured in spite of the cause. The personalisation of mourning may stealthily encourage support for the war because it is difficult to value the soldier while simultaneously rejecting the cause for which they died (King 2010: 4, 17, 18, 20, 21; Jenkins et al 2012: 6).

*The government and military, by contrast, feared the 'Wootton Bassett' phenomenon undermined support for the war.*

The government and military, by contrast, feared the 'Wootton Bassett' phenomenon undermined support for the war. This was because the commemoration emphasised the costs of war and a reluctance to sacrifice 'our boys and girls' in foreign wars (Dannatt 2010; Bower 2016: 521-22). The Army's study of the Afghan campaign expressed unease that '... public opinion begin to sentimentalise the role and loss of Service personnel while growing increasingly ambivalent of the cause for which they fought' (Directorate Land Warfare 2015: xxix).

There is concern in the military that soldiers may be seen as innocent 'victims' of the politicians – who used deception to take the UK to war – which makes it easier for the public to support the soldiers while condemning the war they are fighting. After all 'what noble cause is worth the sacrifice of the nation's innocents?' (Managhan 2011: 452). Since at least 2006 the military leadership have presented the military as victims of politicians who have failed to provide sufficient material and moral support. Charitable campaigns may also present soldiers as victims in order to raise donations. The concern is that the 'victim' image impacts on the image, size and legitimacy of the military as well as recruitment (McCartney 2011). Support rather than sympathy was preferred by the military because the presentation of soldiers as victims could imply vulnerability, weakness and passivity (even femininity) and fuel opposition to military intervention.

The publicity surrounding the repatriation of British military personnel was largely ended by declining British casualties in Afghanistan and moving the ceremony from RAF Lyneham to RAF Brize Norton in August 2011. An MoD document later recommended various initiatives to generate support for Britain's wars, including reducing the profile of repatriation ceremonies (Ministry of Defence 2013).

## PUBLIC OPINION: SUPPORT THE TROOPS, BRING THEM HOME

The military has been, if not the most popular, then at least among the most popular of British institutions. According to private opinion polls commissioned by the Ministry of Defence, this popularity seemed to dip in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq 2003 but had pretty much recovered just as the 'Militarisation Offensive' was launched in 2006. Subsequently, the popularity of the military achieved extremely high levels (see Table 2). These spectacular levels of popularity, it has been argued, were partly generated by exaggerating, or even inventing, incidents of disrespect against the military. This created outrage which then justified a defensive reaction, the further militarisation of British society and greater respect for the military.

Private opinion polling for the MoD (published here for the first time) appeared to suggest that the Iraq war had a detrimental effect on public attitudes towards the military, although even at their lowest ebb they indicated a strong 'favourable' view of the military. After the invasion in March 2003 'favourable' attitudes towards the 'armed forces' dropped and did not recover to the level of January 2003 until after October 2006 (see Table 2). The lowest ebb was in March 2005 when 'only' 54% had a favourable view of the 'Army' and 9% had an 'unfavourable' view – the highest 'unfavourable' level throughout this period. This was reportedly due to controversy over the supply of equipment to the forces, the investigation of deaths at Deepcut barracks, Gulf War Syndrome, and the Hutton inquiry into the death of the government scientist Dr David Kelly (Brian Brady, 'Slump in support for armed forces' *Scotland on Sunday* 16 May 2004). The campaign for further investigations into the deaths of soldiers in Deepcut Barracks is ongoing and the human rights organisation 'Liberty' has launched a campaign for military justice.<sup>18</sup> A MORI poll focusing on the armed forces role in Iraq showed a steep decline in the public's favourable view of the armed forces from 54% in May 2003 to 36% in June 2004.

When General Dannatt launched the 'militarisation offensive' in October 2006 the military had already recovered from its post-Iraq war slump in the opinion polls. By March 2007 the public's favourable view of the military exceeded the January 2003 level, particularly since 'very favourable' views were also much higher. Nevertheless, in September 2007, General Dannatt felt able to claim that there was a 'growing gulf' between the

*During the period 2006-14, polls suggested that the military went from being very popular to spectacularly popular.*

Army and the Nation. The increasingly favourable view of the armed forces coincided with their escalating role in Afghanistan, from Spring 2006. Significantly, although the Army was probably the most high profile of the services when public attitudes to the Army, navy and RAF were canvassed there was little difference in favourability (although a senior Naval officer was reportedly jealous of the Army's casualties because of the high public profile it gave the Army (Elliott 2015: 34)). This undermines the argument that familiarity leads to favourability. During the period 2006-14, polls suggested that the military went from being very popular to spectacularly popular, while there were very few 'unfavourable' views of the military throughout this period (Table 2). The overall 'favourability' rating was very high but even more remarkable is the shift of public support among those holding 'favourable views' to 'very favourable' views. In June 2004 only 16% had 'very favourable' views of the armed forces, by November 2013 this had peaked at 63% holding 'very favourable' views (see Table 2).

The ‘militarisation offensive’ did not transform British attitudes to the military because the military were already highly popular, but it does seem to have heightened that popularity. Other indications of the military’s popularity is indicated by the spontaneous commemoration at Wootton Bassett, homecoming events and the phenomenal growth of military charities (Hines et al 2014: 12-13; Park et al 2012; Ashcroft 2012). The problem as far as the senior military and the politicians were concerned was that this popularity was perfectly compatible with and maybe even reinforced opposition to the war in Afghanistan and a desire to ‘bring the boys and girls home.’ Furthermore, the public’s support for the military didn’t extend to joining up and the Army continued to experience recruitment problems. The continuing and growing popularity of the military institution and service personnel has been reinforced by polls and surveys conducted during 2012 (Ashcroft 2012: 6, 13, 61). The British Social Attitudes Survey 2012, confirmed that there was very strong support for the armed forces, 83% had either a high or very high opinion of the UK armed forces and only 3% had a low or very low opinion. The survey concluded that ‘People clearly find little difficulty in separating the politics of military deployments from attitudes towards the service men and women who take part in them’.<sup>19</sup>

**Table 2: How favourable or unfavourable is your overall opinion or impression of each organisation? (Armed Forces/Army)<sup>20</sup>**

	Jan 2003 AF	May 2003 AF	Dec 2003 AF	June 2004 AF	Mar 2005 Army	Aug 2005 Army	Apr 2006 AF	Oct 2006 AF	Mar 2007 AF	Sept 2007 AF	Apr 2008 AF
Very Fav	19	17	16	16	14	25	19	25	30	29	33
Mainly Fav	55	53	43	46	40	44	45	44	46	47	44
<b>Total Fav</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>77</b>
Neither/Nor	20	23	32		37	19	26	23	18	19	19
Mainly Unfav	3	3	3		7	4	4	2	3	2	3
Very Unfav	1	1	1		2	3	1	1	1	1	1
<b>Total Unfav</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Don’t Know	3	4	5		-	5	5	5	2	1	1

	Oct 2008 AF	Mar 2009 AF	Nov 2009 AF	Mar 2010 AF	Mar 2011 AF	Sept 2011 AF	Mar 2012 AF	Sept 2012 AF	Mar 2013 AF	Nov 2013 AF	May 2014 AF
Very Fav	33	35	36	41	53	56	53	54	49	63	57
Mainly Fav	48	49	46	41	35	33	33	33	35	23	29
<b>Total Fav</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>86</b>
Neither/Nor	15	13	14	14	8	7	9	7	10	8	11
Mainly Unfav	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	3	3	2
Very Unfav	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	0
<b>Total Unfav</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>
Don’t Know	1	1	1	0	1	2	1	2	1	2	1

In 2015 IPSOS/MORI reported that ‘just’ 65% had a favourable view of the armed forces, 72% for soldiers (‘Hearts and Minds: misperceptions and the military’ IPSOS/MORI 16 June 2015). This drop in support, even though the military continue to be spectacularly popular, may be a product of the end of combat operations in Afghanistan and a lower profile for the armed forces. This is

of concern to the military and, therefore, creates an incentive to pursue further military operations in order to keep the military in the public eye (Hines et al 2014).

The British deployment to Helmand, Afghanistan, in 2006 seems to have been unpopular among public opinion from the start. The unpopularity of the war remained relatively stable throughout the rest of the war. This was in spite of united party political support for the war in Afghanistan. This is an important point because it suggests that public discontent with the Afghan war was the result of general public scepticism towards military intervention that risked British lives rather than just the result of high and escalating casualties or particularly dependent on the course of the war itself. From March to September 2006 the British military suffered 35 fatalities in the war, with 19 of these in September 2006. A *Guardian*/ICM poll on 21-23 July 2006 found only 23% thought the presence of British forces in Afghanistan would make the situation better as opposed to 29% who thought it would make things worse, 34% thought it would make no difference. A BBC/ICM poll conducted on 27/28 September 2006 suggested 53% opposed 'the British military operation in Afghanistan' with just 31% in support.<sup>21</sup> Most of Britain's casualties came after September 2006 and there may have been some limited recovery in support for the war since then which could be attributable to the 'militarisation offensive' (see Graph 2). From 2006-10 opinion polls suggested that only 30-40% of the British public supported the war in Afghanistan and 'a clear majority of Britons continue[d] to oppose the war in Afghanistan and to support the expeditious withdrawal of British troops from the region' (Kriner and Wilson 2010: 15). Mass opposition to the war was clearly 'at odds with the platforms of the major parties, which all argued that the continued presence of British troops was vital to national security, as well as for the humanitarian purpose of aiding the Afghan people' (Scotto et al 2011: 5; Kriner and Wilson 2010: 14, 19, 25). This is not so surprising when seen against the consistent support of British public opinion for withdrawal from Northern Ireland after 1974, in spite of the united opposition of the political parties to this policy.



