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**Military media machine: how the British military
communicated Afghanistan at home**

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MILITARY MEDIA MACHINE

**HOW THE BRITISH MILITARY
COMMUNICATED AFGHANISTAN AT HOME**

RIKKE BJERG JENSEN

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the University of Westminster
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Military Media Machine is an investigation into the media management structure, and the increasingly dynamic communication processes, developed and implemented by the UK military. It explores – rather than explains – the proliferation in military media facilitation within defence, at a time when the British armed forces are concluding their nearly 13-year campaign in Afghanistan. During this extraordinary period of strategic pressure, telling a story of success has become a key factor in the military's understanding of their own communication function. So this thesis suggests. It does so by demonstrating how strategic narratives are constructed to distance the soldier and the military institution from the war itself. It shows how the military shift from a combat to a 'train and advice' role has challenged the ways in which this distinction is upheld and communicated. This has a wider applicability too, as it testifies to the increasing conflation of military goals and political objectives.

Using access to UK and NATO field settings and doctrinal discussions, the study documents a growing presence of media theory at the heart of military doctrine. It demonstrates how the British military have engaged large (and not necessarily efficient) resources to managing the story as part of their Afghanistan exit strategy. This includes new communication initiatives, online engagement procedures, information doctrine and media training facilitation. Thesis findings indicate that the purpose of these initiatives is to influence target audiences through the 'means' of the media. They paint a picture of an organisation that is increasingly engaged in catering to, and producing material for, the media.

Media studies have generally not engaged in military communication research. Similarly, the military have shown little interest in involving external partners in their communication function. The thesis positions itself at the heart of this discussion. It recognises that new frameworks of understanding are needed; frameworks that do not attempt to improve the effectiveness of military messaging but which examine it and consider the practice. Unlike most work carried out in military academies the purpose of the study has not been to develop doctrine. Rather, by taking on an inside-out approach (as opposed to an outside-in approach) the thesis examines a fast-growing aspect of communication research that has so far been poorly documented within media and communications studies.

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Acronyms

ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Force
ARRC	Allied Rapid Reaction Corps
CA	Comprehensive Approach
CCT	Combat Camera Team
CIMIC	Civil-military Cooperation
CoG	Centre of Gravity
DCMC	Defence Crisis Management Centre
DCMO	Defence Crisis Management Organisation
DCP	Directorate of Communication Planning
D Def PR	Directorate of Defence Public Relations
DfID	Department for International Development
DMC	Directorate Media and Communication
DMOC	Defence Media Operations Centre
D News	Director of News
D Op	Directorate of Operational Planning
DPO	Defence Press Office
DSMC	Defence School of Media and Communications
EBA	Effects Based Approach
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FLC	Front Line Commander
FLMP	Front Line Media Pools
FOB	Forward Operating Base
FOI	Freedom of Information
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IFOR	Implementation Force
IO	Influence Operations
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
JMOT	Joint Media Operations Team
JOA	Joint Operations Area
JTFHQ	Joint Task Force Headquarters
KLE	Key Leader Engagement
LTT	Lines To Take
MMG	Media Management Group
MOD	Ministry of Defence

MOG(V)	Media Operations Group (Volunteer)
MPT	Media Production Team
MRT	Media Response Team
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OPSEC	Operations Security
PAO	Public Affairs Office
PB	Patrol Base
PIC	Press Information Centre
P Info	Public Information
PJHQ	Permanent Joint Headquarter
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Command Europe
SimPress	Simulated Press
StratCom	Strategic Communication
TAPIOs	Territorial Army Pool of Information Officers

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Jensen, Rikke Bjerg, 'Perceptions of War: Afghanistan, Military, Influence', in Silvia Branea and Valentina Marinescu (eds.), *Communication and Crises* (Bucharest: University of Bucharest Publishing House, 2013).

Jensen, Rikke Bjerg, 'Military Media Operations in Modern Wars', *Global Media and Communication*, Vol 7, No 3, December 2011, pp. 193-9.

Jensen, Rikke Bjerg, 'British military media strategies: New wars – new ways' in Nico Carpentier et al. (eds.), *Communicative approaches to politics and ethics in Europe* (Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2009), pp. 85-96.

Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis, and that the material contained in the thesis is my own work.

Introduction

Why Communicating Afghanistan Matters

That a man can take pleasure in marching in formation to the strains of a band is enough to make me despise him. He has only been given his big brain by mistake.

Albert Einstein, *The World as I See It* (1934).

Afghanistan proved to the British military that strategic communication can be a useful mechanism for influencing public perceptions, harnessing support for campaign activity and countering enemy propaganda. It showed that as a military instrument, strategic communication could potentially unlock many of the issues facing Western forces in counterinsurgency operations. From a military perspective therefore, communication activity presented a significant opportunity to engage with target audiences. As a result, new media and information management units, military communication strategic documents, tactical level guidelines and media training facilities purposefully aimed at influencing target audiences through the ‘means’ of the media all became key components of operational planning and execution during the Afghanistan campaign.

To this end, controlling *the message* was seen as central to military strategic and tactical thinking and was understood as not merely close to military objectives but actually part of them. However, exploiting the opportunities presented by the new communication networks continues to present the military with a number of challenges. New modes of communication have questioned how militaries, and governments, understand their communication activity; they have challenged how the military communicate with different groups of people – different target audiences.

And whilst the communication networks have become increasingly muddled, the nature of conflicts has also become more and more complex. Military communication is thus not straightforward. New frameworks of understanding are needed; frameworks that do not attempt to improve the effectiveness of the messaging but which examine it and consider the practice.

The military mission in Afghanistan highlighted the challenges that the constantly evolving communication environment continues to hold for the UK military. As allied forces implemented their exit strategy, as part of ISAF's 'in together, out together' approach, communicating a *story of success* became a critical component of the strategic narrative. With this in mind, and in order to understand the motivations for and processes of military communication activity, the present research pays particular attention to the military mechanisms in place to communicate *exit* (troop withdrawal) in the context of Afghanistan. It draws on empirical data centred round observations, textual analysis and qualitative interviews. It is based on fieldwork carried out with media and communication units within the British military and within NATO, between 2009 and 2011.¹

Military Media Machine understands the UK approach to Afghanistan exit as a key to identifying the structures, vehicles and discourses employed by the military to *tell their story*. It starts from the premise that the military shift from a combat to a 'train, assist and advice' role in Afghanistan challenges how military operations are communicated, as traditional narratives of war-fighting are no longer suitable. The earlier media-friendly narrative of conventional military engagement is ill fitted to describe the new role of peacekeeping and humanitarianism as the withdrawal of troops is underway. In peacekeeping missions the political narrative becomes all-important. Strategic communication, as a military instrument, thus faces the difficult task of generating themes and messages that promote military success whilst adhering to politically generated peacekeeping objectives, which may not always correspond with military goals. Therefore, engaging with military motivations for and processes of communication activity during Afghanistan troop withdrawal is critical precisely because it problematizes how military-specific methods are employed to fulfil political

¹ See Chapter Three for an outline of the research journey and methodological choices.

objectives. This is important as the military institution holds a dual purpose, being both an independent organisation, motivated by its own internal goals and politics, and a government directed institution driven by political aims.

Against this backdrop, the thesis aims to break with existing polarisation within the defence and communication literature. As noted above, the work is unlike most military studies – of which there is a growing body emerging from within defence academies and military institutions – as it is not an attempt to improve the effectiveness of the messaging itself. Rather, it examines and considers the practise of UK military communication activity; from the strategic level, over the operational level, to the tactical level. Yet the work is also unlike most communication research into conflict, which has paid little or no attention to the role of military institutional structures and the nuances inherent in military culture.

Before reviewing the literature and the broader field within which this study sits, the following section discusses the ideas and thoughts behind the research agenda.

Developing an Idea

Military communication research is positioned at the intersection of media and war studies. However the ‘field’ is dominated by, on the one hand, an inherent scepticism towards the military within media studies and, on the other hand, a failure of scholars of war studies to acknowledge the value of communication research. As a result, most literature dealing with military communication falls into one of two categories: communication studies that accept an outside-in approach and thus offer an examination of military influence on media practice; or expert military writings aimed at internal defence audiences. The thesis sits at the heart of this discussion, detached from prevailing preconceptions about the military, the media and associated scholarly positions. Its audience should thus not be found within the military alone. Rather, it should be seen as an attempt to engage a broad section of both the media and defence community by illuminating the communication structures present within the UK military. *Military Media Machine* thus enters this multifaceted field at the point where war and communication studies meet, where the military and the media are forced to subscribe to an inter-dependent relationship and where the new conflict and communication landscape is opening up new avenues to be explored and exploited.

In the post 9/11 age, wars are not only fought on the ground, in the air, at sea or in space, but also in the increasingly complex and hectic information system. In such a system the public quest for transparency has become even more significant. Consequently, the scale of military strategic communication initiatives has grown accordingly, culminating in the foundation of distinct strategic, operational and tactical communication units within the military institution. To this end, because the information network is occupied by a proliferation of military communication products, the media have thus had to accept certain limiting mechanisms. There are, however, reasons for this shift in military thinking. The nature of communication and of conflicts has changed. The context in which military operations are being conducted is now more a matter of choice than necessity.²

Although the complexities of current military operations are widely acknowledged in defence literature, the role of new forms of communication and the effect that these have on military institutions are less recognised. Even as the last decade has seen an upsurge in war and media literatures, following 9/11 in particular, such debates have primarily dealt with the effects of military practice on communication activity and not vice versa. This is especially true of the large body of work that focuses on the media at war, which particularly deals with accounts from journalists and analyses of media coverage pertinent to specific wars.³ Therefore, in spite of the heightened focus on communication activity within the armed forces, military communication practices continue to be framed within conventional media academic debates; debates, which have tended to be founded upon largely dichotomised notions of restrictions vs. cooperation. Viewed in the shadow of the emergent acknowledgement that media output can influence the potential success or failure of an operation, some

² David Betz, 'Redesigning Land Forces for Wars Amongst the People,' *Contemporary Security Policy*, August(2007), pp. 221-243; Theo Farrell and Stuart Gordon, 'COIN Machine: The British Military in Afghanistan,' *Orbis*, Fall(2009), pp. 665-683; Theo Farrell, 'The Dynamics of British Military Transformation', *International Affairs Journal*, 84(2008), pp. 777-807; and Frank Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars: British Military Failure in Iraq and Afghanistan* (London: Yale, 2011).

³ See, in particular: Stuart Allan and Barbie Zelizer (eds.), *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime* (London: Routledge, 2004); Susan Carruthers, *The Media at War: Communications and Conflict in the 20th Century*, (London: Macmillan, 2000); Richard Keeble and John Mair (eds.) *Afghanistan, War and the Media: Deadlines and Frontlines* (Suffolk: Arima Publishing, 2010); Greg McLaughlin, *The War Correspondent* (London: Pluto Press, 2002); James Rodgers, *Reporting Conflict* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Daya Thussu and Des Freedman (eds.) *War and the Media* (London: Sage, 2003); Howard Tumber and Frank Webster, *Journalists Under Fire: Information War and Journalistic Practice* (London: Sage, 2006); and Howard Tumber and Jerry Palmer, *Media at War: The Iraq Crisis* (London: Sage, 2004).

commentators argue that the military are now increasingly driven by media cooperation.⁴ According to Dandeker, there is evidence of military transformation that relies on the effects of public relation rather than outright censorship to ensure operational success.⁵ Yet this view is opposed by other scholars, who continue to understand military communication activity within notions of restriction and control.⁶

As Western militaries are developing increasingly wide-ranging communication facilities to influence public attitudes and behaviours, media academic frameworks in place to challenge such facilities still tend to be buried in terms such as ‘propaganda’ and ‘censorship’, as also noted by Thomas Rid.⁷ This thesis contends that such terms do nothing to progress renewed understandings of the military communication environment. Regrettably, disciplinary affiliations continue to determine the position authors take. Yet renewed methods of understanding are needed. This also negates what Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin argue in their seminal book *War and Media*.⁸ In their view, changes to the media and warfare landscape mean that conventional scholarly approaches to understand the relationship between the military and the media are no longer suitable. New methods of investigation are needed.

The advances in communication technology have increasingly forced the UK military to transform to deal with such challenges. However, it is surprising how very little media academic attention has been paid to internal military communication structures. The present research thus developed from the original idea of wanting to uncover this much under-researched area within media studies, and to discover new and alternative frameworks of understanding. Since most writings have tended to focus on a possible military impact on media practice and not vice versa, such works have failed to

⁴ See, for instance: Stephen Badsey, ‘Media War and Media Management’ in George Kassimeris and John Buckley (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Modern Warfare* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 401-418; Christopher Dandeker, ‘The United Kingdom: The Overstretched Military,’ in Charles C. Moskos, John Allen Williams and David R. Segal (eds.) *The Postmodern Military. Armed Forces After the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Philip Taylor, ‘The Military and the Media: Past, Present and Future,’ in Stephen Badsey (ed.) *The Media and International Security* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000).

⁵ Dandeker, ‘The United Kingdom: The Overstretched Military’ (2000).

⁶ See, for instance: Trevor Thrall, *War in the Media Age* (New Jersey: Hampton Press, 2000).

⁷ Thomas Rid, *War and Media Operations: The US military and the press from Vietnam to Iraq* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007).

⁸ Andrew Hoskins and Ben O’Loughlin, *War and Media: The Emergence of Diffused War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

acknowledge the constraints, and indeed the opportunities, inherent in military culture. Particularly, there has been remarkably little scholarly engagement with how institutional and technological developments within the media have affected military organisational practice. This may be due to the fact that much war and media literature lacks a clear understanding of the intrinsic characteristics of military cultural and organisational systems. The paradoxical nature of the military – existing in a dynamic and constantly changing environment but reliant on a solid and largely unchanging culture – is central to any understanding of military communication structures, vehicles and discourses.

It must be stressed, however, that some scholars, most notably perhaps Hoskins and O'Loughlin,⁹ and to some extent Maltby,¹⁰ offer insightful discussions on defence institutional practice in the context of military communication activity. However, despite such valuable understandings, these writings tend to be buried in rigid theoretical frameworks and broad analyses. Therefore, such studies often result in contextually and historically detached discussions. With the aim of presenting a discussion rooted in the contextual, cultural and historical realities of the military institution, the thesis moves away from such works. Nevertheless, this is not to say that existent writings are not incredibly important and offer valuable insights into military communication. They do. It simply serves to highlight the fact that an analysis of the British military's structural and discursive processes of defence communication as a means for achieving influence through the use of strategic narratives, and which is sympathetic to the constraints of military culture and institutional practice, has yet to materialise. This is where the current study adds new knowledge.

In line with this, the military-media relationship continues to be understood as a battle between the media's quest for the next big story and the military's need for secrecy and deception. As noted by Rid, safeguarding press freedom is seen as one of the media's greatest concerns, and safeguarding an operation's security is seen as one of the military's biggest worries.¹¹ Most literatures discussing this relationship thus tends

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Sarah Maltby, *Military Media Management: Negotiating the 'front' line in mediatized war* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012).

¹¹ Rid, *War and Media Operations* (2007), p. xi.

to approach the topic with an understanding of competing ideals between media access and defence operational security. Yet the simplicity of such accounts fails to acknowledge the complexities of military communication structures and the sophistication with which these are implemented.

While the media and war literatures have neglected to fully engage with the organisational structures, vehicles and discourses driving military communication activity, defence scholarship holds some specialist writings that explore communication through analyses of military processes. Royal Navy Commander Steve Tatham has been particularly vocal in his views of the role of strategic communication in campaign activity and the failure of the British military to effectively employ the opportunities embedded within this term.¹² As such, the recent rise in the interest in the function of strategic communication as a tool for achieving military aims has predominantly been a product of military scholarship.

Military Media Machine draws parallels with such works. Yet by aiming to elucidate the nuances of military institutional practice in relation to communication activity it has been necessary to devise a distinct contextual framework. The research is thus not an attempt to discredit already existing writings, as they offer significant and valuable insights, but it is an attempt to expand and further the discussion to appreciate the institutionalised processes and mechanisms in place in the military to direct information flows. Empirically founded on military doctrine and observational data collected within military settings, the research aims to move away from media accounts of military communication embedded in terminologies of control, manipulation and propaganda. Instead, the intention has been to connect with the multifaceted and gradually merging military and media landscape; taking on an explorative rather than explanatory approach.

¹² See, for instance: Andrew Mackay and Steve Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict. From General to Strategic Corporal: Complexity, Adaptation and Influence* (Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, Shrivenham: December 2009); Rowland and Tatham, 'Strategic Communication & Influence Operations' (2010); and Steve Tatham, *Strategic Communication: A Primer* (Shrivenham: Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, Advanced Research and Assessment Group Special Series 08/28, 2008).

The thesis recognises contextual factors such as the proliferation of communication technology, a globalised world, counterinsurgency operations and peacekeeping missions as the drivers of military transformation; forcing the military communication framework into new territories. The present study thus contends that such drivers not only shape doctrinal content, they also shape the ways in which the military tell their story.

Against this backdrop, and so as to understand *how the British military tell Afghanistan at home*, two sets of questions were asked. First, what is the strategic rationale for implementing communication as a core principle of military doctrine and organisational structure? Second, what were the vehicles and discourses employed by the UK military to explain their Afghanistan campaign in a UK domestic context? The first question examined the intentions, objectives and organisational structure in place to direct military communication and media activity, as gleaned from official doctrine, key military texts, guidelines and notices. This question thus dealt with the content and motivation for the implementation of strategic communication as a mechanism for exerting *influence*.¹³ The second question aimed at the ways in which strategic narratives were constructed to target British home audiences. This question allowed for an in-depth analysis of the themes and messages employed and promoted by the UK military.

Military communication activity – the approach to, the development of and the role of strategic communication – was thus approached through a military lens in this study. As identified by Rid, since any account of an institution's strategy is effectively an account of shared intentions, ideas, routines and theories of action, understandings of military communication practice can only be researched from a military perspective;¹⁴ from an inside-out perspective.

The Changing Nature of Military Communication

Historically, the UK armed forces have always been concerned with the communication of military operations and defence issues. What was new in relation

¹³ The notion of 'influence' is discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters; Chapter Four in particular.

¹⁴ Rid, *War and Media Operations* (2007), p. 8.

to Afghanistan was the scale of military communication and the extent to which media management moved up the military agenda and into the heart of the campaign. Throughout the campaign, shifts in military thinking led the military to develop increasingly subtle communication strategies, which relied on *influence* as the ultimate driving force.

What was also new in the context of Afghanistan were the increasingly dynamic processes of communication. Non-linear communication models pushed the military communication structure beyond what it had traditionally been tasked with. To this end, communication was increasingly understood as important as the campaign itself. Arguably, therefore, the media became a defining factor in the British Afghanistan mission to the point where it could not be fully appreciated without accounting for this media role. Hoskins and O'Loughlin contend that modern warfare cannot be understood without taking into account the role of the media¹⁵ According to British General Sir Rupert Smith, author of the influential book, *The Utility of Force*, a separate military sphere no longer exists: 'We fight amongst the people, a fact amplified literally and figuratively by the central role of the media. We fight in every living room in the world as well as on the streets and fields of a conflict zone.'¹⁶ Consequently, public perception of military activity has become critical to the mobilisation of home support. Local, national and intra-military perceptions of campaign activity matter to military success.¹⁷ And according to Hoskins and O'Loughlin, it is through the media that perceptions of military operations are generated, maintained or challenged.¹⁸ In Afghanistan, the incorporation of strategic communication, standardised through doctrine and military training, thus became a defining factor during the campaign.

In spite of such a growing military focus on strategic communication, the abilities of the military to control the flows of information and, in turn, public perceptions have

¹⁵ Hoskins and O'Loughlin, *War and Media* (2010).

¹⁶ Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), p. 19.

¹⁷ Angus Taverne, 'The Military use of soft power – information campaigns: the challenge of application, their audiences and effects', in Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox (eds.) *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, historical and contemporary perspectives* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010) pp. 137-151.

¹⁸ Hoskins and O'Loughlin, *War and Media* (2010).

become increasingly complicated. Messages do not travel uninterrupted from sender to receiver. In fact, from a military perspective, technology-savvy adversaries, media-aware home audiences and *plugged-in* soldiers have resulted in an increasingly messy process of communication. What is being transmitted is influenced by an array of external factors, including: counter-narratives; unforeseen incidents; and military action itself. Against this backdrop, the messages being communicated have to compete with numerous outside interferences. How the messages are received by target audiences is influenced by the personal attitudes and behaviours of such audiences.¹⁹ For the military, therefore, it is critical to understand the composition of such audiences; to understand their values, expectations and patterns of communication so as to foster behavioural change.²⁰ However, this is also one of the most difficult aspects of military communication activity. Effectively communicating the *right* message to the *right* audience, who interprets the message in the *right* way and at the *right* time, is thus more the exception than the norm.

Targeting diverse groups of audiences simultaneously, during periods of strategic pressure, requires a sophisticated understanding of audience, and it requires the ability to control a message in a communication environment that is largely uncontrollable. In other words, efficient communication of a strategic narrative is essential to any military operation and yet, because of the difficulties involved, it is a task more likely to fail than to ensure strategic and tactical level successes. While military doctrine offers detailed discussions on target audiences, there is remarkably limited scholarly debate about how the military employ strategically sound narratives to influence audiences.

The UK military employ strategic communication for a number of reasons, including: to reach target audiences; to control their image; to gain and maintain public and political support for their actions; to achieve financial backing; to express their concerns in policy discussions; and to live up to their obligation of political accountability in a democracy of scrutiny.²¹ Soldiers are frequently depicted in the

¹⁹ Tatham, *Strategic Communication: A Primer* (2008).

²⁰ Mackay and Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict* (2009).

²¹ This particular point relating to democratic accountability has been contested by a number of scholars in recent years. Chapter One offers a wider discussion on this notion.

media. Their families use the media. What people think about soldiers and the conflicts they are engaged in is largely shaped by the media. How politicians finance and use military power is influenced by the media. So it is hardly surprising that *The Military* – the whole institutional structure of the forces from soldiers in the frontline through commanding officers in the field and at home, through international coalitions of forces like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) through to the military's organisational structures and political direction in the Ministry of Defence (MOD) – attempt to use the media and are developing increasingly sophisticated communication strategies. What is surprising is how very little academic attention has been paid to this aspect of this very significant contemporary communication practice.

Military Media Machine questions existing frameworks with the objective of uncovering findings that are grounded in original data and which have been discovered through an empirical rather than theoretical approach to the research setting. It has a strong focus on context and a deep grounding in military culture. These choices also shape the ways in which the research is conducted, how the material is analysed and how the arguments are framed. Therefore, while theoretical frameworks such as mediatization, media and democracy, and political economy offer insightful perspectives on military-media relations they are not developed in detail in this thesis. This is a conscious choice, which is driven by the objective of understanding the internal workings of military communication activity through an analysis grounded in military culture.²² To this end, as noted above, the thesis recognises that renewed frameworks of understanding are needed; frameworks which do not conceal their arguments in pre-established analytical and theoretical structures, but which understand the military as an institution transforming to meet the challenges of the present communication and warfare landscape.

Chapter Outline

Military Media Machine is divided into four parts, where the first part provides the background, contextual setting and framework for the study. The second part sets out the principles and prevailing vehicles for military communication activity. The third section offers an analysis of military messaging promoted through the strategic

²² See also Chapter Eight for a brief discussion of the limitations of the study.

narrative pertinent to Afghanistan exit strategy. And finally, the fourth part of the thesis rehearses key arguments and includes the conclusion.

