

Introduction

In the past decade, the government of the United Kingdom has embarked on an aggressive, interventionist military policy, which has seen the country's armed forces deployed overseas in ever-growing numbers, for ever-lengthening periods of time, and with an ever-increasing level of violence. From small-scale peacekeeping operations in the Balkans, to more forceful intervention in Sierra Leone and Kosovo, and most recently to all-out war in Iraq, the scale and tempo of operations has risen inexorably. At the same time, the manpower of the British armed forces has diminished, and will diminish still further following the government's statement on future defence capabilities issued in July 2004.¹ With increasing demands made on fewer people, the military are feeling stretched as never before. Unsurprisingly, critics of government defence policy are demanding that defence spending rise more rapidly to solve the growing crisis.

One should note, though, that if an organisation lacks the resources to properly carry out the tasks its leadership has set, more resources may not be the right solution. In the case of the armed forces, experience shows that the more capable they are, the more politicians demand of them. Additional resources rarely solve the problem. In the face of overstretch, cutting the number of tasks may be a better way forward. This book argues that this is in fact the case with respect to British defence policy. Military interventionism is neither necessary for Britain's defence, nor even beneficial to it. On the contrary, it undermines

[1] Ministry of Defence, *Delivering Security in a Changing World: Future Capabilities*, Defence Command Paper Cm 6269, July 2004 (London: The Stationery Office, 2004).

our security, and imposes undesirable costs on our nation. We should be doing less.

Doing less will not only enhance the security of the United Kingdom, it will also enable us to manage with less. The armed forces of Britain are now geared almost entirely towards interventionist expeditionary warfare. Rejecting that stance as contrary to our national interests will allow us to dispose of those military assets which are now wastefully being deployed in giving us the capability to wage such warfare. Disposing of these will allow us to spend less overall while also spending more on those aspects of security policy which are worthwhile – a double benefit which it would be foolish to reject.

We are now at a tipping point in defence policy. Ever since the collapse of the USSR, security experts, in an effort to defend their institutional interests, have been promoting the idea of military intervention – to meet the ‘challenges’ posed by ‘failed states’, ‘rogue states’, ‘weapons of mass destruction’, and so forth. A whole new vocabulary has developed to accompany this philosophy, including ideas such as ‘peace enforcement’, ‘humanitarian intervention’, and ‘pre-emptive’ (or ‘preventive’) war. Interventionism has become a dogma within defence circles, and among large sections of the political classes. It has now reached its logical conclusion in Iraq.

But the debacle of British policy in Iraq – the phantom ‘weapons of mass destruction’, the appalling intelligence failures, the shocking lack of planning for the post-war situation, the continuing resistance, and the boost given to Islamist terrorism by Anglo-American actions – has served to discredit the interventionist doctrine. It is becoming ever clearer that we cannot easily reshape the world for the better by the aggressive use of military force, and it is becoming obvious that efforts to do so, far from making us safer, serve only to harm us.

Barring an extraordinary reversal of his promise to retire before the next general election, Mr Blair’s days as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom are now numbered. With his departure, an opportunity will come to abandon the policy of military intervention so closely associated with his premiership. To seize this opportunity, we need to start planning alternatives now.

The time has come, therefore, to challenge interventionism head-on, and to draw the necessary conclusions – that the creation of an increased capacity for expeditionary warfare has done us more harm than good, and that we would be better off in all respects if we were to dispense with this capacity as rapidly as possibly. The present book lays out this case. In so doing it hopes to begin a process which will produce a better defence policy for our nation – doing less with less, but doing it better as a result.