## BRITISH PUBLIC OPINION AND OPERATIONAL CONSTRAINTS

There is a growing literature on democracy and war some of which suggests that domestic public opinion is influential on the conduct of war and in particular is sensitive to military casualties and the prospect of defeat. This can lead to an aversion to fighting wars or else the use of high or 'excessive' levels of force during wars in an attempt to minimise military casualties but increasing risk to the civilian population (Beautement 2006; Levy 2012; Dixon 2012c; Bowen 2013: 277). Counterterrorism and 'Remote Warfare' (the use of drone strikes, special forces, Private Military and Security Companies, local allies, cyber warfare, intelligence and air strikes) reduces military casualties and, therefore, is an attractive alternative to counterinsurgency operations that put military personnel at higher risk (Levy 2012). The attempt to generate popular support for war through militarisation suggests, at least, that there is a common perception that the public is resistant to fighting 'wars of choice'.

There is evidence since the end of the Cold War of Western public reluctance to put its military personnel at risk. During the nineties, General Colin Powell responded to the US's 'Vietnam Syndrome' by developing a doctrine that required overwhelming military superiority to limit casualties as well as a clear exit strategy. In 2011, the Israelis were prepared to release 1,027 prisoners in exchange for the release of a single Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit. The ratio of fatalities between Israeli soldiers and Palestinian citizens increased from 1 to 6 in the first intifada (1987-1993) to 1 to 84 during the Gaza offensive 2009 (Levy 2012: 11). There is evidence that US public opinion is overwhelmingly concerned for American losses and little concerned at the deaths of foreign civilians. This echoes British attitudes towards Northern Ireland (Tirman 2011).

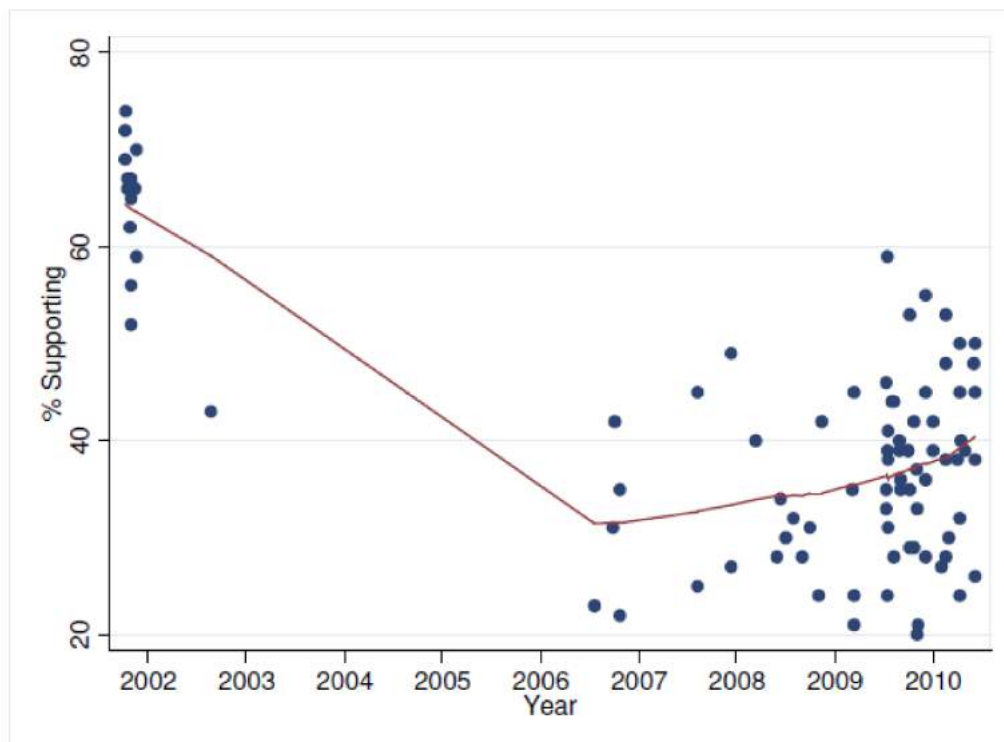
The British public's opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has imposed operational constraints on the political and military elite's willingness to put British lives at risk for fear of further undermining domestic support (Strachan 2013: 339; Dannatt 2011: 282-83; Murrison 2011: 203-04; Gall 2013: 103, 236). In Iraq troop levels were '... driven by political constraints rather than military necessity' (Elliott 2016: 6). The limited deployment of British troops to Helmand was felt to be 'what the market would bear', perceiving cabinet (and perhaps public) opposition to a more significant deployment (Bower 2016: 473). There was also fear of the impact of a single 'catastrophic loss', such as the destruction of a helicopter with 40 passengers, on British public opinion (Richards 2014: 257; Gall 2013: 110, 111, 114, 115). An overwhelming concern for 'our troops' places little premium on British soldiers taking risks to save the lives of 'the other' – insurgents, suspected insurgents or civilians. This undermines the ability of the military to fight a 'Just War' or win the 'hearts and minds' of the local population, which involves the military accepting a higher level of risk to reduce civilian casualties (Menon 2016). Yet at the same time, and perhaps inconsistently, the abuse of human rights by British soldiers and the excessive use of force may also undermine the whole 'humanitarian' rationale for the war; which appears to find some sympathy among public opinion (Robinson et al 2010). This could further encourage public disillusionment with a war that threatens to tarnish the reputation of the nation and the principles of democracy and human rights that it is supposed to be upholding.

Senior officers in Afghanistan perceived domestic public opinion to be a constraint on their military operations, fearing that casualties would undermine public support for the war (Iron 2013: 196; Bishop 2007: 254-55; *The Guardian* 22 December 2008; Directorate Land Warfare 2015: xxvii). A 'senior officer' was quoted as saying:

'There is a general policy by the MoD to keep the horror of what's going on in Afghanistan out of the public domain, and that's probably for political reasons. If the real truth were known it would have a huge impact on Army recruiting and the Government would come under severe pressure to withdraw the troops.' (*Daily Telegraph* 20 September 2008)

In the run up to the British general election of May 2010, General Stanley McChrystal, the NATO commander, suggested that Britain's continued involvement in Afghanistan would be more politically palatable if its troops were moved out of 'harm's way' from the frontline in Helmand. This would reduce British casualties and the pressure to pull out of Afghanistan. As with Iraq, Britain's symbolic contribution to maintaining NATO unity was more important than its military resources (*The Independent on Sunday* 8 November 2009). The US surge saw the Americans pour troops into Helmand and take control of operations. Although 2010 was the worst year for NATO deaths, the British casualty rate from July to December 2010 dropped to 38 compared with 76 in the same period of 2009 (*Daily Telegraph* 27 December 2010). In 2009 there were 108 UK military fatalities in Afghanistan, 103 in 2010 but this dropped to 46 in 2011; 44 in 2012; 9 in 2013; 6 in 2014; 3 in 2015 and 0 in 2016. The Army's study of the conflict claims that 'The conflict declined in popular support paradoxically as the campaign started to deliver tangible progress in ANSF capability' (Directorate Land Warfare 2015: xxix). Opinion poll evidence in Graph 2 contradicts this, suggesting that the escalation of the war in 2006 was unpopular and public support for the war increased only marginally.