Chapter One provides a discussion on the British military as an institution and as a culture that exists within the framework of its own organisational memory. Focusing on the two inter-linked levels of military culture, formal and informal, the chapter argues that in order for military transformation to have a substantial effect on the core of the institution, change needs to be realised at both levels. Therefore, doctrinal change as well as organisational memory are important aspects in the evaluation of military communication activity. Consequently, the discussion starts from the premise that the UK military is an institution that is, on the one hand, accountable to government and, on the other, an organisation with its own integral culture and goals. This particular trait of the military institution is evident at the strategic, the operational as well as the tactical level of military communication. In addition to the discussion on military cultural characteristics, the chapter also firmly situates the workings of the British military within the framework of political accountability. It thus argues that this accountability factor is the underlying driving force behind the military's quest for support; it is important for the military to be *seen* to be accountable so as to legitimise their operations. Ultimately, this also means that political messaging is inherently embedded in the military storyline. The first part of the chapter examines the core routines, rules and goals that make up British military culture and its members, and portrays the military institution as a learning organisation. The second part of the chapter looks at current warfare theory and conflict strategy and positions the study within what General Sir Rupert Smith calls 'war amongst the people'. It thus makes no attempt at charting the history of wars, but it uses Smith's seminal book, *The Utility of Force*, as a core object of study. Particularly, Smith's notion of the 'theatre of operation' helps build a foundation that supports the idea of a warfare landscape that has the people – audiences – at its heart.

Chapter Two places military communication within a historical framework, starting with the Falklands War. It does not offer a chronological analysis of historical wars, but it draws on historical developments in the British military's approach to media management; particularly during the Falklands campaign, the first Gulf War and the Iraq War. Since wars are historically specific and do not exist in isolation, it is

important to establish the historical narrative within which the present study is framed. This is done to understand the strong historical traces found in the MOD Green Book, which directs military-media interaction in current conflicts, as also outlined in this chapter.

Chapter Three rehearses the research journey. It not only describes the methodologies used, it also explains the ideas and thoughts that lay behind undertaking work in a military setting. It offers an insight into the manner in which access was granted to military settings and it presents a critical discussion on prejudices in military communication research. This ultimately led to a journey of discoveries and emergent findings.

Understanding the principles of military communication is central to the second part of the thesis. Setting out the overall military theoretical and strategic approach to communication, promoted through military doctrinal texts, the two chapters in this section set out how military doctrine can be operationalized to form strategic narratives and direct messaging constructed to secure popular support. By examining the organisational structures behind military communication activity, this section is founded upon the contextual frameworks set out in the first part of the thesis. It thus examines military communication and the intentions that lay behind the military strategic, operational and tactical approach to information management.

Chapter Four discusses the rationale, purpose and goals of British military communication as described in military doctrine and as gleaned from observations. Further, the chapter sets out the extent to which external factors such as international coalition frameworks shape UK military institutional practice. Moreover, the chapter identifies basic military objectives as the underlying reasons for the current development of military communication. It asserts that these basic objectives are essential in fulfilling the principal military aims of success on operations and securing the future of the institution. It thus also stresses the central positioning of the Information Strategy in dictating the themes and messages employed to frame military activity on the ground. Finally, the chapter identifies the military categorisation of audiences. In examining the different audience groups, the discussion explores the notion of target audience as defined by the military. The research thus examines how

domestic perceptions, expectations and values are being proactively targeted through strategic narratives.

Continuing the discussion set out in the previous chapter, **Chapter Five** offers a detailed overview of the structure and organisation of military communication. Moreover, the chapter sets out the operationalization principles pertinent to military doctrine on communication activity. It thus examines the military organisational structure in order to understand how the overall principles of military doctrine are translated into functional mechanisms at the tactical level. By dissecting British military communication strategies and doctrinal texts, this chapter is intended to offer an appreciation for the form and content of military communication

Moving from the strategic and operational levels, examined in the previous two chapters, the third part of the thesis questions the ways in which the British military demonstrate tactical level activity in Afghanistan, based on the principles set out in military doctrine on strategic communication. Framing the operation through constructed, strategic campaign narratives, pertinent to the Information Strategy, this section places military approaches to media and communication activity within both a national as well as an international framework.

Comprising two separate chapters, this part includes **Chapter Six**, which concerns the ways in which the British military frame their achievements in Afghanistan through the use of carefully constructed strategic narratives. Drawing on a number of examples from the UK mission in Afghanistan, gleaned from observations fieldwork in training settings and interviews with military personnel, the chapter examines how military constructed narratives are used to promote the military mission in certain, favourable, ways. Particularly, the use of targeted messaging is explored in relation to the training of military personnel. The chapter also argues that in order to promote favourable themes and messages, the British military employ media facilitation that provides the media with pre-packed media bundles ready for distribution through mainstream media outlets.

Chapter Six is closely linked to **Chapter Seven**, which provides an insight into the ways in which the UK military tell their story through the use of new and alternative

communication methods. Driven by digital communication channels, the military employ online media tools to promote favourable campaign themes and messages in relation to Afghanistan exit. These narratives are identified, analysed, discussed and linked to recently launched military online engagement principles. Building on strategic and tactical organisational structures outlined in Chapter Five, this chapter demonstrates, through virtual and visual representations of the campaign, the specific campaign narratives employed by the UK military in relation to Afghanistan, and it questions how such politically generated narratives are used to legitimise the campaign in the eyes of the British public. It thus argues that the visual narrative advanced by the military documents the transformation of UK military responsibility in Afghanistan. It does so by emphasising the humanitarian and peacekeeping role of the British soldier. By examining such structures, vehicles and discourses of military communication in the context of Afghanistan exit, it is possible to trace the military approach to communication from the strategic level, over the operational level, to the tactical level.

The fourth and last part of *Military Media Machine* comprises an evaluation of the British military's overall approach to communication. **Chapter Eight** comprises the conclusion and the core findings of the research and expands the framework to a wider appreciation of the media's impact on military structures and on the processes of wars amongst the people. It thus rehearses what the thesis set out to do, the main questions guiding the research process and a critical evaluation of the findings in relation to the main theories identified in Chapter One. This concluding chapter thus also emphasises the thesis' original contribution to knowledge by positioning the findings within the broader field of war and media studies. In doing so, the chapter includes a reference piece on theories that were not properly developed in the thesis; thus setting out the limitations of the study.

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

A few key debates need to be established before an analysis of communication activity in the British military can materialise. The three chapters in this section rehearse the arguments dominant in such debates as well as outlining how these arguments informed the research, empirically and theoretically. They position the research within the democratic notion of political accountability and within a broader, international legal framework. Before reviewing Smith's notion of *war amongst the people* and the idea that a separate military sphere no longer exists, this part of the thesis discusses the relevance of military culture and organisational learning in relation to the institutional structures directing military communication activity. Furthermore, in brief terms, it sets out the historical developments relating to defence communication by focusing on the Falklands War, the first Gulf War and the Iraq War. This is done so as to understand the historical traces found in current military communication doctrine, most notably the MOD Green Book. Finally, this section includes *My Journey through the Field*, which qualifies methodological choices and narrates the story of gaining access to military communication units. These separate debates incorporate a range of literatures and viewpoints that underpin the discussion that follows in subsequent chapters. They frame the analysis in a particular way. This also means that there are certain limitations to the study that need to be recognised. The intention has not been to engage, in detail, with broader theoretical frameworks, such as mediatisation or political economy. The debates outlined here should thus be seen as an attempt to contextualise the research, on the one hand, and broaden the discussion, on the other.

Chapter One

Communicating Militaries: Three Debates

The only thing harder than getting a new idea into the military mind is getting the old one out.

Sir Basil Liddell Hart, *Thoughts on War* (1944).

In a crisis there is a relentless and unforgiving trend towards an ever greater information transparency. In the most remote and hostile locations of the globe, hundreds of millions of electronic eyes and ears are creating a capacity for scrutiny and new demands of accountability.

Nik Gowing, *'Skyful of Lies' and Black Swans* (2009).

Wars do not exist in a vacuum. Communication does not exist in a vacuum. Military communication efforts have to account for the shifting media and warfare landscape. The UK military is accountable to Parliament and ultimately to the British public, as secured through constitutional principles. Hence, political accountability in a democracy of scrutiny is often voiced as the underlying driving force for military communication. Yet as argued in this thesis, the other side of the coin shows a military guided by their own goals, their own objectives and their own cultural references. Therefore, by understanding the military as a culture, a sub-culture within society, this chapter helps progress the understanding that the military represent an institution driven by binary aims: political and military. This view, which problematizes how military instruments can be used to achieve political goals, has remained largely unobserved within the war and media literature. With the aim of establishing the contextual outline for appreciating military communication, the chapter builds its framework around Smith's seminal book, *The Utility of Force*. As a former British

army officer, Smith's notion of 'war amongst the people'¹ helps advance the idea that today's military campaigns are increasingly being exercised through the media, thereby underlining the idea that a separate military sphere no longer exists.

Accountability

The decision to use military force is a political one. As the military institution represents a department of state, political objectives tend to drive military performance when armed force is employed. Yet if we correlate this view with the understanding that the British military constitute an independent institution, driven by its own aims and goals, the cultural traits of such an institution come to influence the ways in which operations are carried out. This perspective then substantiates the notion that the military organisation – from soldiers in the battlefield to officers in the Ministry of Defence – is shaped by both its political and constitutional responsibilities as well as its cultural roots. Thus, the military institution exists and operates both at the political (strategic) level and at the military (tactical) level. In relation to military communication this is important, as the utility of information (and indeed the management of information) holds a key function at both such levels. Understanding military communication activity and the construction of strategic narratives as a means of securing public support thus also means understanding the constitutional elements that form UK military structures.

Historically, as democracy has grown in the UK, the power to deploy military force has been transferred from the monarch to the government, which in turn is accountable to Parliament.² Since military intervention cannot be removed from democratic and political decision-making processes, the different operational standards that form the basis of all military functions have deep roots in the constitutional and legal status of the UK government. The relevance of accountability thus continues to be a recurring issue for discussions relating to the British military. Yet in spite of this, it can always be questioned whether accountability is the single most pressing issue for the military in the communication of military affairs.

¹ This term is defined in greater detail below.

² Nigel D. White, *Democracy Goes to War: British Military Deployments under International Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) p. 12.

Critical voices have expressed reservations about the sincerity with which the British military communicate campaign activity as an act of constitutional accountability – no-one more so than award-winning news pioneer, Vaughan Smith, who ran Frontline News TV during the 1990s.³ Independent cameraman in Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan, to mention a few, and the founder of the influential Frontline Club in London Paddington, Smith has been vocal in his criticism of developments taking place within the military towards greater information control. He argues that media operations are not about accountability: ‘It is not about public accountability. News management has become an integrated part of the war effort, aiming to maintain public support for the conflict nationally, while winning the information war abroad.’⁴ Yet when examining the large body of work on the relationship between the media and the military it is clear that questioning the motivations behind military communication is not a new phenomenon.⁵ This will also become evident in Chapter Two.

It is however important to acknowledge that accountability lies at the heart of military communication. Indeed, the military themselves list accountability as the underlying motive for developing sophisticated ways of *telling their story* and dealing with the media. Evidently, being seen to be accountable has become a key aspect of the military’s approach to information planning and provision as well as a determining factor in their engagements with those external to the military institution.

³ The history of Frontline and its members has been detailed by BBC correspondent David Loyn in his account of the news agency: *Frontline: the true story of the British mavericks who changed the face of war reporting* (London: Penguin, 2006).

⁴ Vaughan Smith, ‘The “brittle” compact between military and the media’, in Richard Lance Keeble and John Mair (eds.) *Afghanistan, War and the Media: Deadlines and Frontlines* (Suffolk: Arima Publishing, 2010), p. 43.

⁵ See, for instance: Valerie Adams, *The Media and the Falklands Campaign* (London: MacMilland, 1986); Allan and Zelizer, *Reporting War* (2004); Peter Braestrup, *Big Story: How the American Press and Television Reported and Interpreted the Crisis of Tet, 1968, in Vietnam and Washington* (London: Yale University Press, 1983); Douglas Kellner, ‘The Persian Gulf TV Revisited’ in Stuart Allen and Barbara Zelizer (eds.) *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime* (London: Routledge, 2004); Stephen Badsey, ‘The influence of the media on recent British military operations’ in Ian Stewart and Susan L. Carruthers (eds.), *War, Culture and Media: Representations of the Military in 20th Century Britain* (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1996), pp. 5-21; Badsey, ‘Media War and Media Management’ (2010); Carruthers, *The Media at War* (2000); John R. Macarthur, *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War* (London: University of California Press, 1993); Danny Schecter, *Embedded: Weapons of Mass Deception: How the Media Failed to Cover the War in Iraq* (New York: News Dissector/Mediachannel.org, 2003); Philip M. Taylor, *War and the Media: Propaganda and Persuasion in the Gulf* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); and Tumber and Webster, *Journalists Under Fire* (2006).

Acknowledging this accountability factor also means accepting certain pre-conditioned constitutional structures. Therefore, the fact that the UK Ministry of Defence is accountable to a democratically-elected government has not only repercussions for the ways by which the armed forces conduct their military operations. It also plays an important part in how internal military structures are upheld and maintained. These constitutionally derived structures are central to the employment of armed force, confirmed in the *Future Character of Conflict* paper, published by the MOD think-tank, the Development Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC): ‘the use of military instruments will only be viable once events have been correctly attributed through objective evidence, providing a strong basis in public support and taking that case to Parliament.’⁶

Naturally, the exercise of military power in a democracy entails accountability. This is clear. In a system like that of the United Kingdom it is the duty of the military to account for their exercise of power. Furthermore, in an organisation driven by democratic principles it might be expected that political and public pressure, increasingly voiced through the media, prevents the nation from going to war too willingly.⁷ This argument, however, that domestic and public opposition acts as a brake on political decisions to use military power,⁸ can be questioned given the increasingly international character of warfare.⁹ It stands in contrast to the historical reality that, since 1945, the British government’s decisions to deploy troops have increasingly been made within international institutional frameworks, where joint military operations have become the norm.

This international element removes complete national control, making international law and world politics significant players in the use of national military force.¹⁰

⁶ Development Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), *Future Character of Conflict* (3 February, 2010), p. 10.

⁷ White, *Democracy Goes to War* (2009), p. 12.

⁸ This idea that democracies do not willingly wage war is based on the idea that the electorate, or their elected representatives, control aggressive decision-making, as noted by White in *Democracy Goes to War* (2009), p.13.

⁹ The 2003 Iraq War serves as a clear example of how waging war as part of an international coalition trumps domestic opposition. Hence, the extent to which the electorate has the power to control unpopular decision-making must be questioned; especially within an international framework.

¹⁰ See, for instance: W.G.L. Mackinlay, ‘Perceptions and Misconceptions: How are International and UK Law Perceived to Affect Military Commanders and Their Subordinates on Operations?’ *Defence Studies*, 7(2007), pp. 111-160.

Therefore, even if the discussion presented here does not attempt to examine in detail the system of waging war under international authority it is necessary to establish an understanding of the structures that frame the legal and political approaches to armed conflict involving international coalitions. This is particularly important as, according to legal warfare analyst Nigel D. White, ‘decisions about war and the deployment of troops are regularly made on the international stage.’¹¹ Military activity exists within wider national and international political and legal frameworks.

Yet whereas accountability might be at the heart of the (liberal)-democratic state it is not inherent in the construction of many international organisations. This is evident from the fact that they, unlike national militaries within western democracies, are not necessarily answerable to external opinion in order to secure credibility and legitimacy. Since most decisions about the deployment of military force now rest ever more on international institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and NATO, and perhaps increasingly on the European Union (EU),¹² the democratic element of decisions made by national electorates might become increasingly obsolete. As we have seen, the lack of public accountability at the national level thus becomes more evident when understood in an international context.

Supporting this argument, Robert Egnell states that ‘peace and support operations are inherently value laden, often based on just war theory and international legal frameworks’.¹³ National democratic politics on military affairs can thus not be understood without reference to international structures. The relationship between UK military campaigns and international law is also highlighted by warfare theorists David Betz and Anthony Cormack, who note that British military operations in Afghanistan have satisfied the principle of acting within the boundaries of international law, to a large extent.¹⁴ Yet if we look at how military campaigns are

¹¹ White, *Democracy Goes to War* (2009), p. 16.

¹² Development Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), *Future Character of Conflict* (3 February, 2010).

¹³ Robert Egnell, ‘Between reluctance and necessity: the utility of military force in humanitarian and development operations,’ *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 19(2008), p. 405.

¹⁴ David Betz and Anthony Cormack, ‘Iraq, Afghanistan and British Strategy,’ *Orbis*, Spring 2009, p. 330.

framed at an international level it is clear that this has generally not helped generate legitimacy at the national level.¹⁵

The legal culture is increasingly employed as a regulatory framework during military campaigns. Essentially, this means that the work of soldiers is systematised within set legal frameworks. Each military member is answerable to his or her own national law. This highlights the fact that today's soldiers are forced to subscribe to a legal culture, which, at times, undermines military cultural aims. In relation to military communication activity it is important to recognise that the legal culture engulfing both military operations and the work of soldiers is not only relevant at the strategic level and in the planning process. It is equally significant in relation to the practical and tactical level aspects of the work of soldiers.

This is, however, not straightforward in an international context as the national and international legal apparatus do not run along the same lines. Within international law two distinct but inherently connected divisions describe the employment of military force: *jus ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. Often used to explain the legal framework through which armed conflicts are conducted, these two terms clearly testify to the strong legal roots inherent in military interventions. *Jus ad bellum* generally refers to the 'when' of warfare (under what circumstances is the use of armed force lawful?) and *jus in bello* refers to the 'how', described by Christopher P. M. Waters and James A. Green as the 'law of armed conflict'.¹⁶ There tends to be general consensus among military and legal analysts about these two branches of law in relation to international conflict.¹⁷ Yet the third division, *jus post-bellum*, is less clearly defined within politico-legal thinking.

Referring to a period of transitional justice, this term continues to hold great significance for Afghanistan as international fighting troops withdrew from the

¹⁵ For a wider discussion on international law in relation to the use of armed force, see: Christine Gray, *International Law and the Use of Force* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Yoram Dinstein, *The Conduct of Hostilities Under the Law of International Armed Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Waters and Green, 'International Law' (2010).

¹⁶ Christopher P.M. Waters and James A. Green, 'International Law: Military Force and Armed Conflict' in in George Kassimeris and John Buckley (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Modern Warfare* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010) pp. 289-306.

¹⁷ See, for instance: Waters and Green, 'International Law' (2010); and Judith Gardam, *Necessity, Proportionality and the Use of Force by States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

country,¹⁸ and concurrently with the operation increasingly being reframed as a peacekeeping and development mission. The notion of *jus post-bellum*, which is still being debated within just war theory,¹⁹ thus demonstrates the complexities of the Afghanistan campaign. Managing information in a conflict environment that has still not been clearly defined is a challenging task. Framing an operation in military terms in a warfare climate driven by value laden, humanitarian, legal and political objectives is complicated. Within *jus post-bellum*, therefore, influence becomes a valuable mechanism for constructing a strategic narrative that supports not only military objectives but also political goals. In a conflict environment under strategic pressure, the narrative easily becomes the tool with which *success* can be promoted. However, it also problematizes how military instruments can be employed for political purposes and within national as well as international legal boundaries.

As demonstrated in Chapter Seven in particular, the British military increasingly framed their Afghanistan mission within politically directed messages. ‘Humanitarian’ perspectives were recurring notions advanced as central themes in the strategic narrative communicated through military directed channels. This politicisation of military operations was, however, not new to the UK democratic system. The rise of humanitarianism as a legitimatising argument for military intervention has, according to scholars in the field,²⁰ developed since the end of the Cold War. As noted by David Chandler, already from the 1970s onwards, NGOs argued that humanitarian intervention in complex emergencies should also comprise long-term commitment and reconstruction central to *jus post-bellum*, including peacekeeping and development assistance.²¹ Until recently, this approach to military intervention largely escaped substantial criticism and resistance within western

¹⁸ For a discussion on ‘the search for an exit’, see, for instance, chapter seven of Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, *Afghanistan: How the West Lost Its Way* (London: Yale, 2011); and Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars* (2011), p. 144.

¹⁹ See: Charles Guthrie and Michael Quinlan, *Just War Just War – The Just War Tradition: Ethics in Modern Warfare* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007); and David Fisher, *Morality and War: Can War be Just in the Twenty-first Century?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁰ For a wider discussion on the development of international human rights doctrine, see, for instance: Fiona Fox, ‘New Humanitarianism: Does it provide a moral Banner for the 21st Century’, *Disasters*, 4(2001), pp. 275–289; and Stephen Haines, ‘Humanitarian Intervention: Genocide, Crimes against Humanity and the Use of Force’, in George Kassimeris and John Buckley (eds.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Modern Warfare* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), p. 307–328.

²¹ David Chandler, ‘The Road to Military Humanitarianism: How the Human Rights NGO’s shaped a New Humanitarian Agenda’, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 23(2001), pp. 678–700.

democracies was only minimal. Therefore, military operations, legitimised by a *need* to protect human rights have been backed by most policy-makers and publics in the West.²²

This reality has gradually blurred the distinction between humanitarianism and human rights, thus problematizing the distinction between military objectives and political goals. This is particularly significant in the context of military communication activity. Despite the fact that military and political objectives are never the same – as noted in Chapter Five – by applying armed force to meet humanitarian aims the military have to account for political contingencies that may not be achieved through force alone. Strategic narratives understood to support politicised aims are thus seen as effective in securing public backing for military affairs. Here, the strategic narrative becomes a tool with which to maintain a perception that political solutions can be achieved through military intervention. Against this backdrop, constitutional accountability, exercised through military communication activity and indeed through the media, is increasingly driven by international and political objectives, which are difficult to translate into workable military objectives and hard to explain to target audiences.

Afghanistan

The increasingly international nature of conflict means that the notions of legitimacy and accountability might prove even harder to define and fulfil in domestic terms. At the time when allied forces implemented their Afghanistan end-game strategy,²³ the accountability aspect of military performance in war was emerging as a key to constructing a coherent strategic narrative that supported the military's public image. In a war climate that had lost any clear strategic direction and where the notion of absolute victory had become an abstract term, communication and influence activity was rapidly developing as a powerful tool in explaining the legal basis for the operation and a mechanism for upholding legitimacy. Further, at the time, most strategic and doctrinal decisions, military communication policies and information strategies were conceptualised and inaugurated in response to the situation and the

²² David Chandler, *From Kosovo to Kabul and Beyond: Human Rights and International Intervention* (London: Pluto Press, 2006 (2002)), p. 15.

²³ According to Richard Capland (professor Oxford University), policy introduced to set out an exit strategy for Afghanistan has been 'ad hoc' at best. Neither the UN nor the UK have developed doctrine on exit strategy.

British involvement in Afghanistan. Government advisor on operations in Afghanistan and author of the military history of the British campaign for Helmand, Theo Farrell identified the situation in the country as a primary focus for military communication:

During this period achievement of success in Afghanistan is likely to be the single factor most influencing defence reputation. This must be reflected in our communications effort across defence.²⁴

An international war effort carried out by over 40 national militaries in support of the UN authorised, NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and as part of the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom,²⁵ the Afghanistan campaign epitomised many of the problems inherent in international coalitions. It illustrated the challenges of framing national narratives within international contexts; it exemplified the issues relating to military operations stretching over many years; and it underlined the international legal culture that continue to surround joint war efforts.