**Graph 2: British Support for the War in Afghanistan, 2002-2010 (all available polls)<sup>22</sup>**



General Stanley McChrystal identified 'courageous restraint' as a central tenet of his counter-insurgency strategy because NATO was killing and wounding too many civilians, alienating the local population and thereby fuelling the insurgency. 'Courageous restraint' hoped to win 'hearts and minds' by emphasising the importance of avoiding civilian casualties by shooting less and using fewer airstrikes. Soldiers would take on a higher level of risk in order to avoid alienating civilians and this would win them over to the side of the government. The initiative was introduced in the months before June 2010, which saw the highest monthly death toll of 102 foreign troops killed. Although 'courageous restraint' 'sharply reduced civilian casualties' (a 28% reduction, with a third less casualties from aerial attacks in 2009) it was criticised in Britain and the US by soldiers, their families and the media. The initiative then appears to have been withdrawn.<sup>23</sup>

There seems to be a persistent reluctance to hold British troops to account for their actions in war. When the military are held to account it tends to be ordinary soldiers who are prosecuted, rather than those who may have placed them in, what Robert Jay Lifton calls, 'atrocious-producing situations'. Huw Bennett's excellent work provides strong historical evidence of the abuses carried out by the armed forces in previous wars, including Iraq (for example Bennett 2014b). In 2010 Prime Minister David Cameron finally apologised on behalf of the British government for the murder by British paratroopers of 13 innocent civilians in Northern Ireland on 'Bloody Sunday', 31 January 1972. Since 2016 the Conservative government is considering suspending the Human Rights Act to prevent lawyers prosecuting soldiers. The Ministry of Defence paid out £20m in 326 cases to Iraqis while not admitting liability. The pro-war columnist, Nick Cohen, argued that British soldiers should not be above the law: '... we are not dealing with fantastical slanders, but with proved accusations of killing and torture, and hundreds of further allegations that, by the British government's own admission, warrant either compensation or further investigation' (Cohen 2016). The outraged political and media reaction (including, reportedly, Prince Harry) to the conviction of Royal Marine Alexander Blackman for the murder (later reduced to manslaughter on appeal) of a Taliban fighter further suggests the strength of resistance to prosecuting those responsible for human rights abuses (Tirman 2011; Bourke 2014: 108-9). The discrediting of Public Interest Lawyers appears to have dealt a damaging blow to those lawyers who seek to hold the military to account for their actions. The government also decided to close down the unit investigating claims of abuse in Iraq and reduce similar inquiries for Afghanistan and Northern Ireland. The government also wants the military to opt out of the European Convention on Human Rights in future conflicts (*The Guardian* 10 February 2017). Human rights lawyers argue that replacing the Human Rights Act leaves soldiers themselves without protection. Nicholas Mercer, senior military advisor to the 1st Armoured Division during the Iraq war 2003, has bravely defended the prosecution of Army abuses which, he points out, are often systemic failures, which implicate the higher ranks (*The Guardian* 3 October 2016).

## MILITARY INFLUENCE ON POLITICS

The British military have exerted a powerful but rarely noticed influence on the British state. This has been missed even by radical authors (Jones 2014). In a democracy the military are supposed to be subordinate to the elected politicians but this orthodox view does not accurately reflect political realities. In 1997 Hew Strachan concluded in his study of *The Politics of the British Army* that 'what has restrained the Army from political intervention has been the strength of the governmental framework within which it has had to operate' (Strachan 1997: 266). Yet he also argued that 'the political controls on the Army have loosened' and 'the Army's subordination to parliament has become a constitutional figment rather than a practising reality' (Strachan 1997: 266, 265). Britain was a militarist society in which 'the military had colonised the civilians' (Strachan 1997: 264-65). Since 1997, the profile and power of the military has been raised by involvement in the Iraq, Afghan, Libyan and Syrian wars. This has exacerbated tensions in political-military relations and the constitutional convention that the military do not publicly criticise politicians has been broken.

*The British military have exerted a powerful but rarely noticed influence on the British state.*

General Sir Richard Dannatt was the most prominent exponent of the 'stab in the back myth' that deflected blame for the conduct of the Iraq war from the military elite onto the politicians (Dannatt 2011). This myth had been used by the German military after the First World War to shift responsibility for defeat from the military and to the politicians and the home front. The US military used the 'stab in the back' myth over Vietnam and against President George Bush over Iraq in Summer 2005 (Baker 2006; Lembcke 1998). The 'stab in the back myth' plays into the public's perception of military personnel as 'hero-victims': national heroes and victims of politician's wars (Danilova 2015: 98). The military institution is seen as 'apolitical' and this allows the military elite to deflect responsibility for the wars and their conduct onto already highly unpopular politicians.

In Britain there have been serious rifts between politicians and senior military officers over the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These tensions were particularly strong between the Army and the politicians. This is because the Army pushed very strongly for their maximum involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan. When these wars went so badly so quickly the Army and politicians attempted to pass off responsibility to the other. In addition there were organisational rivalries and jealousies between the Army chiefs and senior officers in the navy and air force over the defence budget (Cowper-Coles 2011; Elliott 2015: 82-83; Richards 2014). The Army was able to use its prestige among popular opinion and support among powerful sections of British society, particularly the media, to put considerable pressure on the Labour and then Conservative/Liberal governments over the conduct of war (de Waal 2013; Richards 2014: 194).

General Dannatt combined the 'stab in the back' myth with claims that the 'military covenant' had been broken. In going public, he broke the constitutional convention that the military do not publicly criticise politicians; a convention that has helped to subordinate the military to democratically elected politicians. The head of the British Army, however, believed that the Army was over-stretched by its operations and he was concerned about the provision of essential equipment and the pay and conditions of soldiers. In his interview with the *Daily Mail* in October 2006, Dannatt attacked the Labour government. He criticised government policy and argued that Britain should withdraw from

Iraq because its' presence was exacerbating the security situation. The attack was supported by Lord Bramall, former Chief of the General Staff, and, initially, by Lord Guthrie, former Chief of the Defence Staff. Dannatt's attack seems to have been popular in the Army and among public opinion (*The Observer* 15 October 2006; *Daily Telegraph* 14 October 2006). An ICM opinion poll for the *Sunday Express* suggested that 71% of the British people believed Dannatt should not be sacked for saying that the British presence in Iraq was making the security situation there worse (ICM Omnibus, Fieldwork 13-14 October 2006, *Sunday Express* 15 October 2006).

The head of the British Army was widely criticised across the political spectrum for breaking the convention that the military do not criticise politicians in public but should seek to privately influence the government. Prime Minister Tony Blair held the military in high regard and probably did not expect to be attacked by the generals (de Waal 2013; Kampfner 2003: 22-23, 91-92; Elliott 2015: 202). In public, Tony Blair announced that 'he agreed with every word' of Dannatt's interview. In private, the Labour government considered sacking him but, with good reason, feared an adverse public reaction (Dannatt 2011: 335; *The Observer* 15 October 2006; Bower 2016: 528-29). By contrast, President Obama sacked the US general Stanley McChrystal for being critical of the President in discussions with a reporter.

A year after this incident, in November 2007, Lord Guthrie and five other former defence chiefs attacked the government's defence spending plans. The *Daily Telegraph* described it as 'one of the most astonishing and blistering verbal attacks on a serving government by senior military figures in living memory' (*Sunday Telegraph* 5 September 2010). After leaving the Army, General Dannatt expressed a conditional view of military subordination to the civil authority,

'... That's why the whole notion of the military balance became so critical. Yes, of course we will do whatever the elected government of the day wants us to do, provided the needs of individuals are looked after and we are in balance.' (*Sunday Telegraph* 5 September 2010)

The military put strong pressure on the government for the maximum British involvement in the Iraq invasion (Chilcot 2016a, see the Chilcot box below). In spite of the failure in Iraq the military also lobbied for an escalation of its role in Afghanistan (Seldon and Lodge 2011; Cowper-Coles 2011; Chilcot 2016a; Ledwidge 2013). The Labour government seemed to have lacked adequate knowledge of defence issues and held the military in too high regard. Leading politicians claimed ignorance of key strategic decisions taken by the military (de Waal 2013; Bennett 2014: 289, 291; Defence Committee 2015: 11-16; Bower 2016: 334). Two key Labour Secretaries of Defence, John Reid (2005-06) and Des Browne (2006-08) both claimed to always follow military advice and politicians claimed that they gave the military everything they asked for (Elliott 2015: 83, 146). Labour politicians and civil servants 'were also apprehensive of the close relationship between the armed forces and the media, and were therefore reluctant to challenge military opinion'. The result was that decisions on the use of military force were 'not being taken solely on the basis of national interest, but because of politicians' wish to maintain good relations with the armed forces' (de Waal 2013: vi; Elliott 2015: 83-84). Desmond Bowen, a career civil servant at the Ministry of Defence, argues that the politicians, because of their sensitivity to public opinion, were more concerned about avoiding

*After leaving the Army, General Dannatt expressed a conditional view of military subordination to the civil authority.*

casualties than the military. The military also threatened politicians with exposure if their advice was turned down. Bowen opposed the right of generals to speak publicly because operations should be under political control (Bowen 2013: 277-79). Major General (retd.) Christopher Elliott points out that politicians had a greater incentive than the military to replace thin-skinned snatch vehicles in Iraq. This was because military casualties impacted on domestic public opinion and created severe political problems for the government. By contrast a senior Army officer was reported to have said 'We need to be shedding more blood to show that we're in there with the Americans' (Bower 2016: 521; Elliott 2015: 46; 34). Jonathan Powell, Tony Blair's Chief of Staff, argued that it was the military rather than politicians who are keener to enter wars. It 'was always easier for politicians not to risk soldiers' lives' (Powell 2010: 270).

The military were adept players of the media game. Even as the military sought maximum involvement in the Iraq war they were also briefing against the Labour government and claiming that the military's inadequacies and lack of resources were down to the failure of the Labour government. This allowed the military to claim success if the war went to plan and allowed them to distance themselves from responsibility for failure if the war went badly. The military's 'strategy of optimism' suggested that victory was just around the corner and only required political will to stay the course. If the politicians wavered and withdrew then the military could claim to have been 'stabbed in the back' by the politicians at the point when they were about to win. This 'strategy of optimism' can be dated back at least to the sixties (Dixon 2012a: 15; 43-44; Richards 2014: 286; Gall 2013: 247-50, 335-6). Major General (retd.) Elliott accuses the Chief of Defence Staff, Jock Stirrup, of being '... either deluded about the reality of events or adept at deploying camouflage to hide the collapse of political will to remain in Basra' (Elliott 2015: 200).

*A senior Army officer was reported to have said 'We need to be shedding more blood to show that we're in there with the Americans'.*

Prime Minister Gordon Brown (2007-10) resisted the military's attempts to have more troops deployed in Afghanistan, not convinced that troop numbers were to blame for casualties. Brown's team believed that the military were escalating the war in Afghanistan in order to restore Britain's military credibility with the US after the Iraq war and to maintain troop numbers in the defence review (Seldon and Lodge 2011: 411; Cowper-Coles 2011). There was evidence that the British military were well equipped and that responsibility for equipment shortfalls should, at least, be shared with the military themselves (Chilcot 2016a). Yet the public perception was behind the military in its attacks on the politicians.<sup>24</sup> In July 2009 the Chief of Defence Staff, Sir Jock Stirrup, claimed he was short of helicopters in Afghanistan. This challenged government claims that the mission was fully equipped. That month, a poll suggested 71% believed the Chief of the Defence Staff over Prime Minister Gordon Brown, when Stirrup said 'The Government is doing too little, too late to provide British troops with the helicopters they need'. Max Hastings, military historian and journalist, declared that in forty years of writing about defence he had never known such bitterness in political-military relations.

The Prime Minister was under such pressure from the military that he only agreed to increase troop numbers in Afghanistan on condition that the right equipment was made available to them. Brown writes:

... And when we added an additional 500 troops I did so with an assurance from the Chief of the Defence Staff that I felt necessary for public confidence in our war effort: that before any [soldier] left for Afghanistan he would be able to guarantee publicly that each of them was properly equipped for the tasks ahead. (Brown 2017: 286; see also *The Guardian* 1 December 2009; Seldon and Lodge 2010: 303, 337)

A militarist coalition including the military elite, the Conservative Opposition, sections of the media and civil society appears to have exerted a powerful influence on the Labour governments. In the case of the military this strayed beyond the conventions of Britain's constitution. Seldon and Lodge conclude of Brown's Afghanistan policy, 'It was a moot point whether Brown was shaping British policy or merely managing pressure from the services, and public opinion whipped up by the media' (Seldon and Lodge 2011: 337; Cowper-Coles 2011: 177-78). A special adviser to Gordon Brown on Afghanistan, Matt Cavanagh, has described how the British Prime Minister felt 'boxed in' by the military, 'conceding more than they would have wanted' because of media and public support for the military (de Waal 2013: 32; Cavanaugh 2010).

## **Box 2: Chilcot and the Army's enthusiasm for the Iraq (2003) and Afghan (2006) wars**

The Chilcot Report and the subsequent media coverage were highly critical of Prime Minister Tony Blair's handling of the Iraq war. Supporters of the military blamed the politicians and civil servants in the Ministry of Defence for failures of judgement, finance and equipment. The military elite's role in the Iraq fiasco was largely eclipsed (Elliott 2016, see Deborah Haynes and Mark Urban on BBC Radio 4's 'PM Programme' 12 July 2016 for an astute analysis of the military). Yet the military had actively lobbied for the maximum role for the armed forces in the US led invasion of Iraq 2003 and then sought to restore its reputation by committing to the escalation of its commitment in Afghanistan in 2006. The unexpected fighting in Afghanistan left the military fighting two wars simultaneously and in breach of the 'harmony guidelines' that were devised to protect troops from the adverse effects of over-deployment.

In 2002 the military and Ministry of Defence (MoD) officials presented the Labour government with three options or packages for British military involvement, alongside the US, in the Iraq invasion.

- Package 1 represented a small contribution 'largely comprising intelligence support, access to UK bases and limited numbers of special forces'.
- Package 2 included Package 1 but in addition 90 aircraft and 20 warships and amounted to 13,000 personnel.
- Package 3 was the only one to include significant ground forces. This incorporated 'elements' of Packages 1 and 2 but a ground invasion force of over 300 tanks and armoured vehicles and 28,000 personnel for a total strength of approximately 41,000 (de Waal 2013: 5, although a peak number of 46,000 were involved. See Chilcot 2016b: 262 for other versions of the packages).

Packages 1 and 2 excluded the Army from a substantial role in the invasion, giving a higher profile to the Navy and Air Force. That would put the generals at a disadvantage when it came to negotiating the Army's organisational interests and their future share of defence expenditure. There was a perception that if the military did not use their assets they would lose them: 'use it or lose it' (Richards 2014: 181; Seldon and Snowdon 2015: 487; Elliott 2015: 82-83; Cowper-Coles 2011). The military believed that the deployment of ground troops would give the British greater influence on the planning of the invasion but also help to sustain the close relationship with the US over intelligence and new equipment. It was also claimed that involvement in the invasion might allow the British to avoid or limit a post-war peacekeeping role. The generals argued that the Army's non-participation would also impair morale and might hinder recruitment.

The politicians initially favoured Package 2 and resisted the deployment of large numbers of ground troops. The Chilcot Report concluded:

'The primary impetus to maximise the size of the UK contribution and the recommendations on its composition came from the Armed Forces, with the agreement of Mr Hoon [Secretary of State for Defence]'. (Chilcot 2016a: 811; Chilcot 2016b: 543-44, 597 on Hoon's initial scepticism).

The British Army used its diplomatic skills to bring US pressure to bear on the British government. There were unauthorised suggestions made to US policy makers, allegedly by British MoD/military personnel, that the UK might provide an armoured division for the invasion (Chilcot 2016b: 230-32, 238-252). The British military also used their relationship with the US military to put pressure on the British government over Libya in 2011 (Richards 2014: 338). Advisers to Tony Blair suspected that the British military were using their influence with the US military to put pressure on the British government for an increased role. There were reports of 'growing enthusiasm' from the US military for a maximum British military role in the invasion (Chilcot 2016b: 523-4).



## **Chilcot and the Army's enthusiasm for the Iraq (2003) and Afghan (2006) wars (continued)**

At a meeting with President Bush on 7 September 2002, Tony Blair 'had been alarmed by the US expectations that the UK would lead the northern axis [the invasion of Iraq from Turkey]...' (Chilcot 2016b: 619-20). He had to caution President Bush about the extent of the UK's military role in Iraq. The Chilcot Report suggested that President Bush had probably gained his impression of the extent of the UK role from briefings by the US military (Chilcot 2016b: 632-3). Blair seems to have favoured 'package 2 plus' rather than package 3 and was wary of using ground troops (Chilcot 2016b: 629, 696, 702, 706). The British Prime Minister did not want 'any suggestion' that the UK might offer 'a major land contribution to a Force in northern Iraq...' (Chilcot 2016b: 707). Blair's advisers were concerned at being 'bounced' by the military into a stronger commitment by the generals and the MoD (Chilcot 2016b: 696-710, 886). The British and US military had talked up Package 3 and, after this, ruling it out might disappoint the US President (Chilcot 2016b: 781 790, 800, 804, 806). On 31 October 2002, the British Prime Minister agreed to Package 3.

The military lobbied for Package 3 and maximum involvement in the invasion knowing that:

1. This level of involvement was welcome but not necessary. The US would have been satisfied with a more limited British involvement. On 11 March 2003, Donald Rumsfeld, the US Secretary for Defence, publicly stated that British involvement in the invasion was not necessary.
2. Preparation time for the invasion would be very limited because of the political sensitivities surrounding the war. It was difficult for Blair to publicly prepare for war when he was also arguing for a peaceful settlement through the UN.
3. This meant that the Army would, to a considerable extent, have to fight with existing equipment. The generals would be aware how adequate or inadequate this equipment would be for the task they were taking on. In addition, the British involvement in the invasion breached 'harmony guidelines' designed to protect military personnel from excessive deployment and overstretch. This put at risk their physical and mental health.
4. The Army was also pushing for war knowing that the US had not adequately prepared for its aftermath (Bower 2016: 311). The generals and Blair hoped that the war could be quickly won and the British military withdrawn, leaving post-conflict state-building to other NATO armies or the UN ('go first, go fast, go home'). After the invasion the military were slow to acknowledge the danger of the growing insurgency or commit to higher force levels in an attempt to exert control in Southern Iraq (Elliott 2015: 114).