As one of the first nations to send troops to Afghanistan in November 2001, the UK also became the first military to lead the coalition's ISAF mission. However, from 2006 onwards most British troops were stationed in the south of the country, and mainly in Helmand, where they took charge of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT).²⁶ Regardless of the drawn-out military involvement, and even as international forces explained their presence in the country as a way of establishing a 'stable Afghanistan', as stated in recent MOD Top Level Messages (February 2013),²⁷ instability, hostility and violence escalated.²⁸ The number of casualties on all sides continued to rise and as of March 2014 a total of 448 British forces personnel had died

²⁴ Farrell, 'The Dynamics of British Military Transformation' (2008), p. 795.

²⁵ Charles Heyman, *The Armed Forces of the United Kingdom 2010-2011* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2009), p. 30-31.

²⁶ MOD, *Background Briefing on Afghanistan* (2012). For a wider understanding of the use of PRTs for generating popular support, see, for instance: Ida Dommersnes, 'Bringing War Home: The use of Provincial Reconstruction Teams by Norway and Denmark to construct strategic narratives for their domestic audiences' (Oslo: The Norwegian Atlantic Committee, 2011).

²⁷ Each month a Top Level Message is published, which identifies the most pressing issues for the MOD, and each month the MOD reiterates the military approach to Afghanistan.

²⁸ Noora Kotilainen, 'Humanitarian Soldiers, Colonialised Others and Invisible Enemies: Visual Strategic Communication Narratives of the Afghan War', *Working Paper Number 72* (Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, August 2011).

since the launch of the campaign.²⁹ This intensified the military need for public support as, according to White, the government might become increasingly unpopular if it sends troops to conflicts with consequent heavy loss of life to British service personnel and with no clear exit plan. White also contests that while the ‘imperative for firm action in fighting often tends to result in casualties, destruction and rough handling,’ this is also one of the most difficult aspects of conflict to justify in the eyes of the civilian population.³⁰

The increasingly international nature of conflicts means that the notions of legitimacy and accountability might prove even harder to define and fulfil in domestic terms. The lack of clear end-game strategy, the human costs and the drawn-out of UK involvement have impelled the military to address and influence the increasingly war-sceptical home audience.³¹ This makes military communication, which targets national audiences, a key element in the planning and execution of military operations. Because the military are accountable to Parliament and because politicians are accountable to the UK electorate, the British military continue to rely on popular support to secure success in conflicts and to secure the future of the institution. This becomes particularly important in a warfare climate that has failed to secure clear and identifiable strategic, political and military successes. Therefore, developing and implementing a communication strategy that sees the military live up to their constitutional obligation, is central to the heightened media alertness present in defence institutional structures. Because the media have become the communicators of activity from the frontline and because the media have the power to hold the military to account and influence public opinion, the media are key to reaching and influencing domestic audiences and consequently the focus of military communication.

²⁹According to the MOD Top Level Message from February 2013, ‘a total of 440 British forces personnel have died while serving in Afghanistan since the start of operations in October 2001 [...] 293 personnel have been Very Seriously Injured or Wounded [...] 300 have been Seriously Injured or Wounded.’

³⁰ White, *Democracy Goes to War* (2009).

³¹ A recent opinion poll (ComRes, October 2009) showed that 57 per cent of Britons want the UK to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan immediately. The survey also revealed that 71 per cent of the UK population believed that the mission in Afghanistan is ‘unwinnable’ – this is a rise of 11 per cent since June 2011. And finally, 60 per cent did not think that the war was worth the deaths of British soldiers.

The legal and accountability factors of campaign activity explain one side of military communication principles. Yet to fully appreciate the perspective from which this research takes its beginning, it is important to understand the cultural traits inherent in the military institution. They contextualise the internal military structures put in place to communicate campaign activity. By positioning the research within a military institutional framework, the culturally derived (formal as well as informal) internal structures of the armed forces become all-important. Therefore, following this brief treatment of accountability as well as international legal and political discourses, the chapter moves on to examine the institution that is the UK military.

Military Culture

Made up of a number of sub-organisations, of which the Army, the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy are the most significant, the military establishment is a complex umbrella organisation; a collective, yet diverse organisation. However, each of the single services is shaped by their own ways of ‘doing things’, formed by their own individual culture, individual experiences and particular history. Nonetheless, it is important to recognise that the military as a whole is an organisation with shared goals, rules, identity and work attitudes, inherent in military institutional practices and culture.³² Therefore, in relation to communication activity, understanding the military as a collective is legitimised through this shared culture. Furthermore, understanding the armed forces as a shared culture allows for consistent analysis. This culture that for all its values, norms, beliefs and symbols is the framework within which all military strategic, operational and tactical level decisions are realised. Charles Handy legitimises an institutions-as-cultures approach to the military by stating that:

Organizations are as different as the nations of the world. They have differing cultures – sets of values and norms and beliefs – reflected in different structures and systems [...] Strong pervasive cultures turn organizations into cohesive tribes with distinctive clannish feelings. The values and traditions of the tribe are reinforced by its private language, its catch-phrases and its tales of past heroes and dramas. The way of life is enshrined in

³² In this context, ‘military culture’ is employed to describe a ‘way of life’ of a large and diverse organisation like the military.

rituals so that rule books and manuals are almost unnecessary; custom and tradition provide the answers.³³

Significantly, the military are possibly the most complex of these organisations-as-cultures. As James Arbuckle highlights, even if it might be the best known establishment within organisational cultures it is also the least understood.³⁴ Yet he also notes that because military culture is framed by set codes of conduct and a long and well-documented history, it is also more accessible than less rigid, strong and hierarchical organisations. To this end, the standardised codes allow us to form a clear notion of the building blocks that make up the military institution itself.³⁵

It is possible to argue that British military doctrine, tactical level guidelines, the regimental structure and strong historical roots have fostered an institutional culture, which builds on stability at all levels; at the strategic level, at the operational level and at the tactical level. It is founded in shared beliefs and collective views. The military require complete commitment of every soldier, sailor, airman or woman. However, this does not mean that it is authoritarian. For all their reliance on hierarchical structures, the armed forces also appreciate and foster individualism, in the sense that individual initiatives of ‘can-do’ soldiers are understood as central to the regimental system (particular to the British Army).³⁶ As an example, regiments, the history and culture of regiments, establish stability and support which effectively allows for individualism to penetrate shared cultural beliefs.

Military culture contributes to each individual’s, each military member’s attitudes, assumptions and expectations, and shapes perceptions, motives, intents and behaviours, as noted in doctrine.³⁷ In short, this ubiquitous culture comprises the principles, values and attitudes that shape the military’s joint preferences. Shared

³³ Charles Handy, *Understanding Organizations: How Understanding the Ways of Organizations Actually Work Can Be Used to Manage Them Better* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993), pp. 180-183.

³⁴ James V. Arbuckle, *Military Forces in 21st Century Peace Operations: No Job for a Soldier?* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 35.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ For a detailed outline and discussion on the development of the British regimental system, see: David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, & the British People c. 1870-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³⁷ Joint Doctrine Note 1/09, *The Significance of Culture to the Military* (January 2009) p. 1-1.

understandings and historical preferences thus form the way in which the military view the world as well as their own role, position and functions within it.

Nevertheless, one thing is to base this shared identity on historical and cultural references, another is to uphold and preserve it in the constantly changing war and media landscape. Therefore, protecting the easily identifiable cultural traits against outside interference is a key aspect of the socialisation principles pertinent to the British military and to the training of service personnel. Through training, military members adapt and embody the culture in which they exist. Through training, historical, organisation and cultural features are reiterated. Through training, military culture serves as a *manual* through which codes, customs, rules and routines are reproduced and internalised to the point where such cultural norms are barely observed. But, according to Arbuckle, this *manual* is always there.³⁸

Tightly knit into the core values and historical characteristics of the British Army in particular, the regimental system functions as an extended family. Largely unique to the UK armed forces, it offers a great degree of responsibility among regimental *family members*. It requires each military member to account for his or her own actions:

Under no circumstances of confusion, ambiguity, fatigue or danger, may an officer be excused one fragment of his responsibility, not only for his own actions, but for any actions which may be performed by any person under his command.³⁹

Accountability thus runs throughout all ranks within military structures. Supporting the notion that the military rely on the character of the soldier, each military member is responsible and accountable for his or her own actions. In a warzone this can be a matter of life and death. War is about human beings. It is about soldiers, about adversaries, about civilians. War is thus, in essence, about all of us. Underlining this notion, Jim Storr states that ‘combat is essentially human.’⁴⁰ As noted in Chapter Seven in particular, during the transitional period in Afghanistan, the human(e) characteristics of the soldier become increasingly visible. By recognising this human

³⁸ Arbuckle, *Military Forces in 21st Century Peace Operations* (2006), p. 37.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 43.

⁴⁰ Jim Storr, *The Human Face of War* (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 165.

factor of conflict, military culture is made up of people that voluntarily⁴¹ subscribe to certain formal as well as informal value systems.

It is the character of the service member that matters, as shaped, developed, and reinforced in small work group culture and values. Whether risking their lives to protect their country or that of others, providing medical assistance to local country civilians, or passing out chocolate bars to children...⁴²

According to Thomas Britt et al., the shared identity and cultural heritage of military life trump any individualistic features as they determine the way that military members identify themselves.⁴³ Nevertheless, military culture is not monolithic. Speaking with *one voice* is as difficult within military institutions as it is in any other organisation. The military does not represent a monoculture. As is the case with most human organisations, the institution is made up of people formed by different national, religious or cultural traditions. There is, however, a significant uniformity of approach among military members.⁴⁴ In the words of Frank Ledwidge, author of the renowned book, *Losing Small Wars*, and a Naval Intelligence reservist in Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq, 'the military services [...] attract to their ranks men and women who will fit in, and the services ensure that their training and formation develop them in, as it were, their own image.'⁴⁵

Discussions on military culture thus reiterate the notion that training and collective work promote the cultural traits of the military. This is important as it testifies to the significance of the military training culture, within which much of the material for this study has been collected. In this regard Guy L. Siebold argues that 'the work of others' within the group is as important as your own work. He states:

⁴¹ Ever since UK National Service ended in 1962, soldiers have entered the military on a voluntary basis. Alan Hooper, *The Military and the Media* (Aldershot: Gower, 1982).

⁴² Guy L. Siebold, 'Military Culture and Values: A Personal View', in Thomas W. Britt, Amy B. Adler and Carl Andrew Castro, *Military Life: the psychology of serving in peace and combat. Military Culture*. Vol. 4. 4 vols. (London: Praeger Security International, 2006) p. 10.

⁴³ Thomas Britt, W., Amy B. Adler and Carl Andrew Castro *Military Life: the psychology of serving in peace and combat. Military Culture*. Vol. 4. 4 vols. (London: Praeger Security International, 2006).

⁴⁴ For an alternative discussion on the 'warrior' and the 'soldier' see: Cristopher Coker, *The Warrior Ethos: military culture and the war on terror* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007).

⁴⁵ Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars* (2011), p. 137.

Most interaction in the military [...] occurs in pairs of individuals or small working groups [...] Coordination involves the recognition of others and their actions; integration involves the mutual interaction with others to achieve common goals. In these social processes, values, norms, rules, regulations and the wider culture within which they operate are crucial to success [...] Part of the foundation of these military values is the common experience of service members (in combat, training for combat and support) and the required coordination and integration of action.⁴⁶

Siebold's notions on the inherited and strong group culture central to the military function confirm the unbreakable bond between service members standing shoulder to shoulder during military training and during combat. At the heart of this bond lie loyalty and trust. In the words of Ledwidge: 'Those in tune with that culture will succeed and advance; those out of tune probably will not.'⁴⁷

Change & the Military

Following this trajectory, and given the strong identity attached to military culture and indeed to the character of the individual soldier, the armed forces have often been portrayed as being hostile to change and unable to adapt to changes taking place external to the institution. Whilst much has been said and written about the need for the military to adapt to the changing and increasingly uncertain conflict landscape,⁴⁸ less obvious is the military's need to adapt to the changing and increasingly technologically driven communication environment.

To an outsider, military culture may perhaps appear limiting and intimidating, which in general tends to alienate those not familiar with the core elements making up this culture. This view is confirmed by Rid, who, in his study of the US military's programme of embedding journalists with frontline troops during the Iraq War, argues that '[o]ne of the most critical components of the embedded media program was a

⁴⁶ Siebold, 'Military Culture and Values: A Personal View' (2006), p. 9.

⁴⁷ Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars* (2011), p. 137.

⁴⁸ See, for instance: Gordon Adams and Guy Ben-Ari *Transforming European Militaries* (London: Routledge, 2006); Farrell, 'The Dynamics of British Military Transformation' (2008); Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars* (2011); John A. Nagl, *Learning to eat soup with a knife: counterinsurgency lessons from Malaya to Vietnam* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005); Smith, *Utility of Force* (2005); or Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan: How the West Lost its Way* (2011).

change in military mindset, which meant that a generally accepted and culturally robust bias against the media needed to be overcome.⁴⁹

The bias against the media, highlighted here by Rid, has a long and well-documented history, and it continues to play a significant part in the relationship between the two institutions. Rid's statement also confirms another common feature of the defence institution; the military's ability, and indeed willingness, to change. Whereas some scholars understand military culture as a brake on change,⁵⁰ others understand that change is in fact one of the only constants of the military institution. As Arbuckle argues:

The cohesiveness of the long history of the military has been a traditional brake on progress, but change and the pace of change have caught up with and imposed modern dynamism on a culture not always so receptive to new ideas, new technologies nor necessarily quick to react to altered circumstances.⁵¹

The military have always had to adapt to new, dynamic and rapidly changing environments. The military cannot and have not been immune to internal and external transformation processes. Attitudes and procedures have been altered by experience.⁵² Military transformation is thus paradoxical as it, to paraphrase Adam N. Stulberg and Michael D. Salomone, requires reconciling incentives for dynamic shifts towards new ways of war within organisations designed to foster continuity.⁵³

The nature of military transformation in the context of communication activity thus faces a dilemma. On the one hand, the rigid culture, which relies on adherence to set rules and codes of conduct as outlined above, promotes stability and solidity. On the other hand, flexibility is needed to meet the challenges faced by the constantly and

⁴⁹ Rid, *War and Media Operations* (2007), p. 6.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Nagl, *Learning to eat soup with a knife* (2005).

⁵¹ Arbuckle, *Military Forces in 21st Century Peace Operations* (2006), p. 38.

⁵² For a wider discussion on the characteristics of military change and the difficulties and paradoxes of transformation, see for instance: Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff, 'The Sources of Military Change,' in Theo Farrell and Terry Terriff (eds.) *The Sources of Military Change: Culture, Politics, and Technology* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002) and Captain Terry C. Pierce, *Warfighting and Disruptive Technologies: Disguising Innovation* (London: Frank Cass, 2004).

⁵³ Adam N. Stulberg and Michael D. Salomone, *Managing Defense Transformation: Agency, Culture and Service Change* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) p. 13.

rapidly changing tactical environment in Afghanistan and in order to counter the continual advances made in the area of communications technology.

The fast-moving and ever-changing technology-driven information environment intensifies this paradoxical dilemma. The capability of the military to transform and to learn reflect their ability to gain experience.⁵⁴ Therefore, the military have established a number of procedures and processes meant to ensure a continuous modernisation of military structures by learning from past experiences. Yet literatures discussing the depth of military transformation and organisational learning tend to adopt one of two positions: military change driven by external pressure or military change driven by internal pressure. Whilst internal factors that can foster change are found in the organisational culture and in the personalities of military leaders, external factors comprise (among others) the national and international media and information environment, adverse threats and technological advances.⁵⁵ Recognising this dual nature of the military institution, defence transformation needs both internal as well as external drivers to be successful.

In the same way as both internal and external factors have an effect on the scope of organisational change, military doctrine is key to understanding the depth of change within military institutions.⁵⁶ Here, doctrine represents a generally understood system or mode of conducting military operations. It functions as a homogenised frame of reference for military personnel, and is typically communicated through texts and written guidelines. Doctrine is thus often what survives, literally. Even as inherited cultural practices and institutional learning are core elements directing the work of military members, doctrine ensures a coherent approach to campaign activity. Doctrine establishes a unified military understanding of external factors; it offers a general framework for the institution and for its members; and it is what survives when experience and memories fade.

⁵⁴ Storr, *The Human Face of War* (2009), p. 161.

⁵⁵ Rid, *War and Media Operations* (2007), p. 17.

⁵⁶ It is important to stress the centrality of doctrine within the military institution as the underlying documentation in following chapters, in particular, is founded on doctrinal texts.

As noted by Ledwidge,⁵⁷ and confirming the centrality of doctrine in defence affairs, the US military became the first to introduce new doctrine relating to the counterinsurgency campaigns fought by international forces in the 21st century. In the US Army and Marine Corps field manual *Counterinsurgency*,⁵⁸ launched in 2006, General David Patraeus et al. set out seven core principles and a range of alternative precepts dictating current and future counterinsurgency operations. Three years later, in late 2009, the British military weighed in with not seven but 10 precepts of their own, in the form of ‘The Principles of Counterinsurgency’. Set out in volume 1, part 10 of the Army Field Manual entitled *Countering Insurgency*,⁵⁹ the 10 principles build on a wide range of standards already central to British military workings, including ‘unity of effort’ and ‘primacy of political purpose’. Specific to military communication, the Army Field Manual lists the principle of ‘gaining and maintaining popular support’ for military operations. This notion of ‘gaining and maintaining popular support’ goes a long way in explaining the military approach to communication in relation to establishing a favourable understanding of the military mission in Afghanistan. It not only positions influence activity at the heart of the military campaign, it also testifies to the necessity of inaugurating wide-ranging communication initiatives within defence structures.

However, even as doctrinal discussions found in military journals, field manuals and official doctrinal texts function as organisational memory in military terms, officers tend not to read doctrinal regulations or procedures when in need of immediate solutions. While doctrine functions as the primary guiding instrument at the strategic level, at the tactical level, doctrine consisting of several hundred pages cannot replace experience or institutional learning central to military performance. This is also highlighted by Ledwidge, who quotes one officer for saying: ‘If it isn’t laminated and can fit in my pocket, it isn’t going to get read.’⁶⁰ Therefore, in the words of former US Lieutenant Colonel and author, John A. Nagl, ‘[o]fficial doctrine remains secondary to the substantial experience of many British officers in counterinsurgency.’⁶¹

⁵⁷ Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars* (2011), p. 166.

⁵⁸ US Department of the Army, *The U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual: U.S. Army Field Manual No. 3-24* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁵⁹ Army Field Manual: *Countering Insurgency* (Vol. 1, Part 10: January 2010).

⁶⁰ Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars* (2011), p. 167.

⁶¹ Nagl, *Learning to eat soup with a knife* (2005), p. 202.

With this in mind, learning in the military relies, not only on doctrinal texts and guidelines, but also on knowledge gained from past experiences. In order to capture and learn from such acquired knowledge, the British military encompass two identifiable sources of organisational memory: explicit and implicit. Security analysts, Christopher Dandeker and James Gow refer to the notion of formal and informal, as a way of defining two distinct forms of military culture.⁶² The explicit, formal, type of organisational memory consists of doctrine and written documents, which can be stored in archives or databases. The implicit, informal, type of organisational memory is less tangible.

They contend that the informal culture comprises ‘legends, history and shared beliefs’.⁶³ This implicit form of organisational memory is thus made up of institutional and cultural traits founded upon routines, norms, work ethics, attitudes, team performance, common practices and ‘the usual way of doing things’.⁶⁴ An example of this kind of implicit memory repository is the attitude that many military members have towards the media. Although never mentioned in official military doctrine, a long history of dealing with more or less aggressive reporters and commentators has planted a deep and implicit attitude of hostility towards the media. The notion of the media as ‘the enemy’ is thus an integral part of informal military culture.⁶⁵ This again highlights the dual nature of military culture.

Whether this implicit form of organisational memory, this informal culture, can be transformed through changes to military doctrine has been widely debated in specialist writings. Most of these discussions focusing on military modernisation seem to indirectly contain two overall hypotheses. The first assumption concerns the notion that organisational action can be transformed through changes to military doctrine. This idea prescribes that official doctrinal change automatically translates into behavioural change. Leading on from this, the second assumption understands

⁶² Christopher Dandeker and James Gow, ‘Military Culture and Strategic Peacekeeping’, in Erwin A. Schmidl (ed.) *Peace Operations Between War and Peace* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), pp.58-79.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Rid, *War and Media Operations* (2007), p. 9.

⁶⁵ Fieldwork within Press Information Centres (PICs) on operation confirmed the implicit and hostile attitude towards media representatives. This notion is discussed in greater detail in subsequent chapters.

doctrine to be an adequate representation of the military's organisational memory.⁶⁶ Yet as highlighted by Rid, both of such assumptions are problematic from an empirical point of view, as the link between military doctrine and military behaviour is perhaps less direct than what much of the literature supposes.⁶⁷

If accepting the dual nature of military culture and of the transformation processes underway, there is still extensive debate within defence scholarly writings about the nature and depth of any real change to the military organisation. In *The Utility of Force* Smith is clear in his scepticism of the current transformation process: 'It is one thing to recognize change and quite another to act on it – and such action is yet not apparent.'⁶⁸ But recent literature on military transformation confirms that alternative views and understandings of the military organisation and of military culture are emerging. According to Stulberg and Salomone, this allows for alternative 'outside-in' and 'inside-out' reasons for modified motives, processes and set ideas of organisational transformation.⁶⁹ The extent of such organisational transformation to military communication is at the heart of the discussion that follows in subsequent chapters. Moving on from the notion of military culture, the following debate explores the concept of '*war amongst the people*'.

'Wars Amongst the People'⁷⁰

Discussing any military institution, its culture, its members and its history, along with its planning of communication activity without properly considering the realities of wars themselves, would be both ignorant and wrong. Wars are ugly, they are frightening and they are real. They affect everything and everyone involved. Military intervention is never pretty, quite often messy and mostly tragic. It is thus important to recognise the repercussions that these realities have for the ways in which military communication is planned and executed. Dealing with the current warfare paradigm and the war in Afghanistan – a prolonged, difficult, international and continuously

⁶⁶ Nagl's approach demonstrates both of such assumptions about the effect of military doctrine on behavioural change. Moreover, he states that 'doctrinal change is in many ways a trailing indicator of institutional learning' and an 'efficient way to track the development of learning in military organizations.' Nagl, *Learning to eat soup with a knife* (2005), p. 7-8.

⁶⁷ Rid, *War and Media Operations* (2007), p. 9.

⁶⁸ Smith, *The Utility of Force* (2005), p. 392.

⁶⁹ Stulberg and Salomone, *Managing Defense Transformation* (2007), p. 17.

⁷⁰ This term was coined by Smith in his book *The Utility of Force* from 2005.

evolving war, or as MacKinlay puts it: ‘a war of gradual attrition’⁷¹ – this becomes yet more important. However, to examine any war in isolation is problematic. Moreover, understanding each war as completely unique, disregards the common factors and traits running through all military engagements. Wars do not exist in isolation.

The term ‘war’ has become increasingly saturated in recent years, with scholars and practitioners failing to agree on one single definition for this period of strategic uncertainties. While specialists attempt to produce an indicative description of these *new* kinds of war, labels such as ‘information war’,⁷² ‘intra-state war’, ‘counterinsurgency’,⁷³ ‘ethnic conflict’ or simply ‘new wars’⁷⁴ have all been used interchangeably. This is perhaps not surprising given the large amount of literature engaged in discussions on wars. It reflects the challenges facing writers trying to offer any general analysis of the nature of warfare. In a climate of unclear objectives, failing strategies and a lack of outright victories, this task has not become any easier. Wars are complicated and definitions of today’s wars remain many and varied.

With this in mind, and so as to establish a clear line of argumentation that can be used as a frame of reference for subsequent chapters, this section particularly concerns Smith’s notion of ‘war amongst the people’; a term he coined in his influential book *The Utility of Force* from 2005. Here, Smith offers his views on the elusive notion of ‘war’. In defining the current warfare paradigm, he argues that war no longer exists,⁷⁵ a statement with which he opens *The Utility of Force*.⁷⁶ In an attempt to replace this term he adopts categorisations such as conflict and confrontation, which go a long way in defining the current realities of warfare. However, the rejection of the label ‘war’

⁷¹ John MacKinlay, *Defeating Complex Insurgency: Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan*, Whitehall Paper 64. London: RUSI, 2005.

⁷² Richard Keeble discusses this notion in: ‘Information Warfare in an Age of Hyper-Militarism’ in Stuart Allen and Barbara Zelizer (eds.) *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 43-58. See also: Frank Webster, ‘Information Warfare in an Age of Globalization,’ in Daya Thussu and Des Freedman (eds.) *War and the Media* (London: Sage, 2003), pp. 57 – 69.

⁷³ For more on current counterinsurgency campaigns see, for instance: David Jordan et al., *Understanding Modern Warfare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); David J. Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (London: Hurst & Company, 2010); and Thomas Rid and Thomas Keaney (eds.), *Understanding Counterinsurgency: Doctrine, operations and challenges* (London: Routledge, 2010).

⁷⁴ Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organising Violence in a Global Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).

⁷⁵ Smith, *Utility of Force* (2005).

⁷⁶ Evidently, the outright rejection of the term *war* is also a mechanism employed by Smith to push academics, military scholars and defence commentators to think differently about warfare – to adopt new and alternate modes of reflecting upon the current warfare paradigm.

creates more complications than solutions as it demands a clear and almost impossible distinction to be made between these closely connected terms in complex war-like situations, and thus creates a problem of rhetoric. Therefore, the underlying notion of Smith's rejection of the term war should be found in the understanding that war as a generic and single model no longer exists. Each war, conflict, confrontation, military intervention and complex emergency is different and requires individual clarification. War in the present tense does thus not refer to industrial, total or conventional war nor does it represent all types of modern, unconventional, liberal or asymmetric warfare.

Yet there is clear consensus amongst military thinkers that the nature of warfare has changed significantly over the last couple of decades, in general, and over the last decade in particular. The end of the Cold War in the late 1980s–early 1990s and the attacks on 9/11 are generally recognised as key events – as *benchmarks* – which have changed the political and military landscape. Such events generated a range of new military as well as political challenges. With the breakdown of the Warsaw Pact and the nonexistence of any existential threat, Britain had the opportunity to focus upon 'international challenges such as the proliferation of nuclear weapons and international terrorism.'⁷⁷ Today, from a UK perspective, engaging in armed conflicts has thus been more a matter of choice than necessity.⁷⁸

In the current paradigm most wars are not being fought because they are strategically indispensable; Britain's survival is not at stake. Instead, new wars often become 'wars of choice',⁷⁹ in which the UK feels morally obliged to take part. Therefore, and which has been the case in a number of recent military campaigns involving allied forces, one of the challenges in *communicating Afghanistan* was how to legitimize a campaign of choice. From a military perspective, justifying this kind of war is challenging. Because of the potential of the media to frame success within a warfare paradigm that

⁷⁷ Wyn Rees, 'A Strategic Defence Review: Lessons from the Past', *Political Quarterly*, 81(2010), pp. 424-427.

⁷⁸ Jean Seaton, *Carnage and the Media: The Making and Breaking of News about Violence* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), p. 135. However, as discussed in subsequent chapter, the strategic narrative on Afghanistan has not made use of this framing. Rather, the UK political elites have framed the mission as a *necessity*.

⁷⁹ Mark Laity, 'The media, the military and policy-making – who's calling the shots?', *RUSI Journal* 145(2000), pp. 15-20.

has had to abandon the idea of absolute victory, the publicity side of military activity becomes increasingly important.

Understanding the increasingly significant role of the media in warfare Smith contends that ‘we fight in every living room in the world as well as on the streets and fields of a conflict zone.’⁸⁰ He emphasises the role of the media as a constant factor; a recognition which has often been neglected in military writings. According to Smith, the nature of modern warfare has largely erased the boundaries between military and civilian spheres. In his view, a separate military sphere therefore no longer exists, meaning that military operations now take place entirely within the civilian sphere; *amongst the people*. Therefore, as previous boundaries largely cease to exist, civilians and the military are continuously intertwining and interacting. This new paradigm is thus both a graphic description of modern war-like situations and a conceptual framework.

...it is the reality in which the people in the streets and houses and fields – all the people, anywhere – are the battlefield. Military engagements can take place anywhere: in the presence of civilians, against civilians, in defence of civilians. Civilians are the targets, the objectives to be won, as much as an opposing force.⁸¹

By fighting amongst the people, without clearly outlined battlefields and frontlines, the ‘will of the people’ becomes important in determining *success*. In the ‘battle of wills’ the media hold great importance. According to Smith, they are indispensable as the means of conveying narratives about war in what is not so much ‘the global village’ as ‘the global theatre of war, with audience participation.’⁸² Smith makes evident that, where the fight is for the will of the people, tactical successes will mean nothing if ‘the people do not believe that you are winning.’ This argument can, however, be turned on its head. While Smith notes that tactical success must be communicated through the media in order for *the people* to believe that an operation is successful, strategic narratives can be used to advance tactical level success as well as securing public support.

⁸⁰ Smith, *The Utility of Force* (2005), p. 285.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 3.

⁸² Smith, *Utility of Force* (2005), p. 285.

*Politics by other means*⁸³

Subject to inflation, strategy in its original form has become obsolete, at least if we are to judge by the intense scholarly debate on the concept.⁸⁴ Hew Strachan argues that strategy used to be a model to describe the overall military plan of war. Yet, today, it is employed to suggest a more general approach, such as ‘strategy of freedom’ and a ‘strategy for policy’⁸⁵ – terms derived from UK political circles. The main problem with strategy thus seems to lie in the translation of intentions, or political aims, into clear military goals. This may indeed be a result of an increased politicisation of military intervention and of military policy. In fact, political statements of intent have become increasingly dominant in military documents. The notion that ‘the UK Government does not seek a perfect Afghanistan, but a stable Afghanistan’⁸⁶ was highlighted as one of the overriding goals of the military campaign in Afghanistan. In discussing the problems inherited in the use of the modern form of strategy, Smith contends:

Various terms are now used to apparently define what it is the military are expected to achieve – terms such as ‘humanitarian operation’, ‘peacekeeping’, ‘peace enforcement’, ‘stabilization operations’, ‘achieving a stable and secure environment’ – yet these are in reality more a description of the activity rather than the outcome. None the less, many people, including senior decision makers and policy makers, use and understand them as descriptive of a good outcome, and this can lead to confusion of purpose.⁸⁷

Isabelle Duyvesteyn poses questions similar to those raised here by Smith: How can victory be achieved when the political elite is inclined to describing war in terms that have become very difficult to put into clear military objectives; the strengthening of peace and security, the rebuilding of state structures, and the organising of free and fair elections?⁸⁸ Again, such questions challenge the necessary connection between

⁸³ In his principal book *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz defines war as ‘a continuation of politics by other means’. A highly respected voice among military theorists, his views on the war are still being used to explain current forms of warfare.

⁸⁴ See for instance; Adams and Ben-Ari, *Transforming European Militaries* (2006); Smith, *Utility of Force* (2005); and Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Jan Angstrom (eds.), *Understanding Victory and Defeat in Contemporary War* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁸⁵ Hew Strachan, ‘The Lost Meaning of Strategy,’ *Survival*, 47(2005), pp. 33-54.

⁸⁶ MOD Top Level Message, March 2012.

⁸⁷ Smith, *Utility of Force* (2005), p. 375.

⁸⁸ Isabelle Duyvesteyn, ‘Understanding Victory and Defeat: some conclusions,’ in Isabelle Duyvesteyn and Jan Angstrom (eds.) *Understanding Victory and Defeat in Contemporary War* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 225.

military objectives and political goals. Whilst in the past, the military aim of occupation and the removal of regimes was directly linked to political aims, today, this link has become less direct.⁸⁹

Influential strategist and Director-General for External and Politico-Military Affairs at the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, Robert Cooper suggests a model for directly engaging the military in the political side of conducting war.⁹⁰ Cooper's proposition resembles that proposed by the great Prussian military thinker Carl von Clausewitz almost two centuries ago, in the sense that it calls for a modern equivalent to Clausewitz's notion of having the head of the armed forces sitting in the cabinet, 'not so that the politicians should receive military advice, but so that the army should understand exactly what political goals it was fighting for and could conduct the campaign accordingly.'⁹¹ This idea echoes Smith's strong request for developing a feasible political agenda that can be expressed in clear military objectives.⁹² War amongst the people thus understands contemporary warfare as intertwined political and military events, where politicians should not expect the military to solve the problem by force, nor should the military plan and execute a purely military campaign. In short, 'military force has a role to play: but that role is not a detached one, nor one which will achieve the strategic objective by itself.'⁹³ After all, as we have learned from Clausewitz, military competence and political determination are critical to campaign success.

Moving towards an understanding of the implications of military communication in the context of Afghanistan, David Betz and Anthony Cormack argued that the problem lie in the fact that there was no effective connection between means and ends in the British attitude towards Afghanistan. From their perspective the actual approach was nothing less than 'haphazard.' They contested that, 'when forced to confront the issue

⁸⁹ Isabelle Duyvesteyn, 'Exploring the utility of Force: some conclusions,' *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, September(2008), p. 425.

⁹⁰ Robert Cooper, 'The Utility of Force by General Sir Rupert Smith', *Sunday Times* (18 September 2005).

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Indeed, scholars have compared some of Smith's ideas with those set out by Clausewitz almost two hundred years ago. See, for instance: James Gow, 'The New Clausewitz? War, force, art and utility – Rupert Smith on 21st century strategy, operations and tactics in a comprehensive context,' *Journal of Strategic Studies*, December(2006), p. 1151-1170.

⁹³ Smith, *Utility of Force* (2005), p. 394.

of the British military's role in Afghanistan, ministers tend to be rhetorically vigorous – framing the conflict as an existential, values-driven fight that is essential to win.⁹⁴ Driven by political intentions and military strategic planning (in the spirit of Clausewitz), military communication becomes problematic if the overall strategic goal of a military campaign is not clear. The loss of identifiable strategy thus not only becomes apparent at the strategic level, but also at the operational and tactical levels of communication activity. Managing the storyline at the tactical-military level becomes increasingly difficult if that storyline has not been properly visualised at the strategic-political level.

Expanding the framework of Smith's notion of war amongst the people for the purpose of the forthcoming analysis, Smith is one of the few important military writers who acknowledge the important role of communication in the conduct of modern warfare. Still, as noted by Duyvesteyn,⁹⁵ Smith fits into a long tradition of former military commanders, who after their service reflect upon their experiences – these include General Sir Michael Rose,⁹⁶ General Wesley Clark⁹⁷ and General Sir Mike Jackson.⁹⁸ The overall common underlying theme of these writings is a strong criticism of Western military performance in post-Cold War conflicts.⁹⁹ However, one of the areas where Smith differs from the others is his understanding of the scope and the work of the media in current military engagements. Moreover, Duyvesteyn highlights that Smith's book stands out because of its 'scope and penetrating analysis of contemporary strategic issues,'¹⁰⁰ it not only calls for change it also offers alternatives and solutions.

Smith underpins the idea that today's communication environment has an effect on military structures by emphasising that the presence of the media in most military

⁹⁴ Betz and Cormack, 'Iraq, Afghanistan and British Strategy,' *Orbis*, Spring(2009), p. 328.

⁹⁵ Duyvesteyn, 'Exploring the utility of Force: some conclusions' (2008), p. 423.

⁹⁶ General Sir Michael Rose, *Washington's War: from Independence to Iraq* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007).

⁹⁷ General Wesley Clark, *Winning Modern Wars: Iraq, Terrorism and the American Empire* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

⁹⁸ General Sir Mike Jackson, *Soldier: The Autobiography* (London: Bantam Press, 2008).

⁹⁹ With the exemption of Mike Jackson perhaps, whose book is a more personal account of his time in the military.

¹⁰⁰ Duyvesteyn, 'Exploring the utility of Force: some conclusions' (2008), p. 424.

engagements must be both understood and accounted for. Illustrating the context in which today's military operations are conducted, he uses the 'theatre' as a metaphor:

Whoever coined the phrase 'the theatre of operations' was very prescient. We are conducting operations now as though we were on a stage, in an amphitheatre or Roman arena. There are two or more sets of players – both with a producer, the commander, each of whom has his own idea of the script. On the ground, in the actual theatre, they are all on the stage and mixed up with people trying to get to their seats, the stage hands, the ticket collectors and the ice-cream vendors. At the same time they are being viewed by a partial and factional audience, comfortably seated, its attention focused on that part of the auditorium where it is noisiest, watching the events by peering down the drinking straws of their soft-drink packs – for that is the extent of the vision of a camera.¹⁰¹

Moreover, Smith stresses that the media are 'the source of the contexts in which the acts in the theatre [of conflict] are lived out.'¹⁰² His notion of war amongst the people thus stretches beyond the immediate battlefield. It includes fighting among the people on a much broader scale, through the media, as the people become the new centre of gravity (CoG),¹⁰³ in more ways than the obvious one. His metaphor of the theatre works at a number of levels. Wars are not only fought among people, friends and enemies, on the frontline, they are fought among audiences, immediate and distant. They are fought among the military and the public. They are fought among the military and the government. They are fought among political leaders and their electorate. And to stay within the metaphor of the theatre, the media become the link between the actors, the stage, and the distant home audience. The battlefield provides the stage. Soldiers provide the performance. The script is being written by the strategic narrative.

The people of the audience have come to influence the decisions of the political leaders who send in force as much as – and in some cases more than – the events on the ground.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Smith, *The Utility of Force* (2005), p. 284-5.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 391.

¹⁰³ The concept of a Centre of Gravity (CoG) was originally coined by, Clausewitz in *On War*. In military terms, and in modern counterinsurgency campaigns in particular, the CoG describes the protection of the people – documented by military doctrine.

¹⁰⁴ Smith, *The Utility of Force* (2005), p. 289.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the military is accountable to Parliament. Politicians are accountable to their electorate. Smith contests that the media play a significant part in influencing political leaders, in this respect. Being accountable to the people means that the *mood* of the media and of the public affects political decision-making. In Smith's view, politicians often act on perceptions 'for reasons to do with their own political purpose rather than the one at issue in the fight itself.'¹⁰⁵ Indeed, he is not alone in advancing this view. Public opinion sways political will. According to strategist Beatrice Heuser, the progress of many military operations often corresponds to terms in office of political leaders.¹⁰⁶ Much policy around warfare is developed to fit with political leadership, strengthening the notion that military objectives and political aims are not the same. In such a politicised military environment, the expectations and values of the population become central to political success.

Conclusions

Based on the frameworks set out in this chapter, scholars of war and media face a number of challenges. First, they have to consider the overall principles of armed conflict, national and international legal frameworks, in order to understand the contextual factors that affect the general approach to warfare. Second, they must be mindful of the specific characteristics of individual conflicts in order to establish a solid foundation upon which an analysis can be built. Third, they are faced with the difficult task of determining not only the media's role in warfare, but also the impact of media output on military institutional practice as well as on military performance in wars, thus recognising the *mediatising* effects on military structures.¹⁰⁷ They have to consider the influence of the role of the media on doctrinal and organisational change. Finally, they have to note the historical aspects of military-media relations. Military communication and its related studies cannot be separated from the historical context, as war and media, and the military's dealings with them, are historically specific.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 284.

¹⁰⁶ Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 481.

¹⁰⁷ Stig Hjarvard defines 'mediatisation' as a process that transforms institutions as a result of the impact of the media. Hjarvard, 'The mediatisation of society: a theory of media as agents of social and cultural change' (2008).

Accountability

To understand the analysis that follows in subsequent chapters the discussion on accountability set out here helps place the military institution within a broader constitutional context. This particular framework establishes the underlying rationale for the central positioning of strategic communication within the military institution as well as in relation to campaign planning and execution. Given that the military are accountable to Parliament, political accountability comes to play a key role in the development of communication doctrine. Therefore, in order to be able to examine the structures and vehicles of military communication – the focus of Chapters Four and Five in particular – it is necessary to understand the parliamentary positioning of the military institution itself.

Furthermore, the military themselves see accountability as critical to their communication policy. The reason for discussing accountability in relation to military communication activity should thus be found in these underlying principles. To this end, the thesis not only uses the notion of accountability as a framework tool, but also as a mechanism for furthering the discussion. It questions the extent to which political accountability is in fact a driving force behind military communication activity, or whether the military are increasingly guided by their own goals and objectives. The latter is particularly relevant in relation to the strategic narrative, discussed in Chapters Six and Seven. In this context, the thesis examines the correlation between political goals and military objectives as expressed through military communication activity.

By understanding the military as an institution that holds accountability at a political and at a public level, the notion that the military are driven by binary aims – political and military – is an important one. Critically, the discussion presented here problematizes how military instruments can be used to achieve political end goals. It positions the discussion within the broader questions of how humanitarianism and peacekeeping *storylines* as well as how international legal frameworks are used to legitimise military affairs in the eyes of the home audience. This is a central aspect of the discussion that follows in forthcoming chapters; and it is an aspect that has remained largely unobserved within the war and media literature.

Military Culture

The section on military culture set out in this chapter presents a discussion on the internal structures of the military in order to understand how the traditions of this institution shape its approach to communication activity. It examines the approaches to organisational learning – formal and informal – so as to appreciate how these affect the decisions made in relation to military communication efforts. Identifying the military institution as a culture helps build a framework within which a debate about the different levels of communication activity can take place. It helps establish an understanding of the cultural references and doctrinal verities shaping the military's contribution to strategic communication. To this end, it depicts an institution that relies on stability and continuity, but which has flexibility built into its core structure.

As we have seen, the literatures on military culture exemplified in this chapter build their arguments on the hierarchical nature of the military institution. This is important in relation to the forthcoming analysis, as it questions the extent to which the befuddled and non-linear processes of modern communication have the capacity to circumvent traditional military structures. It thus questions the effects that the media landscape might have on the core structure of the military institution and on the level of military transformation.

Yet as highlighted here, most debates on military transformation processes often question the nature and depth of any real military change. Whether military structures, and whether military culture itself, can be transformed through changes to doctrine has been widely discussed in specialist writings. Therefore, the link between military doctrine and military behaviour might be less direct than what such literatures suggest. This idea is developed further in subsequent chapters – Chapters Four and Five in particular – which build on the notion that military transformation relies on both doctrine, training and experience.

'War Amongst the People'

The final section in this chapter concerns the warfare context within which the forthcoming analysis exists. It argues that as a result of the continuously expanding notions of unconventional warfare, military communication activity is more critical than ever in trying to aid success on the battlefield. Accountability and dominant

value-driven political currents put pressure on the military to carry out their missions within set legal boundaries whilst being liable to the government and to the British public. Since characteristics of modern warfare demand that the British fighting forces use unconventional tactics that are not straightforward, it becomes particularly important for the military to create a narrative that bestows legitimacy and credibility while satisfying the constitutional terms of accountability. Strategic decisions on how to communicate military affairs thus become exceptionally important. Acknowledging the media as a powerful weapon in the military's arsenal, the current warfare landscape sets the backdrop against which all communication activity is measured.

The analysis presented in subsequent chapters builds on the foundation that wars are now fought among *the people*. Wars are fought among the civilian population on the battlefield; wars are fought among adversaries in the theatre of conflict and at home. Wars are fought among political leaders; and wars are fought among international and domestic audiences, through the media. The forthcoming analysis thus accepts these underlying factors as the drivers of an increased media alertness developing within the British military and a growing exploitation of information management. The role of communication in war amongst the people is thus more visible than in any previous conflict involving UK troops. Increasingly, and as noted by Badsey, communication procedures rank at the same level as the war fought on the ground or in the air.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Badsey, 'Media War and Media Management' (2010).

Chapter Two

Historical Traces: Towards the Green Book

...a military officer doing PR for his ship has a whole series of good news stories to try and push to the local press [...] low level stuff, but it's all positive.

Rupert Nichol, Instructor Lt Commander, *HMS Hermes* (1982).

Building on the key debates set out in Chapter One, this chapter offers a historical perspective. It argues that wars and the ways in which the military deal with crises are historically specific. Despite the fact that each conflict is different and requires separate analysis, military transformation is exercised through established institutional systems formed by experience. Therefore, present military communication initiatives exist within historical frames of reference. The previous chapter showed us that both formal and informal cultural traits rest on structures documented in both doctrine and through organisational learning. Memory, written or not, is thus a key factor in the armed forces. It drives strategic, operational and tactical level activity.

The discussion in this chapter employs historical military documentation, juxtaposed with scholarly debates, with the aim of establishing a framework for the forthcoming analysis. The focus of the chapter centres round three key periods in UK military history; periods which have challenged military communication and which have ultimately transformed the military's management of communication activity. More specifically, it uses the military approach to information management during the Falklands War (1982), the first Gulf War (1990-1) and the Iraq War (2003) as building blocks for understanding the historical trajectory that led to the development of the

MOD Green Book.¹ Yet the discussion should not be seen as a chronological overview of wars in general. Rather, it sets out dominant perspectives on the historical progress in relation to military communication with particular focus on the development of the Green Book.

The Falklands: New Bearings

The role of the media in military affairs is not a small matter. It is not a small matter to the military; it is not a small matter in the communication of crises; and it is certainly not a small matter to the public. However, there is nothing new about the military trying to manage information for the media. What is new is that in the past, both the armed forces and the media had poor institutional memories in their dealings with each other and had to learn the same lessons each time they re-engaged, as noted by military specialist and frequent commentator on military-media relations, Stephen Badsey.² Today, communication and media relations have been institutionalised as a central element of campaign planning.

Current doctrine on military communication is thus geared towards meeting the needs of the media, as documented in subsequent chapters. Yet this doctrine differs significantly from the standards used in earlier conflicts involving relations with the media. As the discussion in this chapter shows, the UK military have tried and tested different communication models in their search for workable solutions to the management of information. Therefore, the treatment of the importance of the media as a radical and unprecedented phenomenon of the early twenty-first century is a considerable distortion of facts. Military-media relations have a history; a history that stretches much further back than the Falklands Crisis in 1982. Yet as we will discover, there are particular reasons why this campaign is often cited as the starting point for the *new* era of the military-media relationship, in a UK context.

Mainly due to the logistical challenges of the conflict between Great Britain and Argentina, the UK Ministry of Defence was given an unprecedented opportunity to manage information output through its own systems of communication. The

¹ UK Ministry of Defence, *The Green Book: MOD Working Arrangements with the Media for use throughout the full Spectrum of Conflict* (October 2010).