The Army was prepared for failure and success in Iraq. 'Senior military officers' were reported to have seen the war with Iraq as irresponsible and the lack of intelligence on the country a national disgrace (*The Guardian* 18 March 2003; *Sunday Telegraph* 10 March 2013). In the event of failure the military would be able to point to these briefings as evidence of their reservations and blame the politicians. The reality was that the military had lobbied for maximum involvement and so they were in a position, therefore, to also claim responsibility should the invasion be successful. General David Richards, who deputised for the head of the Army, lobbied hard for the Army's involvement in the war even though he was 'uneasy about the war' and regards it, with the benefit of hindsight, 'as a grand strategic error' (Richards 2014: 181, 186; Elliott 2015: 82).

The military pushed hard for the escalation of Britain's involvement in the 'good' and apparently 'winnable' war in Afghanistan, for which there was united political support. The belief seems to have been that the military could make up with the US for their failure in Iraq and restore the reputation of the British Army by succeeding in a 'proper' war in Afghanistan.

## Chilcot and the Army's enthusiasm for the Iraq (2003) and Afghan (2006) wars (continued)

A 'popular' war in Afghanistan would also promote the Army's priorities over the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, it was a case of 'use it or lose it' (King 2011; Seldon and Lodge 2010; Chilcot 2016a).

The head of the British Army told the British ambassador to Afghanistan that if he didn't send the battle groups coming free from Iraq into Afghanistan he would lose them in the defence review (Cowper-Coles 2011). General Jackson felt Afghanistan was 'proper soldiering' yet he was also reported as having serious reservations about the initial deployment to Helmand (Dixon 2012a: 29; Bower 2016: 414, 427-8, 464-6, 469; *Daily Mail* 10 November 2015). The military reassured politicians that fighting two wars simultaneously in Iraq and Afghanistan was not problematic, even though the Army wanted to withdraw from Iraq (Bower 2016: 474-5; Chilcot 2016a: 720-32; Elliott 2015: 126). The Chilcot report was critical of Britain's growing commitment to Afghanistan because the UK did not have the resources to fight two campaigns. Sir Max Hastings, a military historian and *Daily Mail* columnist with close links to the military concluded that 'our ruling class betrayed us':

'...The Armed Forces allowed themselves to enthuse about a project for which they were woefully, shamefully ill-prepared and under-resourced — as they were later for going into Afghanistan's Helmand province in 2006.' ('How our ruling class betrayed us', *Daily Mail* 7 October 2016)

There is controversy over exactly who was responsible for military policy in Afghanistan (Elliott 2015: 218; Dixon 2012a: 28-30; Bower 2016: 511-14). General Dannatt could find no record that the Chiefs of Staff Committee had discussed the important deployment to Helmand (Elliott 2015: 112, 137, 173). Britain's deployment to Helmand in April 2006 was supposed to be for reconstruction and development but led to the escalation of violence and war fighting. The Army was initially deployed to pursue an 'ink spot' plan to win 'hearts and minds' in Central Helmand and gradually spread a zone of peace. The plan was abandoned for a 'Platoon House' strategy in the north that led to pockets of British troops being surrounded by Taliban fighters resulting in heavy fighting and destruction of Afghan towns by heavy British bombing. This important tactical shift transformed the nature of the deployment. De Waal argues the military did not consult politicians over the key decision to redeploy troops. This '... indicate[s] a positive reluctance by politicians to second-guess or overrule military decision-making, even when their advisers may have doubts over the military's motives' (de Waal 2013: 19; Dixon 2012a: 30-32; Elliott 2015).

The military lobbied both for maximum involvement in the war in Iraq and escalation in Helmand. These wars rapidly deteriorated and the military were able to deflect responsibility onto politicians by blaming them for not having enough troops and inadequate equipment. This gave the military an excuse if the operation 'went tits up in a few years' time' (Richards 2014: 202, 271). The 'strategy of optimism', suggesting that success was just around the corner, also allowed the Army to blame politicians for 'stabbing them in the back' and pulling out just as victory was in sight.

Military interventionists were concerned at the impact of the Chilcot Report on Britain's willingness to fight future wars. In September 2015 General Sir Nick Houghton, the head of the armed forces, had warned that 'The more worrying constraints on the use of force lie in the areas of societal support, parliamentary consent and ever greater legal challenge'. After the Chilcot Report he argued that the 'false lesson' from the Iraq war would lead to Britain losing courage and the 'paralysis of inaction': 'And that is to me wholly at odds with our innate spirit as a nation. We have a set of values and standards that we want to protect and project' (*Daily Telegraph* 15 July 2016).

## THE CONSERVATIVES AND THE MILITARY: “YOU DO THE FIGHTING, I'LL DO THE TALKING”

The Conservative-Liberal coalition government (2010-15) also experienced difficulties in its relationship with the military. In opposition the Conservatives had exploited the military's attacks on the Labour government. The Conservative leader, however, later claimed that he had been alarmed at the way the Army chiefs ran rings around Gordon Brown, colluding with the *Sun* to whip up support for the troops 'to gain financial leverage for more equipment and more men' (Seldon and Snowden 2015: 56). This was in spite of the Conservative party's traditionally closer links with the military and their shared conservative values. The overwhelming majority of former military personnel in the House of Commons are Conservatives. In the 2015 intake 49 out of 51 MPs who had served in the military were Conservatives and just two in the Labour party (*The Guardian* 25 January 2016, Wikipedia lists 46 Conservative MPs, 2 DUP and 2 Labour). 'Labour Friends of the Forces' claimed the seven former military personnel standing as Labour candidates in 2017 represented the strongest slate since the Second World War. General Dannatt, on his retirement, became a Tory peer and adviser on defence to the Conservative party. The military's alliance with backbench Conservatives could constrain the party leadership's room for manoeuvre (Seldon and Snowden 2015: 485).

In June 2010 the new Prime Minister David Cameron announced that British combat troops would be withdrawn from Afghanistan by 2015. The military, by contrast, had argued for a commitment to the 'long war' and claimed that the announcement of withdrawal by the politicians undermined their counterinsurgency effort just at the moment when they were getting it right. This 'strategy of optimism' could then lead to allegations from the military of a 'stab in the back' by politicians. Military commanders sought to slow down Britain's withdrawal, calling for a 'conditions based approach' that was grounded in 'facts on the ground'.

The new Prime Minister was going to assert civilian control of defence policy and in particular over the future of Britain's commitment to Afghanistan (Seldon and Snowden 2015: 49, 56, 491). Although Cameron was eager to withdraw British troops from Afghanistan he was an enthusiast for other military interventions.

Prime Minister Cameron demonstrated a strong willingness to deploy the military in Libya, Syria, the Ukraine and Iraq. The Conservative/Liberal government committed the Royal Air Force to bombing Gaddafi's forces in Libya, although putting 'boots on the ground' was supposed to be off the table (there was strong public opposition to the war). NATO's action against Libya, which was supported by the UN, was supposedly to prevent 'genocide' by the Libyan army in Benghazi and was not to entail regime change. Cameron drew a comparison between genocide in Bosnia and Libya and argued for intervention on the grounds of humanitarianism as well as national interest. MPs voted 557 to 13 in favour of military action in March 2011 (Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell opposed). Attempts to negotiate a peaceful transition were rejected by the Conservative Prime Minister (Seldon and Snowden 2015: 101-10). There was tension between Cameron and David Richards, the Chief of Defence Staff, because the Prime Minister felt Richards was briefing the media and preparing to blame him in the event of failure in Libya. Cameron had ruled out British 'boots on the ground' (although this excluded Special Forces) (Seldon and Snowden 2015: 102; Richards 2014: 338). General Richards seemed to want a more

comprehensive and aggressive approach than the PM's proposal for a 'no fly zone' and have a 'ground control zone' (Seldon and Snow 2015: 111, 113). At the same time, General Richards suggested that the PM wanted to do more than was militarily feasible and stated that being in the Combined Cadet Force at Eton was not a qualification for running a complex war (Richards 2014: 331-343; Ashcroft and Oakeshott 2015: 438-9). There was reported to be 'extreme anger' in Downing Street, however, at unauthorised public complaints by military chiefs on intervening in Libya. In June 2011 the Prime Minister responded to public pressure from the military: "I tell you what, you do the fighting and I'll do the talking". It was speculated that the government's proposed reforms of British defence were shaped by the government's anger at the military's comments about the sustainability of its commitment to the operation in Libya (*The Guardian* 28 June 2011; Clarke 2011). A UN resolution was passed to support NATO airstrikes and protect civilians in Libya. NATO went beyond the UN resolution to support rebel forces and bring about regime change. Evidence has since emerged that the threat of 'genocide' and humanitarian catastrophe in Benghazi was exaggerated in order to justify external military intervention. The death of Gaddafi in October 2011 led to the end of NATO operations and Libya has since descended into chaos (Kuperman 2013; Menon 2016; Foreign Affairs Committee 2016).

The British Prime Minister tried and failed to get the support of parliament for the bombing of Syrian government forces in September 2013. This failure probably prevented President Obama from going ahead with airstrikes, emphasising the importance to the US of being part of a wider coalition to justify military action. The proposed bombing of September 2013 was supposed to be in retaliation for President Assad's use of chemical weapons, although the evidence for this was not a 'slam dunk' and as clear cut as first presented. There is a long and dishonourable tradition of deception being used to take the US and Britain to war, the Iraq war just being the most recent example (Mearsheimer 2011; Robinson 2016). Parliamentary and public opinion appeared to be a real constraint on the deployment of force (Ashcroft and Oakeshott 2015: 445; Seldon and Snowdon 2015: 327, 335, 337, 339). In November 2015, Cameron succeeded in winning parliamentary support for British airstrikes against ISIS forces. Since the vote in 2013 there seemed to have been a shift of British public opinion in support of bombing and even the deployment of ground troops. This opinion, however, appears to fluctuate and does not seem to be the strong and consistent support necessary to underpin the political risk of putting 'boots on the ground'. The scepticism of Labour's leaders, Ed Miliband and Jeremy Corbyn, broke bipartisanship and constrained the Conservative government's room for manoeuvre.

'Remote warfare' has evolved as a response to the constraint of domestic public opinion and its reluctance to risk the lives of British military personnel. This minimises risk of casualties by waging war remotely using drone strikes, special forces, Private Military and Security Companies, local allies, cyber warfare, intelligence and air strikes. Some critics argue, 'Remote Warfare' is insufficient and 'boots on the ground' are necessary for dealing with threats such as that from the civil war in Syria. In order to circumvent political and public opposition to war a move

*It was speculated that the government's proposed reforms of British defence were shaped by the government's anger at the military's comments about the sustainability of its commitment to the operation in Libya.*

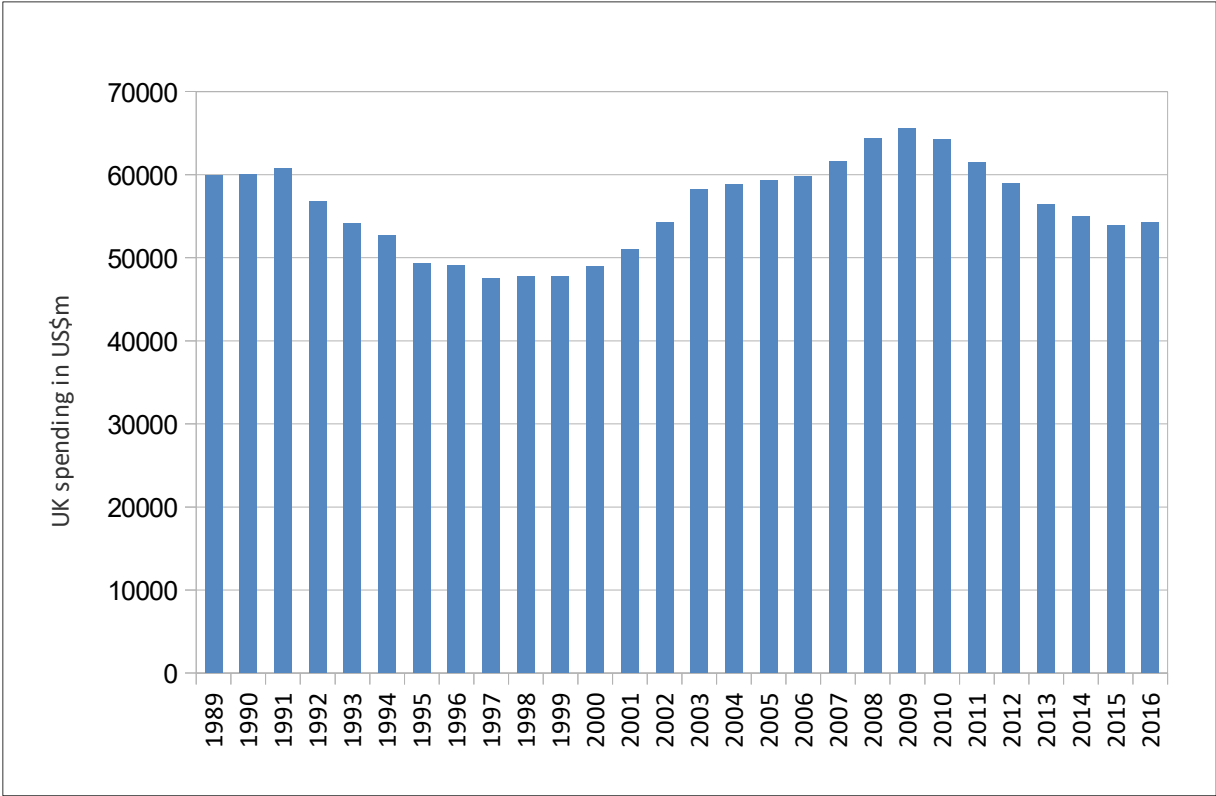
towards the deployment of substantial ground forces would have to be carefully choreographed by using 'incidents', real or fabricated, to generate consent for further 'mission creep'. In Kosovo NATO began by claiming that their bombing would end ethnic cleansing and defeat Milosevic without ground troops. When this failed Tony Blair began to argue for a ground invasion and this bluff succeeded in bringing Milosevic to the negotiating table (Dixon 2000). The ISIS attacks in Paris in November 2015 led to further French bombings in Syria and probably aided Cameron in winning support for British bombing. Attacks in the UK could also be used to justify war in Syria as the distinction between domestic/foreign and war/peace becomes eroded. 'Humanitarians' use humanitarian language to, effectively, call for the escalation of Western military involvement in Syria. Their calls for 'no fly zones', the protection of 'humanitarian corridors' by ground troops or for food drops all require deeper military involvement (Dixon 2017). Any resultant casualties could then be used as a reason to further escalate the use of force – through revenge, 'self-defence' or the 'sacrifice trap' (see above). British special forces are already operating inside Syria and by June 2015 900 British military personnel were reported to be involved in Iraq-related military activity (*The Guardian* 7 June 2015).

By the summer of 2015, the Conservative government seemed to buckle, under the pressure of the British military backed up by the US President and the US military (as the Labour government had buckled on maximum involvement in the invasion of Iraq in 2003), and agreed to increase defence expenditure (Seldon and Snowdon 2015: 466-69). The government initially resisted the military's criticism and lobbying; defence expenditure was not increased and cuts were made to the armed forces (*Daily Telegraph* 10 April 2015; *The Independent* 3 March 2015; *The Guardian* 10 March 2015). Cameron was reportedly 'furious' at resistance in the MoD and from Conservative MPs with service backgrounds (Seldon and Snowdon 2015: xxxvi, 41-43). The Conservatives went into the 2015 general election refusing to make a commitment to devote 2% of GDP to defence expenditure. This was in spite of pressure from the British and US military, the US President, the right wing of the Conservative party and the UK Independence Party (who favour high military expenditure while opposing foreign intervention). It was notable that the Conservatives waited until after the election to pledge to spend at least 2% of GDP on defence over the full course of the 2015-2020 government (the NATO average is 1.4% of GDP). The UK is one of the world's largest military powers and the more appropriate question is why does the UK spend so much, rather than so little, on its military? (Reeve 2015) Since the end of the Cold War – when there was supposed to be a substantial peace dividend – UK expenditure on arms initially dropped but then increased significantly from 1999-2010, before falling back. This has been connected to a powerful militarist lobby in the media (see Table 3, Lewis 2015).

The British public's general tolerance for putting soldiers' lives at risk in military interventions and 'wars of choice' may have declined in spite of the 2006 'Militarisation Offensive' (Hines 2014). This has not prevented champions of military or 'humanitarian' intervention from attempting to generate support for deeper military involvement in Syria (Dixon 2017). This was despite the Chilcot Report's strong criticism on Iraq, the failure in Afghanistan and the debacle in Libya. The British Prime Minister, Theresa May, indicated in January 2017, and after the election of President Trump, that, although she had supported military action in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, the era of intervention was over. The 'days of Britain and America intervening in sovereign countries in an attempt to remake the world in our own image are over' (*The Financial Times* 27 January 2017). The election of President Hilary Clinton might have inaugurated a new era of

'humanitarian intervention'. President Trump, however, rejected 'humanitarian intervention' in favour of more overtly pursuing America's interests through military force. Trump has embraced militarism and is belligerent in his willingness to deploy force.