² Badsey, 'Media War and Media Management' (2010).

circumstances surrounding the British naval force's involvement in the Falklands War shape our understanding of a new military approach to media engagement. The campaign points to specific historical notions of communication policy, traces of which can be found in current doctrine. This is particularly relevant in relation to the MOD Green Book, which replicates many of the concerns voiced during the Falklands campaign. As noted in the introduction to the Green Book, the document '[is a] result of continuing dialogue between the MOD and media organisations and representatives which began after the Falklands Conflict.'³ With this in mind, it was during this campaign that the basis for a contemporary communication policy was forged. The nature and logistics of the Falklands thus changed the manner in which the military believed they could manage information.

No official military apparatus dealing with the role of the media was in place prior to the military operation in the Falklands. Confirmed by Rupert Nichol, who, as an Instructor Lt Commander was tasked with escorting the broadcast media on board *HMS Hermes*, no formal guidelines on how to respond to media enquiries were issued: 'I was never told what I could or could not say [...] but of course I had to be careful not to give out sensitive information.'⁴ On the other side of the spectrum, as a reporter covering the invasion of the Falklands, Robert Fox writes of a 'climate of chaos on information policy',⁵ which dominated the start of the campaign. As a result, and even as Nichol was never issued with directive notes, the 'chaos' that Fox writes about was soon replaced by MOD guidelines on how officers and crews on ships were to engage with media representatives. Developed by Sir Frank Cooper, the official directive stated:

Officers and crews of ships with embarked correspondents should be reminded of the standard rules for dealing with the press and are to be specifically briefed to avoid discussing with them or in their hearing the following:

- a Speculation about possible future action.
- b Plans for operations.

³ MOD, *The Green Book* (October 2010), p. 1.

⁴ Interview, Rupert Nichol, August 2011.

⁵ Robert Fox, *Eyewitness Falklands: a Personal Account of the Falklands Campaign* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

- c Readiness state details about individual units' operational capability, movements and deployment.
- d Details about military techniques and tactics.
- e Logistic details.
- f Intelligence about Argentine forces.
- g Equipment capabilities and defects.
- h Communications.⁶

Directed at 'officers and crews of ships with embarked correspondents', these guidelines clearly reveal what the military categorised as operational security, at the time. Evidently, it set out what the media should not report about the campaign. Yet as noted by Nichol, who was tasked with dealing with the broadcast media on board *HMS Hermes*, including newsmen such as Brian Hanrahan of the BBC and ITN correspondent Michael Nicholson, these restrictions meant that the media would increasingly 'self-censor'. He states: 'They were supposed to clear their text with me, but I had developed quite a good level of trust with them by this time and I knew that they would, to some extent, self-censor.'⁷

Information policy that was developed during, and as a result of the Falklands campaign thus offered the first *benchmark* of the new military communication era; an era shaped by, and founded upon, the US experiences in Vietnam in particular.⁸ Badsey highlights that 'it was inevitable that British views on the media would be heavily influenced by the American experience in Vietnam.'⁹ Therefore, for many, the British military's constrictive media management during the Falklands was demonstrative of their fears regarding unrestricted coverage. This led the UK Ministry of Defence to develop a media access system that, according to Carruthers, reflected

⁶ 'Media Restrictions', quoted in Robert Harris, *Gotcha! The Media, the Government and the Falklands Crisis* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 26 and also in David R. Willcox, *Propaganda, the Press & Conflict: the Gulf War & Kosovo* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 66.

⁷ Interview, Rupert Nichol, August 2011.

⁸ The Vietnam War was the first conflict in which journalists were given 'unrestricted' access to the frontline. Subsequently, uncensored media coverage was blamed for US defeat in the war. Commentators still disagree on whether unrestricted media reportage resulted in military failure. Some argue that there was no connection between the media's behaviour and shifts in American public opinion. Others continue to argue that the Vietnam War was lost because of the media. For more on the role of the media during the Vietnam War, see, for instance: Daniel C. Hallin, *The 'Uncensored War': The Media and Vietnam* (London: University of California Press, 1989); and William Hammond, *Reporting Vietnam: Media and Military at War* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

⁹ Badsey, 'The Media, The Military and Public Opinion' (2000), p.10.

the aim of gaining ‘tighter control’ over the media¹⁰ through clauses and unofficial restrictions placed upon both journalists themselves and media coverage.¹¹ Furthermore, the number of reporters allowed to accompany the Task Force was limited,¹² and as Foster notes, those who were granted access were ‘hand-picked’ by the Ministry of Defence.¹³ Naturally, this gave breeding-ground for mistrust within media circles; mistrust stimulated by the political lobbying, which is believed to have determined how reporters were ‘hand-picked’. Former BBC newsman and author of *Gotcha!* – in which he details his experiences as a journalist during the Falklands – Robert Harris notes that during the campaign, ‘the number and members of an improvised press pool were determined entirely by political lobbying under frantic circumstances at the start of the campaign.’¹⁴

Not surprisingly perhaps, these assertions reflect many of the concerns voiced by reporters today. As noted by Frontline man, Smith, in Afghanistan the ‘numbers [of embedded reporters] are kept very low, particularly when the military are feeling sensitive about what is happening. Whole operations can go unreported by independent journalists on the ground.’¹⁵ According to Smith, these views are inherent in the Green Book, which have continued to direct tactical level military approaches to media working relations throughout the Afghanistan campaign. Through established directives the Ministry of Defence managed much of what was being reported from the frontline. Smith notes that this is largely a result of the military excluding journalists who have previously produced ‘unfavourable coverage.’¹⁶ Against this backdrop, the Green Book replicates a number of concerns voiced in previous conflicts involving UK armed forces; it demonstrates the existence of a military system that shifts responsibility away from the military and onto the media, as detailed by David R. Willcox, author of *Propaganda, the Press and Conflict*.¹⁷

¹⁰ Carruthers, *The Media at War* (2000), p. 119.

¹¹ David Morrison and Howard Tumber, *Journalists at War: The Dynamics of New Reporting During the Falklands Conflict* (London: Sage, 1988).

¹² INF 12/1430: Falklands & the Media.

¹³ Kevin Foster, ‘The Falklands War: A Critical View of Information Policy,’ *Defence and the Media in Time of Limited War* (London: Cassell, 1992).

¹⁴ Harris, *Gotcha!* (1983), p. 24.

¹⁵ Smith, ‘The “brittle” compact between the military and the media’ (2010), p. 44.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Willcox, *Propaganda, the Press & Conflict: the Gulf War & Kosovo* (2005).

However, as has been noted by a number of commentators, the logistics of the Falklands became a significant advantage for the military in relation to information provision. Effectively, military coordinators held the power to postpone media reports and visual imagery so as to meet their own needs, which essentially meant that the average story arrived back in the UK two days after being transmitted.¹⁸ Initially, getting images from the front back to the UK took even longer, as explained by Nichol:

It took 16 days to get imagery from the front to the UK. But it was still interesting and top of the news. That's the most important point. That it was 16 days old did not take away from its news value.¹⁹

However, in the aftermath of the Falklands campaign, the UK Ministry of Defence emphasised that restrictions had only been enforced on issues concerning *operational security* – a term, which continues to result in heated debates between the military and the media. Yet criticised by reporters, censorship was seen as a way for the military to limit media as well as information output, especially with regard to British casualties.²⁰ Since reporters relied on the military for accommodation and technological facilities, initiative was handed to PR officers in the Ministry of Defence, who, according to David Morrison and Howard Tumber, often delayed transmission of reportage.²¹ This view is also supported by Nichol:

...a military officer doing PR for his ship has a whole series of good news stories to try and push to the local press [...] low level stuff, but it's all positive. The PR officers in the MOD have an entirely different agenda, which is to protect their minister from criticism. They have in general famously a negative attitude: 'Can you make a comment? No I can't.' It has to be cleared many levels up. They are not allowed to say anything at desk level. That's changed since, but that was very much the case at that time. These people's main response were 'no comment', 'can't tell you', 'I'll come back to you' and they wouldn't. And the journalists in general were pretty crossed about the MOD press associates.²²

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Interview, Rupert Nichol, August 2011.

²⁰ Morrison and Tumber, *Journalists at War* (1988).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Interview, Rupert Nichol, August 2011.

Even as military attitudes towards the media have changed to some extent, many of the discussions are as relevant today as they were in 1982. In the Falklands, journalists believed that because the Ministry of Defence was particularly ill-prepared for the campaign, imposed restrictions had undermined their professional integrity and right to free speech.²³ Subsequently, the Ministry of Defence defended their media policy by stating that it prevented ‘embedded’ correspondents from risking the success of the campaign.²⁴ For Valerie Adams, however, the Falklands campaign represented a combined failure of Ministry of Defence media planning and the inability of journalists to fully understand the logistical and practical limitations of reporting within a warzone.²⁵

The Falklands campaign highlighted to the UK government that it needed to devise a more subtle plan for dealing with the media and for the management of information coming from the theatre of conflict. Therefore, and as a consequence of the largely critical media views voiced over military handling of reporters on board the ships, the British government felt it necessary to ‘learn the lessons’ of the campaign. Essentially, this resulted in a number of reports and papers, which were commissioned by the UK government and aimed at improving military-media relations for future operations. Particularly the report by the House of Commons Defence Committee, *Handling of Press and Public Information During the Falklands Campaign*, acknowledged that the role of the media could not be ignored in modern military operations: ‘In a modern war, a full appreciation of the public information aspects is as unavoidable as confronting problems of a more strictly military relevance.’²⁶ The report also highlighted the importance of ‘incorporating the media into the organisation for war’²⁷ to promote both the ‘nurturing of world opinion’ and also ‘the political and psychological elements of national security policy.’²⁸

²³ Kevin Robins and Frank Webster, ‘The Media, the Military and Censorship’, *Screen*, 27(1986), p. 57.

²⁴ Badsey, ‘The influence of the media on recent British military operations’ (1996).

²⁵ Adams, *The Media and the Falklands Campaign* (1986).

²⁶ House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Handling of Press and Public Information During the Falklands Conflict*, Session 1982-83 (8 December 1982), p. xxxv.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. liii.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. i.

Indeed, the Falklands experience was particularly influential on British military media relations in subsequent wars. It alerted journalists to the degree to which government officials may attempt to contain and restrict journalistic work. Similarly, it highlighted to the military the need to develop more sophisticated and subtle systems to manage the media beyond control methods. With the development of modern communications technology, achieving monopoly over the dissemination of information is impossible. Still, even as military communication today is more sophisticated than the structures in place in 1982, and run through a set organisational framework, contemporary communication activity in place in the Afghanistan campaign resonated with many of the same concerns and influences encountered during the Falklands campaign. Yet it also resonated with many of the issues that faced the UK armed forces during the First Gulf War, as noted below.

Media War in the Gulf

As we have discovered, and as iterated in military communication policy, the Green Book is formulated to direct media behaviour during military deployment. Officially, it establishes a legal framework within which the military and the media can interact. Essentially, this means that journalists sign up to a contract, which gives them access to the battlefield through a system of embedding reporters with deployed troops or, as developed during the Gulf War, a method of putting in place press pools for accredited correspondents. Both of such measures have been imposed as a means of providing media representatives access to the theatre of conflict in exchange for certain restrictive measures. As we saw in relation to the Falklands Conflict, and setting out the framework for military-media interaction, the Green Book represents a continuous and developing agreement between the military and the media; an ‘agreement’, which ‘began after the Falklands.’²⁹

A military document, the Green Book builds on experience gained from historical campaign activity where the military and the media have been forced into an interdependent relationship. In so doing, it acknowledges that the military-media relationship has a historical trajectory, which is likely to affect current and future military approaches to information management. Military communication thus builds

²⁹ MOD, *The Green Book* (October 2010), p. 1.

on an acute awareness of the influence of the media; an awareness which is founded upon an attempt to justify the increasing implementation of all-encompassing communication strategies.

With this in mind, safeguarding operational security, safeguarding campaign success and, ultimately, safeguarding the lives of soldiers and civilians are all advanced in the Green Book as the underlying aspects and dominant principles of military information management. In essence, as illustrated by developments in historical conflicts, this means that reporters become tied to an agreement that hands initiative to the military, as also criticised by Willcox.³⁰ In *The “brittle” compact between the military and the media*, Smith voices some of the same concerns as he contends that the Green Book gives embedded correspondents some form of ‘editorial independence’ as long as they comply with operational security restrictions.³¹

Before looking at how military-media relations during the First Gulf War made an impact on the Green Book, we need to recognise the many concerns that have been voiced about the level of censorship and military control of information during this conflict. The international military campaign against Iraqi forces took place in January and February of 1991 and resulted in a decisive victory to coalition forces. Importantly, in the context of military communication activity, the Gulf War instigated a new set of parameters. It not only changed how the military understood the role of the media in crises, it also saw communication concerns move up the military agenda and into the heart of operational planning. Confirmed by Brigadier Partrick Cordingley, who commanded 7th Armoured Brigade in the build-up to the Gulf War: ‘very soon media was not third on my list of priorities but first on the agenda of the daily conference.’³² According to Badsey, ‘[a]fter the Gulf War, it [would] never again be possible to discuss the conduct of war without reference to the media.’³³ In this context, the implementation of the Green Book specifically altered the manner in which the media engaged with military affairs and it underlined many of the worries

³⁰ Willcox, *Propaganda, the Press & Conflict* (2005).

³¹ Smith, ‘The “brittle” compact between the military and the media’ (2010).

³² Brigadier [now Major-General] Patrick Cordingley, ‘Future Commanders – be warned!’ cited in Stephen Badsey and John Pimlott (eds.) *The Gulf War Assessed* (London: Arms & Armour, 1992), p. 171.

³³ Stephen Badsey, ‘The Media War,’ in Stephen Badsey and John Pimlott (eds.) *The Gulf War Assessed* (London: Arms & Armour, 1992), p. 219.

about military and government censorship highlighted in the aftermath of the Gulf War. The media was no longer secondary to military campaigns, but it had become an integral part of campaign planning.

The Gulf War, then, was the first major international conflict fought against the background of accessible global telecommunications and domestic video-recorders, and might thus prove a watershed in the way states publicly conduct their relations with one other.³⁴

As noted here by Taylor, critical to military communication in the Gulf was the development in communications technology, most notable direct satellite broadcasting. For the first time audiences were able to follow every step of the operation as it unfolded. Television news experienced large viewing figures and national newspapers saw high readerships.³⁵ Yet despite the seemingly overflow of imagery, stories and narratives emerging from the frontline, and made available to home audiences through technology driven news outlets, commentators have noted that media scrutiny of military affairs was at an almost all-time low during this period. Increasingly, the media became a weapon that the military believed they could exploit for their own purpose to aid strategic successes.

This reality eventually led to the term ‘media war’ being employed to emphasise a new relationship between western militaries and the international news media. As Badsey writes, ‘the term represents the exploitation of the news media by the armed forces as a means of securing military victory in the battlefield.’³⁶ This was particularly poignant in relation to the release of information about campaign activity during the Gulf War. Because of extensive public interest in military activity during the war – an interest which may initially have been ignited by the constant flows of information coming from the frontline – the military put in place a system of releasing information that would benefit their own campaign narrative. Essentially, the release of *news* was thus solely in the hands of the military, who were able to determine if, how and when

³⁴ Taylor, *War and the Media* (1998), p. x.

³⁵ During the Gulf War, 85 per cent of the British public said they would watch television news regularly and 54 per cent of the population claimed to read a daily national newspaper. For more discussion on this particular aspect of the conflict, see: Rory Carr-Hill and Martin Shaw, *Public Opinion, Media and Violence: Attitudes to the Gulf War in a Local Population* (Hull: University of Hull, 1999).

³⁶ Badsey, ‘Media War and Media Management’ (2010), p. 401.

information was released. Ultimately, this gave the military a significant edge over the media in ensuring that information sourced through military channels would make its way to domestic audiences.

By communicating their own storylines through legitimate and independent news channels, the military believed that they would benefit from greater public acceptance. This is important as it resembles the underlying military reasoning for developing sophisticated communication policy in Afghanistan; from a military perspective exerting influence through independent media channels secures legitimacy. Effectively, the military need to be seen to offer the media access to frontline news and allowing audiences frontline *seats* to campaign activity was remarkably similar in the Afghanistan campaign as during the Gulf War. Discussions on military censorship in the Gulf thus echoed many of the concerns voiced in Afghanistan. Trevor Thrall states that by *appearing* to offer the media, and thus also the audience, unlimited access to the frontline, the military believed that they would be able to ‘set the tone of coverage’ in the Gulf.³⁷ Because the media were almost completely reliant on defence communication units for the provision of campaign information, the military managed to almost completely detract attention from negative storylines whilst advancing their own favourable narratives. As noted by Badsey:

...the great media surprise of the war was how a highly-co-ordinated [...] media policy at the highest levels had provided newsworthy images and narratives for the media, controlled the story, and successfully blocked negative or critical reports.³⁸

In light of this, the British military communication activity in place in Afghanistan reflected many of the aims and objectives central to the media and information management strategies employed during the Gulf War. However, it is also important to note that the Green Book, which directed military-media interaction in Afghanistan, was more progressive than the military media restrictions in place during the first Gulf War. As noted by Smith, ‘[t]he conditions set out in the *Green Book* are progressive when compared with the restrictions that the press experienced; say in [...] the Gulf

³⁷ Thrall, *War in the Media Age* (2000).

³⁸ Badsey, ‘Media War and Media Management’ (2010), p. 407.

War of 1991.³⁹ At the same time, it is critical to recognise that advances in communication technology had made complete information control impossible by the time of the Afghanistan mission.

The Green Book relies on the understanding that the military hold the power to dominate the military-media relationship. Particularly, the delivery of media facilitation during operations is increasingly the responsibility of the media, whilst in earlier conflicts equipment for the transmission of media reportage would, in most circumstances, be supplied by the military. Yet given recent advances in communication and satellite technology, the Green Book states that: ‘Correspondents will be expected to provide their own communications and transmission equipment.’⁴⁰ However, in situations where the military believe that operational security may be at risk due to communication, the employment of such satellite equipment ‘will be at the discretion of commanders.’⁴¹ This effectively means that by imposing operational security measures, the military are able to restrict any coverage from the theatre of conflict. Not surprisingly, this particular aspect of the Green Book has been opposed by a number of media practitioners. To paraphrase Willcox, this initiative shifts responsibility onto the media, as the obligation to provide media facilitation has been removed from the military.⁴²

The system of allowing media facilitation, while subjecting correspondents and media reports to security checks, was thus initially developed during the First Gulf War. Following the war this system quickly became the official military strategy in relation to giving the media access to the battlefield in the form of *pools*. The UK military’s Media Response Team (MRT) – consisting of a television crew, four reporters and a military escort officer⁴³ – initiated the use of media pools with frontline troops. These pools gave a small number of reporters access to battlefield action.⁴⁴ However, this system did not allow reporters near the frontline. Rather, reporters in the pools were

³⁹ Smith, ‘The “brittle” compact between military and the media’ (2010), p. 44.

⁴⁰ MOD, *The Green Book* (October 2010), p. 22.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Willcox, *Propaganda, the Press & Conflict* (2005).

⁴³ According to Badsey, the number of pool places allocated was fewer than 200 in total, ‘leaving more than 1,000 frustrated journalists away from the frontline, in no mood to do the coalition any favours.’ See: Badsey, ‘The Media War’ (2000).

⁴⁴ The pools were limited to British, American and French journalists.

tied to an array of restrictions and military control mechanisms.⁴⁵ John Pilger stated that '[d]uring many years reporting wars and coping with propaganda [he had] never known such manipulation in a self-proclaimed free society'.⁴⁶ Journalists were the real prisoners of war, trapped behind the barbed wire of reporting curbs, according to Richard Keeble.⁴⁷ Alex Thomson, ITN Channel Four News reporter, used the same image: 'The pools were a prison'.⁴⁸ And finally, David Loyn noted that in the Gulf War, and from a military perspective, journalists were seen as the enemy within, which the soldiers were also told during internal briefings.⁴⁹

Reflecting the complaints voiced during the Gulf War, it is evident that media limitations enforced through the Green Book are designed to reduce the number of sources available for reporting frontline incidents and events. Demonstrating the military's quest for unity and cohesion in information output, the number of sources was further reduced with the implementation of the pool system. As documented in the Green Book:

Pooling arrangements will apply whenever demand exceeds capacity on a facility. In such cases, the MOD will endeavour to provide as many places as possible, so that all forms of media will be represented [...] If pooling occurs it will mean that all written material and photographs and unabridged copies of broadcast tapes and film produced by all correspondents resulting from the facility will have to be made available to all media outlets on request.⁵⁰

In historical terms, some attempts have been made to operate outside of such military facilitations. During the Gulf War, developments of satellite phones and other portable communications equipment enabled media mobility and independence from military facilitation. Recognised in military doctrine this development in communications technology gave reporters some freedom in the battlefield, making reporting outside

⁴⁵See, for instance: John Falka, *Hotel Warriors: Covering the Gulf* (Washington: The Woodrow Wilson Center, 1991); Alex Thomson, *Smokescreen: The media, the censors, the Gulf* (Kent: Laburnham & Spellbound Ltd, 1992); Thrall, *War in the Media Age* (2000).

⁴⁶ John Pilger, 'The Great British Silence: Behind the Sanitised Media-Speak are Dead Bodies' *Free Press; Journal of Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom* (1991), p. 1.

⁴⁷ Richard Keeble, *Secret State, Silent Press: New Militarism, the Gulf and the Modern Image of Warfare* (Luton: John Libbey Media, 1997), p. 109.

⁴⁸ Thomson, *Smokescreen* (1992), p. 82.

⁴⁹ Loyn, *Frontline* (2006), p. 102.

⁵⁰ MOD, *The Green Book* (October 2010), p. 13.

of military hosting facilities a problematic factor in the military communication structure. These unaccredited reporters (termed *unilaterals*) attempted to report on operational events on their own terms and by their own initiative. This is also noted in doctrine:

There will be correspondents, both national and international, who work independently throughout the Joint Operations Area (JOA), equipped with their own communications facilities and transport. These correspondents will undoubtedly attempt to cross the 'front line' and report on activities of both sides in real time.⁵¹

Even as unilateral reporters are believed to have produced some of the best reporting of the war – as an example, and during his time as a video journalist, Smith produced the only uncontrolled footage of the Gulf War when he managed to get to the frontline disguised as a British Army Officer⁵² – the topic continues to cause great controversy within the media and within the military.⁵³ In Afghanistan, correspondents were warned against operating outside of UK military facilitation: 'Correspondents who gain access to operational areas, other than under the auspices of MOD or Media Operations staffs, do so at their own risk.'⁵⁴

In short, official military communication channels are increasingly becoming the only information channels accepted by the British armed forces. The Green Book is especially designed to keep unilateral reporting at a minimum, to limit the number of sources and to ensure military dominance in relation to information provision.

Towards Afghanistan & the *Green Book*

Highlighted by Willcox,⁵⁵ and reflecting many of the media concerns expressed in previous wars, regulations in place in contemporary military engagements, and thus also in Afghanistan, are remarkably similar to those Harris noted during the Falklands Crisis (specified above). In the Green Book the UK Ministry of Defence states:

⁵¹ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 3-1.

⁵² Portrayed in Loyn, *Frontline* (2006).

⁵³ Badsey 'The Influence of the Media on Recent British Military Operations,' (1996), p. 8.

⁵⁴ MOD, *The Green Book* (October 2010), p. 6.