**Table 3: UK Military expenditure by year in constant (2015) US million dollars, 1989-2016**  
(Source: SIPRI)



## JEREMY CORBYN, THE MILITARY AND THE LIMITS OF BRITISH DEMOCRACY

The election of Jeremy Corbyn to the leadership of the Labour party on 12 September 2015 tested the limits of British democracy. Corbyn is a long-standing supporter of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Stop the War Coalition and an opponent of Trident. He was described as ‘... the least militaristic person since the 1930s to command a major British party’ (*The Guardian* 25 January 2016). Just three days after Corbyn’s election, the Chief of Defence Staff, Sir Nick Houghton, described Trident as ‘non-discretionary’. This was a rebuff to Corbyn by attempting to close down the debate on the replacement of Britain’s nuclear weapons before it had started (Houghton 2015). On the same day the First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir George Zambellas, had also stated publicly how vital Trident is to Britain’s security, in spite of the constitutional convention that military chiefs avoid political controversy (*The Guardian* 22 September 2015). A week after his election ‘a senior serving general’ told *The Sunday Times* that the armed forces would take ‘direct action’ to stop a Corbyn government downgrading the military:

‘There would be mass resignations at all levels and you would face the very real prospect of an event which would effectively be a mutiny. ... Feelings are running very high within the armed forces. You would see a major break in convention with senior generals directly and publicly challenging Corbyn over vital important policy decisions such as Trident, pulling out of NATO and any plans to emasculate and shrink the size of the armed forces. The Army just wouldn’t stand for it. The general staff would not allow a prime minister to jeopardise the security of this country and I think people would use whatever means possible, fair or foul, to prevent that. You can’t put a maverick in charge of a country’s security.’ (*Sunday Times* 20 September 2015)

The MoD described the general’s comments as ‘not helpful’ but ruled out a leak inquiry. On ‘Remembrance Sunday’ General Sir Nick Houghton, speaking on the BBC, publicly denounced Corbyn’s repudiation of the nuclear deterrent. Max Hastings, the military historian and political commentator,

*The armed forces ‘don’t belong to the government, they belong to the monarch... And they take this very seriously’*

argued that Corbyn was correct in his response: ‘It is a matter of serious concern that the Chief of the Defence Staff has intervened in issues of political dispute’. Hastings’ view was that ‘senior officers should fight like tigers in private against ministerial follies, but ultimately implement government policy – or quit and speak their minds’ (*Daily Mail* 10 November 2015). The director of the Royal United Services Institute stated that the armed forces ‘don’t belong to the government, they belong to the monarch... And they take this very seriously’ (*The Guardian* 25 January 2016). The monarchy, another popular British institution, has a very close relationship with the armed forces.

Remarkably, Labour’s 2017 general election manifesto embraced the target of spending 2% of GDP on defence. This had not been part of Labour’s manifesto in 2015. The party criticised the Conservative’s defence cuts for weakening Britain’s defence. It placed itself on the side of servicemen and women against an incompetent Tory government and sought to promote the Armed Forces Covenant (‘For the many, not the few’ Labour Party Manifesto 2017). The Labour MP Dan Jarvis, a former Major in the Parachute Regiment and one of just two Labour MPs with military service, was discussed during 2016 as one of the favourites to replace Corbyn as Labour leader. He supported air strikes against Syria in 2015 and was an opponent of defence cuts (*The Guardian* 6 July 2012).

## CONCLUSION

The end of the Cold War, rather than leading to an era of peace, has found Britain in a state of almost permanent 'hot' war. The problem for political and military elites has been that they have struggled and failed to generate sufficient popular consent for the inevitable sacrifices that would sustain a 'Long' or 'Permanent' state of war. This had been the case even in Northern Ireland, which is part of the UK, with a majority identifying themselves as British. The invention of a variety of euphemisms for war: 'humanitarian intervention', 'peace enforcement', 'human security' and the 'Right to Protect' (R2P) has failed to persuade majorities of the British public to lend their support for open-ended 'wars of choice'. This failure led British and US politicians to use deception to justify the disastrous invasion of Iraq in 2003. The British public also opposed the 'good war' in Afghanistan from the very start of the escalation in 2006. The 'Militarisation Offensive' launched that year with the support of political, military and media elites along with influential sections of civil society failed to overcome public opposition to the war. Since then, the public have provided wavering support for the bombing of Libya and Syria but has not demonstrated the strong and consistent support for ground wars that would put significant numbers of military lives at risk. Women are more reluctant supporters of bombing (Riefler et al 2014). This seems to explain recent attempts to restrict parliamentary involvement in the decision to go to war. Public scepticism means that any future ground war may also have to be justified again by the resort to deception to convince the public of an existential threat (Mearsheimer 2011). Strong evidence has emerged that incompetence, if not deception, was employed to involve NATO in bombing Libya (Kuperman 2013; 2016). The Chilcot Inquiry has also provided further substance to the argument that 9/11 and the 'War on Terror' were exploited by the US President and the British government to legitimise their attempt to target Iraq, Syria and Iran for 'regime change'. This was in spite of the lack of evidence to connect these states to Al Qaeda. In an important article, Piers Robinson asks '... to what extent might have Western populations been manipulated into support for a war on terrorism that was as much about geostrategic opportunism and aggressive wars, as it was about tackling Islamic fundamentalist terrorism?' (Robinson 2017: 69, 66). The British military is still organised for global expeditionary warfare rather than national defence (Reeve 2015).

The British public's high regard for 'our boys and girls' in the armed forces has further increased since the 'Militarisation Offensive' of 2006. But this support for the armed forces has been shown to be compatible with a persistent opposition to the wars they were fighting. The public seem to have been reluctant to sacrifice soldiers in 'wars of choice' that are not perceived to be in Britain's 'vital national interests'. The military are concerned that the armed forces are seen by public opinion as 'hero-victims' and this reinforces their unwillingness to see them sacrificed. The regard for the armed forces is such that predominant British political, military, media and public opinion does not seem to accept that the military should take significant risks in order to fight with 'minimum force' and 'courageous restraint' to win the 'hearts and minds' of foreign populations. Militaries, therefore, increase the level of force and raise the risk to the civilian population thereby undermining the 'humanitarian' rationale for war. This contradiction is embodied in Conservative MPs who favour 'humanitarian intervention' while opposing laws that seek to ensure that British troops fight in a humanitarian way. The British military elite's reluctance to acknowledge its poor historical record on human rights abuses and unwillingness to be held fully accountable for current operations casts further doubt on Britain's ability to wage 'just' or 'humanitarian war' (Tirman 2011; French 2011; Benest 2011).



A 'Militarisation Offensive' was launched in 2006 to change British politics and society in an unsuccessful attempt to generate support for the war in Afghanistan. The influence of public opinion on war used to be publicly denied. After 2000 policy makers publicly acknowledged the importance of domestic opinion. The battle for the 'hearts and minds' of domestic public opinion became the 'front line' in the 'Global War on Terror'. The war now needed to be won in Helmand (and Syria) but also at home. The 'enemy' could only be beaten if they believed that the British had the 'political will' and determination to prevail domestically as well as in Afghanistan. This implied that the military's techniques for fighting insurgents should be brought back home, whether to be implemented by more paramilitary style policing or a new domestic role for the military. Powerful military figures in Britain and the United States advocated a 'Long War' strategy that would have seen those countries in a perpetual state of war for decades. 'Wartime' is then used to justify exceptional measures such as the transformation of British society to generate support for war and the further erosion of democracy and human rights. Although it could be argued that 'wartime' is the norm rather than the exception given the UK's long history of warfare (Dudziak 2013; *The Guardian* 11 February 2014). In 2015 the Chief of Defence Staff complained: 'the more worrying constraints on the use of force lay in the areas of societal support, parliamentary consent and ever greater legal challenge' (Houghton 2015).

The Army's active lobbying for their maximum involvement in the Iraq war and to take on the deployment to Helmand increased its profile and power in British politics and society. British generals used the US military and US politicians to put pressure on the Labour government to secure the fullest possible involvement of the British Army in the Iraq invasion 2003. The generals did so knowing: first, the problems of planning for the war and the aftermath; the state of the equipment available to the troops; and the strain that this would put on the armed forces (Chilcot 2016a). The military

*The generals, having sought to simultaneously fight wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and reassured politicians that they could do this, then attacked the politicians for the problems faced by the armed forces in fighting a 'war on two fronts'. This provided the crisis of public support that justified the subsequent 'Militarisation Offensive'.*

then tried to redeem itself for its failures in Iraq by pursuing a greater role in the Afghan war. The generals, having sought to simultaneously fight wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and reassured politicians that they could do this, then attacked the politicians for the problems faced by the armed forces in fighting a 'war on two fronts'. This provided the crisis of public support that justified the subsequent 'Militarisation Offensive'. The military's complaints about inadequate support for the troops were a key rhetorical driver behind more general calls for increased military spending and promoting the organisational interests of the military (Lewis and Hunt 2011: 176). The UK has the second largest military industrial complex in the world (Reeve 2015). Between 1997-2009 the UK military budget, urged on by a pro-military press, rose by 75%, while Germany's rose by 12% over the same period. By 2009 the UK was only behind the US and China in military expenditure (Lewis and Hunt 2011: 164).

There is a disturbing failure among 'the ruling class', as Max Hastings put it, to take responsibility for the failures in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Labour government has an important responsibility

for failure in Iraq and Afghanistan, but they do seem to have been largely following military advice which pushed for maximum involvement in both conflicts (Elliott 2015). The military have then attacked the politicians for putting them in this position and used this to enhance their power within the British state. Political, military and other actors have attempted to pass off responsibility for failure on each other. There have been no resignations or sackings among senior officers for the failures of the military in Iraq and Afghanistan. Major General Elliott (retd.) argued that it was possible to conclude that 'nobody was really in charge' (Elliott 2015: 82). The 'military ethos' which values duty and discipline, leads to a situation in which only the bravest are willing to speak truth to their superiors and suffer the consequences for their careers, whether in the military or the civil service (Docherty 2007). Those who have served face considerable problems adjusting to civilian life but acknowledging these problems may damage the military's reputation and exacerbate its recruitment problems (Gee 2017).