⁵⁵ Willcox, *Propaganda, the Press & Conflict* (2005), p.66.

Subjects that correspondents may not be allowed to include in copy, or radio or television reports without specific approval may include at least some of the following:

- a Composition of the force and the locations of ships, units and aircraft (see separate subsection on aircrew interviews).
- b Details of military movements.
- c Operational orders.
- d Plans or intentions.
- e Casualties (see separate sub section below).
- f Organisations.
- g Place names.
- h Tactics, details of defensive positions, camouflage methods, weapon capabilities or deployments, force protection measures.
- i Names or numbers of ships, units or aircraft.
- j Names of individual servicemen, Prisoners of War (see separate section) or names of hostages and their families.

In the interest of the security of the force and of the individual, correspondents must accept that they may be required to submit all written material, voice items intended for radio or television, films or video recordings produced for television, associated scripts or voice accompaniments, and still photographs for security checking clearance before transmission.⁵⁶

The strong correlation between these newly implemented regulations and those Harris listed in relation to the Falklands demonstrates the influence of previous communication doctrine in current policy. Whilst the new guidelines meet the new security and communication environment, they adhere to some of the same principles as those formulated for previous conflicts, dating back to the Falklands Campaign. However, as documented in the Green Book, a number of additions, which ultimately amount to further restrictions, have also been implemented. Whereas the guidelines issued during the Falklands Campaign were specifically aimed at crews serving on ships, the Green Book is prepared with media representatives in mind. As noted by Willcox, the approach to communication activity, highlighted in the Green Book, is driven by a shift in responsibility.⁵⁷ During the Falklands it was the responsibility of the media escorts as well as individual crew members to ensure that the information

⁵⁶ MOD, *The Green Book* (October 2010), pp. 14-15; and set out in Willcox, *Propaganda, the Press & Conflict* (2005), p.66-67.

⁵⁷ Willcox, *Propaganda, the Press & Conflict* (2005).

provided to the media did not violate distributed guidelines or jeopardised operational security. Yet the development of the Green Book has significantly altered this approach. Now, not only do the media rely on their own transmission equipment they must also accept military security checks of material and they are responsible for complying with military contractual guidelines. If they fail to do so, future accreditation and embedding possibilities are likely to be hampered.⁵⁸

Initially, this shift became particularly poignant in the aftermath of the Iraq War in 2003, as it revealed to most western militaries that the media could no longer be forced to uncritically promote politically driven strategic narratives. Consequently, and as a way of getting the media on their side, the military resorted to public relations techniques and lobbying.⁵⁹ Imitating the US military's system of embedding reporters with frontline troops during the outset of the Iraq War,⁶⁰ embedding also became the key military media strategy for the British armed forces throughout the conflict. Complying with the regulations set out above, embedded war correspondents were seen to be given unprecedented access to frontline action. In a blog discussing the similarities between the media policy employed by the UK armed forces during the Falklands Campaign and that used in the Iraq War, BBC News defence correspondent, Caroline Wyatt writes:

The Iraq conflict of 2003, a much more contentious war, was rather different, and embedding became increasingly controversial. It was indeed a way for us in the media to secure first-hand access to the battlefield, but in return, we had to sign up to the MoD's 'Green Book' agreeing that our reports would be read for 'operational security' and promising that we would not betray operational plans or secrets.⁶¹

Even as the system of embedding reporters with the military was not unique to the Iraq War, it was unique in the sense that it allowed a large number of accredited

⁵⁸ Smith, 'The "brittle" compact between military and the media' (2010).

⁵⁹ Charles C. Moskos, 'Towards a Postmodern Military: The United States as a Paradigm', in Moskos, Williams and Segal *The Postmodern Military: Armed Forces after the Cold War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁶⁰ In his study on the political objectives behind Pentagon's decision to embed reporters with US fighting troops, Thomas Rid argues that the media coverage of the invasion phase of the Iraq War is seen as exceedingly successful, from the media's view as well as from the military's perspective. Rid, *War and Media Operations* (2007).

⁶¹ Caroline Wyatt, 'How has embedding changed since the Falklands?' blog, 2 April 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/journalism/blog/2012/04/falklands-2.shtml> (accessed 3 April 2012).

correspondents to travel with deployed troop, it put in place extensive training facilities for reporters before deployment. Embedding thus became much more systematised and institutionalised during the Iraq War than in relation to the press pools established in the Gulf War. This form of institutionalisation of military information management and media interaction continued after the conclusion of the Iraq War. As subsequent chapters will show, the systematic institutionalisation of communication activity was also reflected in military doctrine in place in Afghanistan.

Highlighted by a number of reporters as well as media scholars, the embedding system launched for the Iraq War did indeed allow reporters to file first-hand reports on campaign activity and it gave news organisations a chance to obtain ‘big pictures’. Therefore, whilst embedded reporters provided much of the on-the-ground war coverage in Iraq, press briefings at US Central Command (CENTCOM) in Doha, Downing Street or the UK Ministry of Defence were pivotal in disseminating background information to the media. So as to ensure consistency in military output, briefings were organised by the UK military to promote particular aspects of the war effort and to frame the operation in certain, favourable ways. In a study done by Robinson et al. in 2009,⁶² three themes emerged as the key focus of coalition news management during the Iraq War. First, it was important for the military to stress that they were progressing and that *success* was only a matter of time. Second, the military emphasised the importance of building a *better Iraq*. Third, the scale of the humanitarian effort made by coalition forces to help Iraqi civilians was promoted through military briefings and seen as an important part of the campaign effort.⁶³

Whilst military information management was seen as pre-dominantly successful in promoting consistency through pre-constructed campaign narratives, the system of embedding reporters with deployed troops was argued to jeopardise media objectivity. Tumber and Palmer highlight that journalistic impartiality was compromised, to some extent, as correspondents began to identify with the soldiers.⁶⁴ Yet, importantly, Smith stresses that ‘the primary control exerted by the military is through determining who

⁶² Piers Robinson, Peter Goddard and Kay Parry, ‘U.K. Media and Media Management During the 2003 Invasion of Iraq,’ *American Behavioral Scientist*, 52(2009), pp. 678-88.

⁶³ Robinson et al., ‘U.K. Media and Media Management During the 2003 Invasion of Iraq’ (2009), p. 681-2.

⁶⁴ Tumber and Palmer, *Media at War: The Iraq Crisis* (2004), p. 32.

actually gets embedded and unfavourable reporting is not often rewarded with further opportunity.’⁶⁵ According to Smith, therefore, it is not so much the fact that reporters bond with the soldiers in the battlefield that limits independent reporting. Rather, it is the fact that the military are able to select ‘popular’ and ‘less critical’ reporters for embedding, which jeopardises independent (media) scrutiny of military affairs.

Further to this discussion about military-media relations in Iraq, Thomas J. Johnson and Shahira Fahmy argue that because reporters were prohibited from travelling independently, which meant they could only go where the military took them, they had access to few sources other than the military.⁶⁶ Moreover, Keeble suggests that embedding was particularly suited to detract attention from the wider context of the war, thereby un-problematizing it.⁶⁷ During the war itself, and in accordance with Keeble’s assertion, the military often criticised the media for failing to provide sufficient information about the overall strategy of the campaign. Indeed, the then Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon stated that the localised viewpoint of the embedded journalists failed to encourage understanding of the wider aims of the operation.⁶⁸ Moreover, when commenting on the new and emerging media environment, he stated:

One commentator on television this week said that, in Iraq, we were seeing a new kind of war. I disagree. It is less a case of seeing a new kind of war, more that we are seeing war in a new way. Startling pictures of a sort which have previously been the preserve of battlefield commanders are being beamed into our homes. Journalists can report changing situations as they happen, in real time.⁶⁹

In contrast to this assertion by the former Defence Secretary, the Green Book is specifically aimed at limiting the number of people *witnessing* activity in the frontline. It makes provisions for what the media should report to home front audiences and how such reports should be dealt with. Particularly, the use of expert knowledge is seen as exceptionally problematic because they ‘could be of assistance to an enemy’. Editors

⁶⁵ Smith, ‘The “brittle” compact between the military and the media (2010), p. 44.

⁶⁶ Thomas J. Johnson and Shahira Fahmy, ‘Embeds’ Perception of Censorship: Can you criticise a Soldier and then have Breakfast with him in the Morning?’ *Mass Communication and Society*, 12(2009), p. 57.

⁶⁷ Keeble, ‘Information Warfare in an Age of Hyper-Militarism’ (2004).

⁶⁸ Geoff Hoon, ‘No lens is wide enough to show the big picture’ *The Times* (March 28, 2003).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

are thus ‘requested [...] to take special care when inviting speculation from such experts.’⁷⁰ Importantly, however, without the use of specialists to offer context and substance, the only expert knowledge is likely to be that offered by the military themselves, who become the narrators of campaign activity. This is problematic as defence issues are complicated and need specialised knowledge, which the public might not have. With fewer sources available and with the military functioning as *expert witnesses*, the military-generated narrative is yet more likely to become the dominant storyline influencing the public’s understanding of military affairs.

Conclusions

This brief historical overview of military communication initiatives during selected conflicts simplifies the development of military-media relations. This is clear. Yet, in spite of such simplification, the chapter establishes a coherent historical narrative against which the forthcoming discussion on British military communication activity in Afghanistan can be understood and analysed. It helps illustrate how the military have developed progressively more dominant forms of communication and mechanisms for dealing with the media during military engagements. Therefore, evident from the military approach to communication outlined here, the UK military have developed a tried and tested programme for managing information and for communicating *their story*. The launch of the Green Book has standardised the military-media relationship in unprecedented ways.

This chapter has thus documented how traces of military communication practices from previous conflicts are being reproduced in current doctrine. It has established a particular historical narrative upon which we can establish a wider understanding of the military approach to communication activity. Therefore, while the focus here has been on the development of the Green Book in particular, subsequent chapters take this discussion further by examining how this development is seen in current strategic communication doctrine (Chapters Four and Five) and in relation to the strategic narrative developed with respect to Afghanistan (Chapters Six and Seven).

⁷⁰ MOD, *The Green Book* (October 2010), p. 15.

In essence, contemporary military communication policy replicates many of the concerns voiced during previous conflicts involving UK armed forces. Even as military communication today is more sophisticated than the structures in place in 1982, 1991 and 2003, contemporary communication activity resonates with many of the same concerns and influences encountered during the Falklands Campaign, the First Gulf War and the Iraq War. In a very particular manner, the circumstances surrounding the British military's involvement in these conflicts shaped both the military's and the media's understanding of a new and emerging approach to mutual engagement.

Forthcoming chapters demonstrate that the systematic institutionalisation of military information management and media interaction, reflected in most examples presented here, continued in the development of military doctrine on strategic communication in relation to Afghanistan. Similarly, although wars are historically specific, the themes used to justify wars have remained remarkably consistent. As demonstrated in this chapter, the Iraq War demonstrated the importance of *telling a story of success* and to highlight the scale of the humanitarian effort made by coalition forces. As we will see in Chapters Six and Seven in particular, these themes strongly resonate with the strategic narrative reiterated in Afghanistan.

One key discovery, highlighted in this chapter in relation to all three conflicts – the Falklands War, the Gulf War and the Iraq War – is the gradual development of a military system that shifts responsibility away from the military and onto the media; a military system that shifts responsibility for the war away from the institution, away from the soldiers, and onto the political establishment. This particular notion is not only a significant development in the military approach to the media, but it is critical to how we explore the military's understanding of audience; how they frame stories of war to influence public opinion and to secure popular support – and it is a key theme which needs to be understood as an underlying factor when furthering the discussion on doctrinal development in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Three

Methodology: My Journey through the Field

As many scholars have pointed out, not only are researchers studying their informants, their informants, in turn, are studying them back – to figure out who the researcher is and whether the researcher is a source of potential threat.

Lee Ann Fujii, *Shades of Truth and Lies* (2010).

To understand the methodology guiding the study, this chapter explains the research journey and the methodological choices that formed the analysis. It is divided into three sections, with the first section setting out the reasoning behind the methodology and the chosen methods. The second section provides an overview of the research journey with a particular focus on access and ethical issues arising from the field. This is followed by the last section, which presents a discussion on the taboos in military-media research. The chapter thus provides an overview of the methodologies employed to carry out the work, the practicalities of the research process and the relevant methodological findings. It includes a discussion on the different stages of the research. Therefore, although the chapter explores a particular research journey – from having my laptop confiscated on the first day of a NATO exercise to teaching interview techniques to soldiers – it also sets out the core methodological choices made during the research process.

Ideas behind the Methodology

Embarking on an explorative journey, through a field that is largely unknown to you at the outset is an exhilarating as well as a challenging experience. It is not

straightforward; it is not simple; and it has certainly not been without complications. It has revealed the flexibility needed to conduct research that positions itself in the intersection of communication and conflict studies, and importantly, it has revealed existing taboos and prejudices inherent in military communication research. As a researcher and indeed as an outsider, studying military organisational practices requires a particular willingness to accept certain limiting measures in order to gain insights. Therefore, the explorative nature of the research process has been an invaluable part of the work as well as a rewarding and exciting journey of discoveries. The flexible methodological structure, set out in this chapter, allowed the material and the contextual settings to guide the direction of the research.

In order to understand the following discussion on the different methods used to gather data, it is critical to recognise the position from where the study took its beginning; the research started from the data collected in the field. By mapping out the different components of the military communication and information structure, the research was approached as a journey; a journey from which overall arguments and categorisations could be drawn. This also meant that the process of gaining knowledge started from the ground, in the field, thus resembling aspects of grounded theory.¹ This then led to an exploratory, rather than explanatory research journey.²

With the aim of understanding the institutionally derived structures embedded within the broader spectrum of military communication activity, it was anticipated that by taking an ethnographic approach the subtle nuances of the military organisation, and of its culture, would come to the fore. This was based on the assumption that by combining various methods of qualitative nature, it would be possible to illuminate different aspects of military communication activity. To this end, analysis of official military documents as well as interviews and observations in field settings were chosen on the basis that they would complement each other and offer insights into the different aspects of military communication.

¹ Borrowing elements commonly affiliated with Grounded Theory, the methodological choices aim to conceptualise 'what is going on' rather than searching for a 'truth'. Originally developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss and formulated in their book *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* from 1967, Grounded Theory is often used in the social sciences, and mainly in qualitative research.

² For more on exploratory research see, for instance: Robert A. Stebbins, *Exploratory Research in the Social Sciences* (London: Sage, 2001).

Military Documents

So as to appreciate the official military approach to communication activity, doctrine as well as military policy documents came to form the core of the study and were used to substantiate the interview and observation work. Although such documents were not considered in isolation, they were employed as a way of documenting the organisational processes guiding the military's approach to communication activity. Importantly, the sampling of key documents demonstrated strong media theoretical work at the heart of military doctrine; something which was not apparent before the start of the study. These documents thus became critical to appreciating the complexities of the military as an independent institution and an institution penetrated by a distinct sensitivity towards the media. They offered examples and discussions, which could be used to substantiate specific arguments as well as the general discussion.

A great number of military documents in the form of doctrinal notes, official guidelines, and policy texts were acquired during the course of the research. And in some instances doctrinal and policy texts became the main vehicles for understanding the organisational structure of communication activity and its position within the military institution. Military documents thus came to form the skeleton of the thesis structure and were considered as a critical part of a bigger whole.

Table 3.1: Overview of the most central official military documents used for the study.³ These documents comprise a range of doctrinal and policy papers, most of which come in the form of Joint Discussion Note (JDN), Joint Warfare Publication (JWP) and Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP). Other official documents listed here comprise strategic texts as well as Top Level Messages, which set out the official military line towards relevant issues affecting military operations.

Document	Access	Date accessed
Joint Discussion Note 1/05, <i>UK Military Effects-Based Approach</i> (February 2005)	MOD website	January 2009
Joint Discussion Note 4/05, <i>The Comprehensive Approach</i> (January 2006)	MOD website	May 2010
Joint Discussion Note 4/06, <i>Information Management</i> (June 2006)	MOD website	May 2010
Joint Discussion Note 7/06, <i>Incorporating and Extending the UK Military Effects-Based Approach</i> (September 2006)	MOD website	January 2009

³ There is a full list of all documents sourced for the study included in the bibliography as well.

Document	Access	Date accessed
Joint Discussion Note 1/09, <i>Significance of Culture to the Military</i> (January 2009)	MOD website	April 2009
Joint Discussion Note 1/11, <i>Strategic Communication: The Defence Contribution</i> (April 2011)	MOD website	November 2011
Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01, <i>British Defence Doctrine</i> (August 2008)	MOD website	January 2009
Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01, <i>British Defence Doctrine – Fourth Edition</i> (November 2011)	MOD website	November 2011
Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40, <i>Security & Stabilisation: The Military Contribution</i> (November 2009)	MOD website	November 2011
Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, <i>Media Operations</i> (September 2007)	MOD website	January 2009
Joint Warfare Publication 3-45, <i>Media Operations</i> (November 2001)	MOD website	January 2009
Joint Warfare Publication 3-80, <i>Information Operations</i> (March 2006)	MOD website	January 2009
<i>Contact with the Media and Communicating in Public</i> , DIN03-020 (November 2008)	Exercise scenario	March 2009
<i>Defence Online Engagement Guidelines</i> , DMC-PR-05-07-02 (August 2009)	Defence Social Media Hub	April 2011
<i>Media Operations Training 2011-2012</i> , 2011DIN07-095 (February 2011)	Exercise scenario	April 2011
<i>Media Operations Training 2012-2013</i> , 2012DIN07-025 (February 2012)	Military contact	April 2012
UK Army Field Manual, <i>Countering Insurgency</i> , Vol 1, Part 10 (January 2010)	Military contact	December 2010
UK Ministry of Defence, <i>The Green Book: MOD Working Arrangements with the Media for Use throughout the full Spectrum of Conflict</i> (October 2010)	MOD website	November 2010
Defence Communication Strategy (February 2007)	MOD website	March 2009
Defence Communication Strategy (revised March 2009)	MOD website	March 2009
Defence Information Strategy (October 2009)	MOD website	January 2010
Defence Online Engagement Strategy (August 2007)	MOD website	April 2011
Top Level Messages (November 2010-February 2013)	Downloaded from: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/top-level-messages	Various dates
NATO, Allied Command Operations and Allied Command Transformation, <i>Public Affairs Handbook</i> , July 2010	Exercise scenario	March 2009

The most relevant documents obtained during the research journey were: *Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1: Media Operations*; *Joint Warfare Publication 3-80: Information Operations*; *Defence Communication Strategy*; *Joint Discussion Note 1-11: Strategic Communication*; *Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40: Security & Stabilisation*; *Defence Online Engagement Strategy*; *Defence Online Engagement Guidelines* and *Contact with the Media and Communicating in Public*.⁴

These documents proved to be invaluable to the research. It is safe to say that without them the work would never have taken off, as they established the foundation upon which all subsequent questions, discussions and analyses could be built. In addition, they provided practical examples in cases where this could not be gleaned from the field settings. Without understanding the core structure of military communication, which was mainly established through these documents, none of the other two methodological approaches would have had any relevance. The documents were thus distinctly used as means with which to ground and cross-reference data obtained through observations and interviews.

The *MOD Green Book: MOD Working Arrangements with the Media for use throughout the full Spectrum of Conflict* was also employed as a key document during the research process. As a core, practical guide for service personnel when dealing with the media, the Green Book supplied a framework through which the applied limitations and constraints of the military-media relationship could be assessed. As a result, the Green Book emerged as central to the arguments and the analysis put forward in Chapter Two of this thesis.

Evident from the above overview of accessed sources of information, military documents were either obtained through interviews, in fieldwork settings or downloaded from the Ministry of Defence's website.⁵ Most of such texts were thus already publicly available, at the start of the research. A majority of the documents acquired during fieldwork with the British military were in the form of step-by-step

⁴ See Table 3.1 for a schematic overview of the military documents used in the analysis that follows.

⁵ Following the completion of the research, the online presence of all UK government departments has been centralized. This means that these documents can no longer be found on www.mod.uk (as this does no longer exist). The new official website for the MOD is found under the department's section of www.gov.uk.

guidelines and notices on practical working arrangements with the media – produced by the military for the military in their communication training. A great number of documents and exercise material was also obtained during fieldwork with the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) in NATO and in the PJHQ in Northwood.

Participatory Observation

In combination with textual analyses of military strategic texts and policy documents, participatory observation became the main vehicle for charting the different elements of military communication. Through this fieldwork it was possible to understand the institutionalised processes directing military information flows, before gaining an insight into the attitudes and opinions of military members, as gleaned from conversations. It was thus anticipated that data sampled within observational settings would shed light on the more subtle military views of and approaches to media engagement.

In order to obtain an institutional view, rather than an individual view, I initially immersed myself in this, at that stage, unknown field, and accumulated data from a number of different perspectives. It was particularly important to gain an insight into the structural processes built into the military institution in relation to communication activity. This was done through observations in strategic planning meetings, tactical briefings and day-to-day dealings with Public Affairs Officers, media and information operations staff as well as media minders during training exercises in Germany, Northwood and Sardinia.

Furthermore, I anticipated that by observing the practical enactment of military communication policy in these field settings, I would be able to collect data that informed my overall understanding of the military communication structure. Participatory field observations were also aimed at gathering data that informed the general understanding of the military as a collective, driven by a joint work culture. In summary, observations were carried out to gain insights into the ways in which military communication activity is developed, shared, conveyed and executed by military members within their institutional setting and the ideas that lay behind such practices.

Table 3.2: Overview of field settings, interviews and email correspondence. Anonymity was offered to all participants, which means that names and titles of informants have only been included where this has been agreed beforehand. In relation to observations work, which took place in operational military settings, all participants and informants are only referred to by rank and position.

Type	Interview/Field setting	Date
Observation	Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09	1-15 March 2009
Observation	PJHQ Northwood, NATO exercise	7-14 April 2010
Interview	British NATO Officer engaged in Information Operations	March 2009.
Interview	Frank Ledwidge, Author of <i>Losing Small Wars</i>	August 2011
Interview	Mark Wenham, Chief Instructor, DSMC	March 2009
Interview	Media Advisor to the UK Military	March 2010
Interview	MOD Chief Press Officer	April 2011
Interview	Rupert Nichol, Lt Commander Instructor	August 2011
Interview	Media Operations Branch Press Officer	March 2009
Interview	UK Commanding Officer, Helmand, Afghanistan	March 2009
Interview	UK Commanding Officer, Basra, Iraq	March 2009
Interview	US Commanding Officer in Iraq & Afghanistan	March 2009
Interview	US NATO Officer, Rheindahlen	March 2009
Emails	Ex-Media Operations Branch Press Officer	April-May 2011
Emails	UK Intelligence Officer in Helmand, Afghanistan	Jan-Feb 2009

Interviews

To complement the observations work, which yielded solid insights into the practical and institutional processes of military communication activity, I used interviews to obtain information about the role of the individual soldier in relation to communication activity. Interviews were thus particularly aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the views of military personnel, their perceived views of their own communication function and how they explain this function.⁶ In addition, interviews were particularly useful in gaining insight into the attitudes and opinions of individual service members. They were also critical in understanding the role of the soldier within strategic, operational and tactical level communication structures.

It is important to stress that because of the ways in which the research developed, these interviews were employed mainly as background, and have not been used explicitly throughout the thesis. This was a deliberate choice from the outset, as it allowed for knowledge to be gathered in informal settings. To this end, because the interviews took a particular loose structure – resembling conversations – they were especially

⁶ This is based on Tim May's notion that interviews are useful in determining 'what informants think they do'. Tim May, *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001).

useful as a mechanism for gaining informal insights into the underlying structures of military communication activity.

Another motivation for using interviews to obtain knowledge should be found in the flexibility offered through this particular method. Given the nature of most exploratory work, obtaining information about specific topics relevant to the overall research aims requires a certain kind of flexibility that can be achieved through interviews. Based on this assumption, I considered qualitative interviews to be suitable for understanding the feelings attached to current military communication efforts, as expressed by military personnel with a communication function. As such, interviews were conducted resembling unstructured and semi-structured interviews.⁷

Given the limited empirical work in this area from a communication perspective, I initially entered the field without knowing what I would find, mapping it as I went along. This resulted in an ever evolving and fluid course of action. Because of this reflexive approach, which allowed the material to lead the way, it was important not to let pre-established agendas determine the direction of the research. Therefore, situating the work within established frameworks of public accountability as well as theoretical and empirical notions of war amongst the people and military culture⁸ developed organically along with the emergent thesis structure. These particular frameworks thus arose as a result of developing discoveries and findings and were not formed based on presupposed hypothetical understandings. Instead, they were re-adjusted throughout the course of the research in order to establish solid analytical and contextual foundations.

A Question of Access

Engaging with, and aiming to understand, the context in which the military and the media are forced to interact, requires access. Therefore, the question about access is often seen as the biggest obstacle to conducting research within the military. Indeed,

⁷ Semi- and un-structured interviews were chosen because they allow informants to talk more freely, which was important so as to gain an understanding of the individual military member's attitudes towards the institution. And because of the flexible and dynamic nature of the research itself, this form of interviews was necessary.

⁸ Set out in Chapter One.

before I started the research a lot of concern was raised within my academic department of whether I would be able to gain the necessary access to military institutions, and access to participants to carry out the needed fieldwork. Similarly, when presenting at media and communication conferences as well as internal meetings and symposia, questions about access were raised more often than not. This might be due to the fact that by being based in a media department, military institutions tend to be understood as closed and hostile communities. Here, the view of the military as a closed entity trumps the understanding that all government departments are subject to public accountability and thus need to be *seen* to live up to this responsibility in order to account for their exercise of power and so as to maintain legitimacy.

However, these initial concerns voiced within my department resulted in a certain awareness of my own position at the intersection of the two *fields*. It made me question my own approach to the study and as a consequence, the notion of access became an important factor in the research design. Concerns relating to data collection thus proved to be a strength in the conceptualisation of the research framework as I became conscious of my own role in the field settings. Furthermore, it alerted me to my own *outsider* status. In this way, the worries voiced within my department at the outset, became a useful exercise in defining my own role in, and entry into, the field. Essentially, it helped me discover my own position in a military setting, which meant that I was able to approach the research with informed awareness of how I could overcome perceived challenges and limitations. Importantly, however, it also illuminated the strength of the research as a cross-disciplinary study.

However, by conducting cross-disciplinary work that exists in the intersection of war and media studies, *my journey through the field* exposed a number of taboos and prejudices inherent in interactions between the military and the media. As a researcher in a media department conducting fieldwork within the military, these prejudices came to the fore in subtle as well as explicit ways. Noted in the introductory chapter, it is clear that media and communication studies have not recognised the relevance and value of researching military communication practices. This may be due to the fact that media studies remain sceptical of the military. At the same time, the military have shown remarkable little interest in engaging with media criticism of their

communication activity. It is perhaps not surprising then that prejudices continue to prevail.

Taboos in military-communication research are predominantly driven by experience, memory and historical events as documented in Chapter Two. Whereas these events have alerted the military to the (damaging) power of the media, they have highlighted to the media the extent to which military information management can restrict media freedom and objectivity. Today, such taboos may be less explicit as military-media interactions are exercised through subtle systems of agreement, formalised in the MOD Green Book. Yet this does not mean that they are obsolete. Far from it. Media institutions continue to see the military as hostile to external interference and the military tend to understand the media, and media coverage of campaign activity, as a necessary *evil*. Views on each other's function are thus often expressed in dichotomised terms; views that tend to be founded on an unwillingness to acknowledge and engage with inherited prejudices.

However, this view is not only confined to the military and the media themselves. In fact, *my journey through the field* has rendered visible existing prejudices in media and war studies. As inherent views and pre-determined standpoints still tend to dominate the opinion researchers take, positioning the discussions in the intersection of the communication and conflict fields has been important. In the same way, it has been critical to establish a framework which appreciates these existing tensions between the two institutions; tensions which also function as the underlying current in a democracy of scrutiny.

Therefore, by conducting research in this fragmented setting, taboos have to be recognised and dealt with. As a researcher working within the military while being based in a media department, it is perhaps not surprising that preconceptions were voiced from two sides. On the one hand, I had to convince military members that my purpose for researching their system of communication was to explore and understand rather than to frame my analysis within presupposed theoretical frameworks and pre-existing media views. On the other hand, I was faced with considerable resistance within my own university department and through the ethics approval process. It is clear that such prejudices have led to a substantial deficit in media studies into military

communication structures, while, at the same time, extensive research is being done within defence academies on how best to manage information for the media and how best to communicate favourable storylines.

It must also be noted that by labelling the military as an antagonistic institution threatened by outside intrusion, communication research limits its own framework of enquiry. It creates a void, which is increasingly occupied by a proliferation of military communication products. The media, along with media academics, thus risk opening themselves up to (military) manipulation. Understanding the military institution as hostile to external views is far from the truth. The military have come a long way in trying to engage the outside world in what they do. They understand that if they are to get the public on board they need *to be seen* to allow this public a degree of access to appreciate what they do. And as the research progressed it was clear that any agreement to get access to institutional data was based on a wish to show the military as an *open* department of state. The fact that accountability was central to the participation of military personnel in the research thus became a significant empirical finding.

Military Access: Developing Trust

Despite the initial concerns voiced about access in my department, within the first three months of the research, access was granted to a regiment due to be deployed to Afghanistan. As gaining access to military settings is a game of trust and negotiations, this initial contact was achieved with invaluable assistance from a well-established BBC correspondent. Conversations and email correspondence with the regimental Intelligence Officer (see Table 3.2), while the particular regiment was preparing for deployment to Helmand and during early deployment, helped pinpoint issues and topics that would need further examination. This initial contact paved the foundation for subsequent enquiries and contacts.

To this end, gaining this kind of insight early on in the research helped develop trust, which proved essential in securing continued access to military data. Effectively, this insight was instrumental in locating a wider network of informants and, in most cases, existing contacts were more than helpful in introducing new respondents. In a military setting this was invaluable. Conscious of my position as an outsider, gaining trust was

also the only way of gaining access. Trust is not something military members take lightly. It is at the heart of the institution, at the heart of the culture, and it is central to military operations. Trust, therefore, became a key aspect during the course of the research and something that had to be prioritised at all costs in relation to all interactions and communication with the military.

Yet gaining sufficient access to an organisation such as the military was never going to be a straightforward process, neither in theory nor in practice. But by employing a method of selective sampling from the outset, it was possible to identify specific individuals who would be able to shed light on issues relating to the research topic. Both informants and field settings were thus selected in light of their role in communication activity.

Military Access: Training Exercises

At the start of the research in early 2009, initial access was granted to the British-led public affairs office in NATO's Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC).⁹ This field setting proved particularly significant at a number of levels. First, it gave me important access to institutional military communication structures. Second, it allowed me to assess the military's interaction with the media on a day-to-day basis. Third, given that this particular field setting was aimed at training media and communications staff, it helped elucidate the structures and institutionally derived mechanisms of communication and information management. Lastly, it helped me identify key questions and areas of further inquiry.

The two main field settings thus evolved around active military training scenarios, lasting between one and two weeks: 1) Elmpt in Germany and Sardinia, as part of Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, and 2) Northwood in the UK, as part of a larger NATO exercise. Prior to my arrival in these two military settings, and because of my previous experiences as a journalist, I was contracted to be part of the Simulated Press

⁹ The Allied Rapid Reaction Corps, and its accompanying Public Affairs Office, is a British-led NATO headquarters. Manned by British officers and with a British ARRC spokesman, Lieutenant Colonel Mark Wenham, this setting was considered particularly useful within the broader picture of UK military communication activity. All British doctrinal policies and terms have been streamlined to correspond with those of NATO and the training of communication staff is carried out within UK training facilities.

(SimPress) team, which would supply a daily news service during the two-week and one-week exercises, respectively.¹⁰

Being physically based within this military organisational structure meant that access to daily briefings on operational and tactical manoeuvres was granted. To this end, conducting active participatory observational work already within the first six months of the research (Elmpt and Sardinia, March 2009) and then again halfway through the research (Northwood, April 2010), established an important and solid foundation for all subsequent work and contact with the military. It also very clearly shaped the execution of the research and subsequent thesis structure.

This initial field setting thus not only helped identify the processes by which the military manage information for the media – how the communication of campaign activity is planned and performed and how military personnel are trained for media positions prior to deployment – it also secured future access. By the end of the fieldwork, in 2011, data had been collected from a total of four fieldwork settings, ranging from tactical training scenarios, over operational meetings to strategic observational settings. The fieldwork also included visits to the British Forces Broadcasting Services (BFBS)¹¹ as well as the Public Affairs Office of the ARRC headquarters in Rheindahlen, Germany,¹² Army Family conferences and NATO's Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) in Northwood.¹³

Importantly, the field settings allowed me to gain an insight and an understanding of the institutional practices that drive military communications; through active and passive participatory observations, through access to training material and official documents, and through informal conversations as well as individual interviews. This helped uncover the meanings attached to communication-related practices.

¹⁰It needs to be stressed that my role in these exercises was very much as part of the Simulated Press team. However, this should not be seen as a damaging realisation as being part of the team, and thus also of the exercises themselves, gave me the opportunity to assess the internal structures and workings of military communication and media interaction.

¹¹ BFBS is the British Armed Forces' own radio and television station, aiming to connect the British Forces community around the world. Since October 2009, BFBS Radio broadcasts live from Camp Bastion in Helmand, Afghanistan, on a daily basis.

¹² Following the completion of this part of the fieldwork and as of June 2010, the ARRC has moved to Innsworth in Gloucester, UK.

¹³ One-week (7-14 April 2010) NATO with PJHQ in London (Northwood).

As a final thought on the method of gaining access to an institution such as the military, it is important to stress that this kind of research is never a straightforward process. As noted above, obstacles and limitations are concerns that need to be considered before, during and after the research journey. Furthermore, in relation to the question of access, the taken-for-granted-assumptions about the military's perceived lack of interaction with external parties became an important methodological finding in itself. Gaining access to a military setting is neither a given nor an impossibility. It is a constant journey of negotiations and trading. It is a question about institutional practices and structures. It is a question about trust. But most of all it is about personal interactions; developing and maintaining personal relations with informants.

This is not a pre-established methodological approach but a realisation of best practice. It is not discussed in methodological guidelines as a step-by-step approach on how to obtain access to supposedly closed communities, but it relies on a willingness to adapt to changing research parameters during the course of the research. Unless the methodological approach is flexible enough to adapt to unexpected discoveries, and loose enough to incorporate changing research settings, military institutions remain closed to outsiders, including media scholars. This has not been a negative recognition but an enriching factor that has created a dynamic research approach: from inside the military institution.

Ethnographic Traces

Having obtained access to two military training field settings, I was in a position where I could gather in-depth knowledge and invaluable insights into the structural and organisational processes of military communication activity. Furthermore, after having gained trust amongst some of the key informants, I conducted interviews with individuals both within the British military and within NATO about their communication role. Two important aspects of the ethnographic fieldwork thus need to be investigated further: field relations and research ethics.

Field Relations

Entering a more than five hundred-man strong military base as one of only three civilians, and as a woman, was a challenging experience, at first. Because of my active

involvement in the field settings, it was critical to establish a balance between acting as part of the SimPress team and carrying out my research. As with all of the work I did with the different military units, acting in a discreet manner was vital to extracting representative meaning and so as to minimise what Adler and Adler term researcher 'effects'.¹⁴ Balancing my work as a researcher, on the one hand, and as a member of the SimPress team, on the other, was only made possible because of the intense military settings. Therefore, although my observation role was overt in the sense that I took on a participatory function, it allowed me to observe military personnel in their natural setting. In fact, because of my explicit participatory role as a member of the SimPress team, my researcher function became peripheral to the field setting. This allowed me to gain insights into a broad range of military planning procedures, command structures and shared cultural references.

Another reason why this balance was possible to maintain in practical terms was that there was a clear distinction between *in exercise* and *out of exercise*. This meant that every time I interacted with military members they would be fully aware of the situation. Within exercise settings I kept my *identity* as a member of the SimPress team very clear. Yet the insights gained as part of the exercise settings were not only noted and employed in further analysis, they proved to be critical to the discovery of significant empirical findings. As an example, the understanding that the military communication structure incorporates clearly defined proactive and reactive measures to influence target audiences was initially formed during the first exercise field setting. At a different level, the fact that elaborative exercise scenarios were essentially centred round the presence of the media (SimPress in this case) became an important empirical finding as well.

I intentionally chose to respond openly about my research interests when asked. This proved a very useful tactic as many of the media and communications staff showed great interest in the work and offered to speak to me outside of the exercise scenario, as they wanted to give their thoughts and views on the matter. It also resulted in visits to BFBS and ARRC HQ, as noted above. If I had chosen to keep my research intentions hidden, these opportunities may not have materialised. By being open about

¹⁴ Adler and Adler, *Observational Techniques* (1998).

my intentions I acquired a range of different and informal perspectives on communication and information management procedures, which helped pinpoint areas for further analysis that could be cross-referenced with military documents.

It is important to stress that despite the fact that I gained more and more trust during my interaction with military members in these field settings, I never categorised myself as a 'member'. This was important in order to maintain objectivity throughout two-week training exercises, where daily interaction with media and communications staff meant that mutual trust and improved relations became a significant factor. However, as a joint group, the military are a protected community with a defined culture, based on shared beliefs, loyalty and camaraderie, as also detailed in Chapter One. In light of these distinct field relations, the research processes required me to constantly reflect on my own role and position within the field settings. Therefore, as a mechanism of reflection, and perhaps even as a result, I produced field notes in all field settings. Because two of the settings, Elmpt and Northwood, evolved around active military exercise scenarios, most of the written material and accounts were written after I had left the exercise area. Similarly, in more informal settings I refrained from writing field notes until I had left the specific setting.

In general terms, field notes were produced according to particular themes and topics, which continued to develop throughout the research journey. And as a result of the flexible methodological structure, they were continuously adjusted to account for new findings and discoveries. As noted by a number of scholars within the field of ethnography,¹⁵ the ways in which a researcher notes the data, how these data are theorised and problematized, are contingent on the broad orientations of the researcher. Therefore, the reflexive approach, with which I entered all of the field settings, helped me develop field notes that, as accurately as possible, recorded what I observed in the field. As noted above, I constantly evaluated my own role and position within the field.

¹⁵ See, for instance: Charlotte Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography* (London: Routledge, 1999); and Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. (London: Routledge, 1995).

Research Ethics

Even as there were ethical considerations to be taken both in relation to the fieldwork settings and in relation to the interaction with potential informants in the military, the dynamic nature of the study also meant that it was impossible to foresee what would happen during the course of the study. Because of these uncertainties, it was particularly necessary to get the research approved by the Research Ethics Sub Committee. The dynamic process through which the research came into existence, and subsequently developed, meant that unexpected changes, alterations and incidents were most likely going to take place. This also meant that the research process reflected this dynamic structure, which led to a number of informal conversations with military members within field settings.

Like most social research projects involving interaction with informants, the project was guided by established principles of confidentiality where necessary. All informants were given the opportunity to remain anonymous, as also requested by the Research Ethics Sub Committee. The reasons for this were mainly ethical concerns and a realisation that military members are first and foremost loyal to their own institution. Therefore, in order to allow them a certain degree of freedom to speak about their institution, it was necessary to accept this model. On reflection, this is perhaps one of the biggest disadvantage in gaining an insight into defence institutional practices.

From a military perspective, it was important that data collected during field observations or through conversations and interviews with military personnel would not expose the opinions of individual service members.¹⁶ Only a few citations have thus been included, and only when this has been agreed with informants. As a result, official military documents, doctrinal publications and policy papers came to form the core of the research. And because of this requirement, alternative sources in the form of strategic and tactical level guidelines and notices were gathered and used to triangulate data collected in the field.

¹⁶ Most of the research thus had to comply with Chatham House Rule.

This should not be seen as a damaging realisation as such texts often supported collected empirical data relating to the structural processes and the objectives inherent in military communication activity. Rather, it should be understood as a mechanism for gaining insightful access to an institution which is often seen as closed to external researchers. Therefore, if we, as media scholars, allow such restrictions to determine the kind of research we are willing to undertake, we not only fail to understand the processes of institutional practices, we also fail to engage with factors that have a real impact on the performance and work of media institutions.

In summary, and on balance, the limitations inherent in this kind of work are outweighed by the potential for unique insights. These insights have thus informed and supported perspectives obtained through other research methods.

Summary

This chapter has set out the overall methodological framework for researching military communication structures and activity. Starting from the official documents, over observational fieldwork, to interview processes, the discussion has rendered visible some of the limitations, and indeed opportunities, in this kind of research. The chapter has thus presented an overview of the research, its methodological elements and the ethical considerations linked to this process.

Military Media Machine acknowledges that a more straightforward approach is needed to appreciate the institutionalised mechanisms and structures in place to direct military information flow; an approach, which is not couched in pre-established and generalised theoretical frameworks but flexible enough to evolve during the research journey. Therefore, as noted in this chapter, the study expands academic boundaries through incorporating methodological considerations, contextual debates and analytical elements reflecting the convergence of war, military and media. Instead of being understood within set analytical and theoretical boundaries, which would restrict the dynamic methodological approach, the research is guided by a number of key contextual debates relating to accountability, military culture, historical military-media relations and the notion that a separate military sphere no longer exists; thus offering a contextually and historically grounded discussion.

Against this backdrop, key to *My Journey through the Field* has been the flexible structure of the methodological approach. It has allowed a story to develop. The reflexive approach has meant that the research process has been a constant journey of re-evaluation, adjustment and negotiation. Developing an appropriate methodology as you gradually familiarise yourself with the field and mapping it as you go along makes for a dynamic and fluid process that dominates the choices made throughout the research. The initial questions about access made me increasingly aware of my own influence on and position in the field settings. It highlighted the strength of the research as a cross-disciplinary study, as gaining an insight into military workings is mainly left to military insiders. In this context, field relations proved a poignant factor in the collection of data and my role in the field was under constant evaluation throughout the research process. My role as an academic researcher, as an outsider, as a woman, as a Faroese and as a non-member was critically assessed in relation to all field settings. The culmination of all these methodological efforts and the consequent findings is presented in subsequent chapters.

THE STRUCTURES & VEHICLES OF MILITARY COMMUNICATION

Military communication is organised centrally within the British armed forces in the Directorate Media and Communications (DMC). Military communication and information management initiatives have increased significantly, in recent years, leading to a proliferation in resources for communication and influence activity. A wide range of media and communication directorates, media training facilities as well as doctrinal publications have been launched within defence structures, to communicate military affairs and to train military personnel for media interaction. Communication has thus been institutionalised as a core component of military campaigns. In essence, communication activity is planned and executed *by* the military, *through* the media, *for* target audiences. Strategic communication in the UK military should be understood within a general understanding of *influence*. Seen as a central component of the Government's Comprehensive Approach and the Ministry of Defence's Effects-Based Approach, the military communication remit is institutionalised and applied in a systematic manner within defence. The mechanisms put in place to manage strategic narratives, construct favourable themes and messages and direct information flows are thus becoming ever more apparent. They have grown to an unprecedented scale. The two chapters in this section examine the extensive structures in place within the British armed forces to direct information flow and to target audiences, identified by the military.

Chapter Four

The Principles of Influence

...the overall relationship between the MOD and the media should be looked at afresh, to rebuild trust, and to rebuild a relationship where each respects the different needs and perspectives of the other. The MOD cannot control the media: what it must do is to control its own narrative. But there needs to be recognition that there has been a decline of trust, and a worsening of the relationship.

Tony Hall, *Review of Media Access to Personnel* (June 2007).

The aim of strategic communication: To put information strategy at the heart of all levels of policy, planning and implementation, and then, as a fully integrated part of the overall effort, to ensure the development of practical, effective strategies that make a real contribution to success.

Mark Laity, NATO Chief Strategic Communication, October 2011.

Communication activity gradually crept up the military agenda and into the heart of the Afghanistan campaign. This was not a small matter. In fact, military communication activity continued to grow throughout the campaign, with new and dynamic media training facilities, guidelines, doctrinal texts and specialised communication sub-units being launched across the defence community. Strategic communication thus became a key aspect of campaign activity with dedicated units being established to integrate this relatively new high-profiled concept into military strategic thinking. Furthermore, influence activity increasingly became a dominant factor, incorporated into military structures and endorsed by British commanders. Examined through the growing focus on influence, this chapter understands the *military media machine* as goal oriented and constantly reacting and adjusting to

changing political as well as conflict and communication climates, in order to influence target audiences. As the primary target for military communication work, the expectations of domestic audiences are central to the themes and messages constructed as part of the strategic narrative.

The Function of Doctrine

The military institution is shaped by both external and internal attitudes towards its ethos, epitomising the paradoxical elements framing military structures. It is bound by political and legal directives but exists within its own culture. It relies on consistency and stability but operates in fast-moving and rapidly shifting environments. It is steeped in tradition and inherent processes but forced to transform and adapt to meet new and emerging challenges as well as responding to internal and external factors. It is engaged in activities at a diplomatic, political and military level, in accordance with the British government's political objectives. As outlined in Chapter One, these paradoxes are important. They not only frame the discussion on military doctrine and strategic communication in this chapter, they also inform and shape doctrinal content itself.

As the key guiding principles of military practice, doctrine is shaped by the culture in which it exists. Emphasising the significance and impact of military culture on defence doctrine, Ledwidge states that 'doctrine [...] reflects strongly the approaches, and indeed the culture, common to all British military services.'¹ Therefore, any analysis of doctrine on strategic communication must be understood through the underlying military culture. Moreover, it must be sympathetic to the institutional constraints of the organisation. The military constitute an institution that operates within political frameworks whilst still driven by its own organisational objectives. An analysis of communication activity thus problematizes how military instruments can be used to advance military success – meeting military objectives and adhering to political aims at the same time.

¹ Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars* (2011), p. 141.

Because of the broad range of communication-related elements and distinct modules developed within the military institutional structure, the term ‘communication activity’ has been coined here to reflect all of these different practices. The term should thus be understood as comprising a number of *tools* relating to communication and information management and inaugurated to achieve maximum influence. It thus includes, but is not limited to: media operations, media training, communication guidelines, and online communication tools. However, military communication activity does not exist in isolation. It is one of a range of doctrinal approaches put in place by the UK Ministry of Defence to manage information coming from the military during crises. Therefore, before an analysis of communication activity can take place, these additional parameters need to be established in order to position the military communication remit within the larger institution-led information structures. These particular approaches to information management serve several functions; functions which span from using information tactically on the frontline as a way of progressing a military operation to using information to obtain broader political objectives at the strategic level.



Figure 4.1: *The United Kingdom Information Strategy.*

‘Government policy and end-state objectives for the desired outcome of any situation or crisis drive the Info Strategy, which is then translated into Government information and communications activity.’