The military elite was principally behind the 'Militarisation Offensive', although it was also supported widely among politicians, the media, pressure groups and the public. The armed forces were spectacularly popular in Britain throughout this entire period. Public opinion polls suggest that although there was a dip in, albeit high, levels of popularity after the invasion of Iraq, this had almost recovered by the time the 'Militarisation Offensive' was launched in 2006 and then soared to 'spectacular' levels – according to private opinion polls for the MoD. Before 2006 the military had been on the defensive against the intrusion of civilian and 'liberal' values into the military. After 2006 the 'military ethos' was promoted as a conservative model to civilian society through education, the media, cultural initiatives (including a 'warrior' or 'militarised' masculinity) and the promotion of an assimilationist, Christian nationalism. The military elite *invented* the 'Military Covenant' as a key means for promoting militarisation. While its champions tried to claim a long, venerable, historic pedigree its origins lay in an obscure Army document published in 2000. Legislation was proposed making it a crime to insult the military uniform. Criticism of the military institution or armed forces personnel was so limited that in order to generate further support for militarisation and a defensive public reaction, the media used 'moral panic' and scare stories to exaggerate any available 'incident'. Some hoped that the militarisation of British society would create enduring changes that would survive a possible decline in the profile of the military (Strachan et al 2010: 8), particularly after the end of combat operations.

Since the military were already very popular many of the initiatives to promote militarism were well received. There is strong evidence for this in the growth in support for military charities and the spontaneous commemoration at Royal Wootton Bassett. David Cameron, the Conservative leader then Prime Minister, echoed General Dannatt in attacking multiculturalism and advocating a more assertive, 'muscular', assimilationist and conservative British Christian nationalism. The stronger defence of 'British (conservative) values' at home would help to defeat Jihadis in the domestic 'war of ideas', as well as projecting determination to defeat the Taliban and other enemies abroad. The 'Military Covenant' also became a vehicle for the military and the Conservative party to attack the Labour government. This rebounded on the Conservatives after they took power in 2010 because an emboldened military turned their fire on the new government.

The 'Militarisation Offensive' has enhanced the power of the military over the government and led to severe strains in political-military relations unprecedented in the post-war era. Leading soldiers have expressed a conditional view of the military's subordination to even 'moderate' Labour governments. These concerns have been revived more recently by the military's

'unconstitutional' criticism of the radical Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn. This is troubling because the military do pledge allegiance to the monarch rather than the democratically elected government of the day and the Royal Family has historically been very close to the military. From the perspective of some senior military officers, the operation of democracy is at odds with the effective prosecution of war. These officers believe that the politicians and media have failed to manufacture the consent of the British public for the war in Afghanistan, provided insufficient resources to the military to allow it to do its job and that the announcement of withdrawal undermined the mission at the point when NATO had finally got a successful military strategy in place to defeat the Taliban (Directorate Land Warfare 2015). This 'stab in the back myth' has been used to deflect responsibility for the failures in Iraq and Afghanistan onto the politicians rather than acknowledging the shared responsibility of some senior military personnel for the state of the armed forces and operational shortcomings (Ledwidge 2014; Chilcot 2016a; Elliott 2015). Many senior military figures see 'the role of the political world to adapt itself to the requirements of the military campaign, not the other way around' (de Waal 2013: 20).

*From the perspective of some senior military officers, the operation of democracy is at odds with the effective prosecution of war.*

Conservative militarists have demanded further autonomy for the military freeing it from the 'interference' of democratic control (Dannatt 2011; Prins and Salisbury 2008; Cavanaugh 2010). In the US, 'Professional Supremacists' also argue for a much more dominant role for the military in policy-making (Feaver 2011). At the same time, growing criticism of the performance of the military high command has come from civil servants, politicians and some of the senior ranks, but also from those further down the chain of command (Ledwidge 2013; Ledwidge 2014; Elliott 2015; Doherty 2007; Bailey 2013). The 'military ethos', which values duty and discipline, does not encourage the critical evaluation of the armed forces from within. Ironically, although the military is associated with hierarchy and accountability no one appears to have taken responsibility for failure (Elliott 2015). There has been a significant decline in trust among public opinion of the 'senior members of the UK Armed Forces' from 83% in March 2003 to 60% in September 2014 (Yougov 25 October 2014; DCDC 2012: 4; Elliott 2015: 236). There is a popular view that the British Army was 'Lions led by donkeys' in World War 1 and so the image of 'incompetent' generals may resonate (YouGov Survey 7-8 January 2014).

Labour and Conservative Prime Ministers have struggled to contain the power of the military elite, which has been emboldened by its support within the media, civil society and the public. Politicians also struggle to control their militaries in the US and Israel, Presidents Bush and Obama had major public arguments with their generals (Bacevich 2005; Levy 2012; Feaver 2011). In an anti-political age where trust in politicians is so low, the military are a power to be reckoned with, particularly during wartime when their profile is high. Politicians in the UK and US have exacerbated this anti-political mood by their use of deception to mobilise support for the Iraq war in 2003. By the 2017 general election even Jeremy Corbyn's Labour party endorsed the target of 2% of GDP spent on defence, something it hadn't been committed to in 2015.

Militarisation has contributed to a culture, which supports the use of military force as long as it does not put British lives at great risk. This implies a shift from counterinsurgency to counter terrorism and 'remote war'. The MoD has also produced a document on how to sell wars to the public by increased

use of mercenaries, unmanned vehicles, use of special forces and reducing the profile of repatriation ceremonies (*The Guardian* 26 September 2013; DCDC 2012: 2). Yet others, including General Dannatt, believe that 'remote war' is ineffective in achieving Britain's military objectives and promote the revival of expeditionary warfare and counterinsurgency, putting 'boots on the ground' in Syria and elsewhere. Although there is considerable public resistance to this it may well be calculated that once troops are deployed, embroiled in conflict and suffering casualties, the 'sacrifice trap' will generate consent for such a war. British special forces reportedly provide 'boots on the ground' in Syria without the need for parliamentary approval.

Militarists have an interest in promoting a state of permanent war because it can increase the power of the military and be used to justify the further militarisation of society to generate support for war. The problem of 'remote warfare' for militarists is that it reduces the profile of the armed forces and, therefore, their power. There is 'concern' among political and military leaders that with the end of serious combat operations in Afghanistan 'the strong levels of public support of the Armed Forces might fade into indifference.' Defence cuts could also see the Army 'become increasingly disconnected from, and irrelevant, [to] the general population' (Hines et al 2014: 4, 18). There have been attempts to correct 'misperceptions' of the military in order to reverse cuts, increase defence expenditure and improve recruitment.

Whether or not current levels of militarism endure or not remains to be seen. Opposition to militarism is relatively weak, there were once strong 'peace' lobbies in the Labour and Liberal parties but some of these have been seduced by the notion of 'humanitarian war' (Dixon 2017). Peace and human rights campaigners and trade unionists have helped to organise resistance to the militarisation of education and recruitment in schools. Conservative realists can also be an influential restraint on military intervention (Jenkins 2015; Bacevich 2005). Although British public 'support' for the armed forces does not extend to a desire to join up and recruitment problems persist, cultural militarism does seem to be relatively popular. This militarised public opinion may support 'remote' military action but be less supportive if it puts personnel at significant risk. The rise of a right wing populism, particularly President Trump in the US, supports powerful armed forces but tends to oppose foreign adventures that cost 'our lives'. Nonetheless President Trump has, in the past, explicitly embraced militarism and has taken a belligerent attitude to foreign policy.

The current 'structure' of British public, media and political opinion makes 'Cosmopolitan' or 'Humanitarian Interventions' problematic. The depth of support for interventions has been shallow and the public seem reluctant in practice, if not sometimes in theory, to risk the lives of British soldiers to fight justly in foreign wars, even if they are perceived as legitimate. Labour, and even Conservative, politicians have struggled to control the military. A key constitutional convention that the military do not publicly criticise the politicians has been broken. The military's power over Labour's Iraq and Afghanistan policy seems to have been excessive in a democratic state. The Conservatives were able to impose defence cuts although, under pressure from the military and US Presidents, this was reversed in the summer of 2015. The wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and current wars in the Middle East – which have catalysed the domestic threat from Jihadi violence – have also created 'permanent war' and blurred the lines between 'war' and 'peace'. This has led to an assault on the democratic and liberal British values that wars are supposed to have been fought to protect and promote. This includes the control of the military by elected politicians as well as free speech, human rights, scrutiny and accountability, privacy, pluralism, multiculturalism, dissent and debate. These are portrayed as disloyal if not treacherous in a time of permanent war.

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## NOTES

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