Adapted from Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 4-1.

Guided by the principles of supporting the government's political aims, the Information Strategy² is the overarching and leading strategy directing information coming from the military. With politically driven objectives, this Strategy is a result of cooperation between all government departments, most notably the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Department for International Development (DfID) and the Ministry of Defence.³ The overall aim of the Strategy is to promote favourable politically driven storylines – strategic narratives – which are believed to secure trust and gain support within the population, while undermining the adversary's actions.⁴ In relation to communication activity, the Information Strategy sets out the provision for the incorporation of information management principles that can be used to communicate specific (positive) campaign messages to specific audiences. It thus makes allowances for communication activity to be employed to target audiences, whose support is identified as critical to the successful completion of a military operation.⁵

Within the scope of the Information Strategy, communication activity is driven by both proactive and reactive military objectives. British military doctrine specifically operates within three communication *profiles*: active; semi-active; and passive. The greater the media interest in an operation, the more 'active' military communication becomes. Whether or not an operation or a specific incident requires an active media profile or not is determined entirely by the political leadership. The flexibility of the Information Strategy, therefore, ranges from proactively promoting favourable narratives to reactive measures devised to respond to unfavourable media coverage of military affairs.

In addition to the structure inherent in the Information Strategy, current military communication is part of the military's effects-based approach,⁶ which was initially set out in an intangible doctrine note in 2005. Importantly, this version of the doctrine

² The Information Strategy was previously known as the Information Campaign. The use of the term Information Strategy is aligned with NATO doctrine. The Information Strategy is an integral part of the strategy plan which informs, and is informed by the Commander's Campaign Plan.

³ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p.4-2.

⁴ Joint Warfare Publication 3-80, *Information Operations* (March 2006), p. 1-4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1-3.

⁶ In the 2005 version of the doctrine, the Effects-Based Approach is defined as 'the way of thinking and specific processes that, together, enable the integration and effectiveness of the military contribution within a Comprehensive Approach.'

included two considerable changes in focus within British military thinking, as also noted by Farrell.⁷ First, the text stated that military operations should focus on realising non-material goals and that the military should aim to incorporate non-lethal activities (non-kinetic) into their operations; activities, which the paper claimed ‘could prove vital to success on the battlefield’. Second, and which was important in relation to existing and further collaborations with government departments like the FCO and DfID, the paper recognised the necessity of developing a ‘multi-disciplinary and multi-agency approach’ to operations with reference to the ‘joined-up government’ approach.⁸

Because of its strong focus on end-results, and concerned with politico-military attitudes rather than process, the 2006 version⁹ of the doctrine moved beyond an effects-based approach and strengthened the idea of an ‘effects-based philosophy’.¹⁰ In the new edition, effects aggregate to decisive conditions which, in turn, aggregate to the desired operational end-state.¹¹ The 2006 version also explicitly situates the effects-based approach within a larger cross-departmental and interagency framework, appropriately named the Comprehensive Approach (CA).¹²

The CA builds on four core principles: a proactive cross-Whitehall approach; shared understanding; outcome-based thinking; and collaborative missions.¹³ In this context, the CA recognises that the ‘military instrument’, as part of a pan-government structure, ‘cannot operate in isolation and successful operations and enduring outcomes will involve a wide range of contributors and influences.’¹⁴ Officially, military communication strategies thus function as an extension of the wider operational strategies within both the Ministry of Defence and the strategic pan-government

⁷ Farrell, ‘The Dynamics of British Military Transformation’ (2008).

⁸ Joint Discussion Note 1/05, *The UK Military Effects-Based Approach* (February 2005).

⁹ Joint Discussion Note 7/06, *Incorporating and Extending the UK Military Effects-Based Approach* (September 2006).

¹⁰ Farrell, ‘The Dynamics of British Military Transformation’ (2008).

¹² Joint Discussion Note 4/06, *Information Management* (June 2006).

¹² As a cross-Government framework, the Comprehensive Approach is put in place to ensure a unified response across government departments. Yet after the conclusion of this writing, NATO introduced the notion of an Integrated Approach, reflecting the Comprehensive Approach, at an international level. The content of and vision for the Integrated Approach mirrors that of the Comprehensive Approach.

¹³ House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Comprehensive Approach: the point of war is not just to win but to make a better peace*, Seventh Report of Session 2009-10 (18 March 2010).

¹⁴ Joint Discussion Note, 4/05, *The Comprehensive Approach* (January 2006).

approach to defence and security. According to Farrell, within the military there is evidence of innovation, both in the adaptation to effects-based thinking and in the conceptual situating of military operations within larger, civilian-led, interagency campaigns.¹⁵ As we will see, this is particularly important in relation to communication activity. Maintaining a coherent and consistent strategic narrative at both the political level and at the military level is one of the principal criteria for campaign success.

The importance of information in this context is thus also emphasised in UK doctrine: 'Information is the lifeblood of the CA concept [...] And it should be managed to support joined up activity in the diplomatic and military arenas.'¹⁶ In line with this, military doctrine specifies the use of themes and messages to ensure synchronisation across all military levels, so as to avoid differences in government messaging – in the strategic narrative. In relation to this, the doctrinal definition of *theme* establishes that it is 'an overarching concept or intention, designed for broad communication application', while *message* is understood as 'narrowly focused communication directed at a specific target audience'. Further, and critical to subsequent discussions on strategic narratives, military doctrine defines *narrative* as 'communication that portrays a story designed to resonate in the mind of the audience that helps explain the campaign strategy and operational plan'.¹⁷ Identified in Chapters Six and Seven of this thesis, the overall strategic narrative devised to explain the Afghanistan campaign built on themes and messages that supported the politically-driven campaign objectives defined as ensuring security and stability, on the one hand, and promoting peacekeeping, development and humanitarianism, on the other. Therefore, as a general rule, coordinating the *UK message* is critical to the function of the Information Strategy:

Cohesion is achieved by a common understanding between partners on the ways and means to achieve crisis-resolution objectives. Nationally, cohesion is required between government departments and agencies, and between the UK Government and its domestic

¹⁵ Farrell, 'The Dynamics of British Military Transformation', p. 787.

¹⁶ Joint Discussion Note 4/05, *The Comprehensive Approach* (January 2006), p. 1-9.

¹⁷ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40, *Security & Stabilisation: The Military Contribution* (November 2009), p. 3-3.

audience [...] Coherence is achieved through the use of clear, mutually supportive themes and messages, which resonate with our target audiences.¹⁸

The strong focus on cohesion and coherence among government departments and between coalition partners, and within target audiences, may appear self-evident in a military context as counter-narratives are seen as being detrimental to the messaging. However, as identified in Chapter One, speaking with one voice is as difficult in the military as it is in any other human organisation. Speaking with one voice across government departments is even more difficult, and speaking with one voice across international coalitions, over a period of more than ten years, is virtually impossible. Nevertheless, as outlined in the military discussion note on Information Management, and in the context of government-wide crisis management, the UK Ministry of Defence ‘should be prepared to harmonise its Information Management requirements (principally those of the Defence Crisis Management Organisation (DCMO)) with those of other Government departments.’¹⁹ This is important as a means of constructing favourable and workable strategic narratives that are supported across defence, across government and across coalition partners.

As a result, the latest version of the Information Strategy, inaugurated by the UK Ministry of Defence in October 2009, is both dynamic and purposely vague.²⁰ It holds the capacity to adjust to any given situation in response to constantly evolving external and internal factors. Explicitly promoting information coordination and management, the document prescribes that the development, planning and execution of the Information Strategy must be coordinated horizontally and diagonally across the UK Government and between relevant agencies and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs).²¹

In the same way, doctrine prescribes that the Information Strategy must be coordinated vertically from the national political strategic level to the departmental strategic level, over the operational level and down to the tactical battlefield level.²² This

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 3-12.

¹⁹ Joint Discussion Note 4/06, *Information Management* (June 2006).

²⁰ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p.4-2.

²¹ Defence Information Strategy (October 2009).

²² Ibid.

organisational structure is perhaps not surprising given the hierarchical, top-down nature of the military institution, identified in previous chapters. However, in relation to other government departments and external agencies, this approach is not straightforward. Organising information cross-governmentally thus highlights the inherent problems in conducting operations founded on civil-military partnerships (as prescribed by the Information Strategy). Since a separate military sphere no longer exists, as argued by Smith,²³ military and non-military organisations become interdependent. Moreover, since the CA concept originated as a military initiative other departments have been slow to adopt it.²⁴ Given that basic military objectives and political goals are not the same, in military campaigns these partnerships are put to the test. The Information Strategy thus rests upon these largely unstable cross-departmental and civil-military partnerships, as demonstrated by Figure 4.1.

Problematizing the relationship between political, civilian and military objectives even further, the six-month rotation principle of the military²⁵ means that a brigade and its senior officers have only limited time in which to make their mark. This serves a *real* problem in relation to securing the communication of a coherent strategic narrative. As noted by Ledwidge, in Afghanistan this meant that each brigade deployed to Helmand had a ‘signature operation’, which was used to brand the mission in progressive ways.²⁶ Supporting his argument, Ledwidge quotes Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, former ambassador to Afghanistan, for saying:

Each brigadier would say that he understood the ‘comprehensive approach’, and planned to work with DfID and the FCO, as well as with the Afghan authorities. But each brigadier would launch one kinetic operation, before returning his brigade to Britain after the best six months of his professional life. And then the whole cycle would start again.²⁷

²³ Smith, *Utility of Force* (2005).

²⁴ House of Commons Defence Committee, *The Comprehensive Approach* (18 March 2010).

²⁵ In Afghanistan, the British military brigade is deployed for six months at a time. This means that not only do deployed soldiers leave the operational area after six months on operation, military headquarters also change every six months. A number of commentators have pointed to the problems inherent in this structure, as it hinders continuity and progress on the ground. In relation to communication activity, it calls for non-specific and generic narratives that are not affected by changing ground-level goals.

²⁶ Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars* (2011).

²⁷ Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, former ambassador to Afghanistan, quoted in Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars* (2011), p. 85.

However, from a democratic perspective, the cross-government approach to military campaigns is crucial as the military exist within a broader government structure and is accountable at both the political, diplomatic and public level. And even as the six-month rotation schedule of the military creates a culture of ‘quick fixes’ and is driven by identifiable and visible progress at the tactical level, the themes and messages devised at the strategic level are a result of a unified and cohesive governmental, politically endorsed, strategic narrative. From the point of view of the military, therefore, the strategic narrative is also useful in creating a situation where they are able to detach themselves from the war itself. The strategic narrative thus often becomes as important as any of the activities taking place at the tactical level, at least when communicated to target audiences. And according to Ledwidge, ‘[t]he cross-departmental Afghan communications unit... govern[s] a great deal of what happen[s] on the ground.’²⁸

The Role of Strategic Communication

In a politico-military context, strategic communication emphasises the importance of shaping public perceptions of campaign activity.²⁹ Particularly, it was the attacks of 9/11 that stimulated increased interest in this elusive term. Yet it is safe to argue that the integration of strategic communication into military structures has not been without problems. Not least in a British context, where the concept has developed in parallel with the emergence of *influence*, which military members now claim is central to everything they do. Influence activity has taken hold in the military and has gained renewed relevance in military doctrine:

The Commander’s role is initially to establish the effects necessary to exert the desired influence. Assisted by his staff he then derives the activities required to realise those effects [...] Within formation headquarters and at unit level, dedicated staff officers are required to support commanders and principal staff officers in balancing kinetic and non-

²⁸ Ledwidge, *Losing Small Wars* (2011), p. 85.

²⁹ This has been documented in a number of recent scholarly works. See, for instance: David Betz, ‘Communication Breakdown: Strategic Communications and defeat in Afghanistan,’ *Orbis* 55(2011), pp. 613-630; Thomas E. Nissen, ‘Strategisk Kommunikation – en nødvendig konceptuel og strategisk udfordring’ (København: Forsvarsakademiet, 2011); and Tatham, ‘Strategic Communication: A primer’ (2008).

kinetic activity to achieve desired effects on the insurgent, the affected population and, indirectly, wider audiences.³⁰

Coinciding with the development of strategic communication in NATO, and authorised by UK commanders, influence activity functions as a vehicle for strategic communication, in the sense that it involves media operations, information operations and psyops as effective communication tools, at the tactical level.³¹ With this in mind, the integration of both strategic communication and influence activity is indicative of a shift in UK military thinking from exclusively focusing on kinetic effects to incorporating *non*-kinetic effects – to paraphrase Farrell, to ‘reassure’, ‘influence’ and ‘inform’ target audience groups.³² Recognised in the 2011 discussion note on military contributions to strategic communication, this change in attitudes has been advocated by Royal Navy Commander Steve Tatham in particular. Along with Major General Andrew Mackay, he has pushed for stronger focus on Target Audience Analysis (TAA)³³ so as to ‘effect properly constructed influence campaigns, perhaps dislocating the urge to apply force, as the primary activity, from the epicentre of military thinking to the periphery.’³⁴

As a result, in April 2011, the Defence Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), a UK Ministry of Defence think-tank, weighed in with a new and significant doctrine note (JDN 1/11), which defined strategic communication as: ‘Advancing national interests by using all Defence means of communication to influence the attitudes and behaviours of people.’³⁵ As noted by Mackay and Tatham, the document also set out the main forms of communication:

...informational, attitudinal, and behavioural. Informational communication seeks to simply impart [...] Attitudinal communication seeks to positively influence people’s opinion on a particular issue [...] Behavioural communication seeks to induce a particular

³⁰ Army Field Manual, *Countering Insurgency*, Vol. 1, Part 10 (January 2010), p. 6-3.

³¹ See Chapter Five for an outline of the organisational structure of military communication.

³² Farrell, ‘Dynamics of British military transformation’ (2008), p. 795.

³³ In ‘Strategic Communication & Influence Operations: Do We Really Get It?’ Rowland and Tatham call for an integrated military approach to Target Audience Analysis as they place the audience at the heart of military operations.

³⁴ Mackay and Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict* (2011), p. 135.

³⁵ Joint Discussion Note 1/11, *Strategic Communication: The Defence Contribution* (April 2011).

type of behaviour, either reinforcing or changing it [...] The three types of communication can be linked together but are not necessarily dependent upon each other.³⁶

Evidently, this is important in the sense that it recognises that strategic communication is driven by psychological means that aim to change attitudes and behaviours. However, the timing of the document is equally important. Launched following the NATO-wide decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan by the end of 2014,³⁷ JDN 1/11 was a result of extensive discussions within both the UK Ministry of Defence as well as among war and communication specialists like Mackay and Tatham. Essentially, this meant that strategic communication became a *hot topic* within British defence structures; how strategic communication could potentially contribute to political and military success in Afghanistan and how the military machinery could potentially contribute to its implementation became widely debated topics among military strategists.

Media Operations & Information Operations

Influence thus functions as an operative arm of strategic communication. It is devised as an important element of the Information Strategy and it includes two distinct, but closely linked, components of communication activity; media operations and information operations. Essentially, media operations are driven by the idea of a 'truthful' and 'fact-based' approach to communication. This is important as they are critical to the military's dissemination of information about campaign activity through independent media channels. Media operations are thus those mechanisms used by the military to engage with national and international media, through specific media facilitation as set out in Chapter Five of this thesis. Information operations, on the other hand, are planned and executed in order to exert direct influence, through techniques such as deception, manipulation of information and perception management. In effect, this means that whereas media operations aim to exercise influence through independent media channels, allowing media organisations full editorial control over the information, messages promoted through information

³⁶ Cited in Mackay and Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict* (2011), p. 133.

³⁷ Allied forces are currently implementing their exit strategy in Afghanistan, as part of ISAF's 'in together, out together' approach espoused through NATO's Lisbon Summit in 2010.

operations are fully managed by the military, thus aiming to circumventing external influences.

Because of the clear distinction in the systems of operation, media operations, on the one hand, and information operations on the other, have distinct audiences in mind. In theory, the main target audience for media operations is the domestic home audience, while information operations are driven by the aim of influencing the attitudes and behaviours of regional and local audiences in the theatre of conflict. However, empirically this distinction is less straightforward as discussed in greater detail below. For now, and for clarification, it is important to maintain a division between the two.

Documented by the discussion on online and visual narratives in Chapter Seven of this thesis, messages advanced through different forms of influence – information operations or media operations – are distributed through distinct military communication channels. The strategic narrative thus makes use of a variety of influencing tools disseminated based on strategic communication principles. Looking specifically at information operations as a separate component of influence activity, the Army Field Manual states:

Information Operations is the current term for a number of tools and techniques delivering influence effects and is a means to coordinate their use within the commander's plan. These tools and techniques include PSYOPS, electronic warfare, presence posture profile, computer network operations, deception, physical destruction, information security, KLE³⁸ and the handling of visitors.³⁹

The field manual thus testifies to the range of influencing tools available to the commander. Particularly aimed at targeting and reaching intended audiences, undermining adverse information and enemy propaganda, and securing regional support for campaign activity, influence is a particularly critical aspect of communication activity at the tactical, battlefield level. This is where the strategic narrative, along with accompanying themes and messages, is most likely to experience strong counter-narratives disseminated as propaganda through adverse

³⁸ Key Leader Engagement (KLE).

³⁹ Army Field Manual, *Countering Insurgency*, Vol. 1, Part 10 (January 2010), p. 6-3.

communication channels.⁴⁰ It is perhaps not surprising then that information operations (including deception, manipulation of information and psychological operations) are specifically targeting regional and local audiences to aid the commander's freedom of operation in the theatre of conflict. This aspect is also highlighted in the Information Strategy, which notes that information operations hold a particular and important role in relation to influence:

Co-ordinated actions undertaken to influence an adversary or potential adversary in support of political and military objectives by undermining his will, cohesion and decision-making ability, through affecting his information based processes and systems while protecting one's own decision-making processes.⁴¹

In the same way as a strong commitment to strategic communication points to a shift in military thinking at the international level, the documented and growing focus on influence activity within UK defence structures reflects a change in the ways in which the British military approach campaign activity. It thus testifies to a significant shift in military, political and international strategic thinking. A shift that has repercussions for those involved in military affairs. Ultimately, the Information Strategy emphasises that influencing a wide range of policymakers, publics and international stakeholders is central to conducting successful military operations. It does not obscure the fact that influence is essential in winning public, political and financial support. The military need resources, which can ultimately be secured through political and financial support. The Information Strategy thus promotes influence as a defining element in the battle over narratives:

Think of counter-insurgency as an argument to earn the support of the people. It is a contest to influence the real and very practical calculations on the part of the people about which side to support. Every action, reaction, failure to act and all that is said and done becomes part of the debate. The people in the audience watch, listen and make rational choices based on who can better protect them, provide for their needs, respect their dignity and their community and offer opportunities for the future. Ideology can influence

⁴⁰ See, for instance: Erica Gaston and Jonathan Horowitz, *The Trust Deficit: The Impact of Local Perceptions on Policy in Afghanistan*, (Open Society Foundations, October 2010).

⁴¹ DTIO Policy Paper (22 February 2001) cited in Joint Warfare Publication 3-80, *Information Operations* (March 2006) p. 2-1.

the outcome, but it is usually subordinate to the more practical considerations of survival and everyday life.⁴²

Winning the battle of wills, the will of the people, as noted by Smith⁴³ – be it local leaders or domestic audiences – helps drive the military’s development and systematic planning of information tools. Given that wars are now fought amongst the people, in *the theatre*, securing and maintaining the people’s support is achieved through psychological means. As noted in UK doctrine: ‘Psychological effects on specific target audiences, rather than physical attacks on capability, are likely to be the lasting and decisive elements in stabilisation.’⁴⁴ Supporting this approach, the Army Field Manual states that it is important that information operations focus on the tactical use of psychological operations to ‘influence the local population and affect the will and understanding of the insurgent.’⁴⁵ In other words, whereas media operations are directed towards using the media to reach distant target audiences, information operations are employed to influence the immediate audience present in the theatre of operations.

The British military do not steer away from their quest to manage perceptions of campaign activity. Similarly, as we have seen, doctrine does not hide the power of influence. Looking at doctrinal texts which set out the principles of strategic communication in general and influence activity in particular, it is evident that by incorporating influence activity into campaign planning the military establish a (theoretical) framework within which media operations and information operations can be executed alongside each other. This does not necessarily jeopardise the ‘truthfulness’ of media operations, but it puts pressure on the strategic, operational and tactical level communication staff to execute these two modes of operation through distinct lines of command. Therefore, with the heightened visibility of influence activities in the British military and with the knowledge that such activities incorporate a range of communication and information management principles, how media operations (‘truthful’ and ‘fact-based’) and information operations (‘deception’,

⁴² Commander ISAF’s Counterinsurgency Guidance, August 2009.

⁴³ Smith, *Utility of Force* (2005).

⁴⁴ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40, *Security & Stabilisation: The Military Contribution* (November 2009), p. 3-2.

⁴⁵ Army Field Manual, *Countering Insurgency*, Vol. 1, Part 10 (January 2010), p. 6-3.

‘information manipulation’ and ‘psyops’) are executed, becomes important and a critical analytical tool.

As we have seen, the notions of psychological operations, computer network operations, electronic warfare and deception are framed collectively within the overall concept of influence activity.⁴⁶ The ‘close link’ between media directed activity and operations aimed to deceive and manipulate target audiences,⁴⁷ formally recognised in military doctrine,⁴⁸ thus problematize the military-media relationship. Yes, the media may present a problem in the sense that they have become increasingly powerful in determining the success or failure of an operation. However, independent scrutiny is critical to keeping institutions clean. And as mainstream media institutions are suffering from declines in resources,⁴⁹ contesting such influence mechanisms becomes increasingly difficult. Despite the explosion in communications technology, the media are relying on the military for supplying reliable information from the battlefield, through media operations. Yet at the same time, as we discovered in Chapter Two of this thesis, the Green Book shifts responsibility onto the media. So this creates a paradox. Whilst the media, stripped of resources, are reliant on the military for frontline information, the military increasingly narrow the space in which the media can operate within the theatre operation. Through subtle influence mechanisms the military are thus increasingly likely to control the media rather than their own narrative, as Tony Hall suggested in his *Review of Media Access to Personnel*,⁵⁰ with which this chapter opened.

Ultimately, this shift in the military approach to communication is evident throughout the organisational structure. With an increased focus on influence, doctrine specifies that a key difference between media operations and information operations is that ‘while media operations cannot control a message once it is in the hands of the media, information operations will attempt to control a message at all stages of its delivery to the target audience.’⁵¹ This distinction becomes all the more crucial at the tactical

⁴⁶ UK Army Field Manual, *Countering Insurgency*, Vol 1, Part 10 (January 2010).

⁴⁷ Interview, British NATO officer engaged in information operations, March 2009.

⁴⁸ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p.4-2.

⁴⁹ Nick Davies, *Flat Earth News: An award-winning reporter exposes falsehood, distortion and propaganda in the global media* (London: Vintage, 2008).

⁵⁰ Tony Hall, *Review of Media Access to Personnel* (June 2007).

⁵¹ UK Army Field Manual, *Countering Insurgency*, Vol 1, Part 10 (January 2010), p. 6-4.

level. Driven by the aim of influencing audiences so as to gain popular support, which the military believe will ultimately lead to financial and political support as well as the securing of resources for the institution and for future operations, the work of the information operations staff is simple. Explaining his role in information operations in Afghanistan, a British NATO officer put it this way: ‘I know you’re going to try to make me say that what I’m doing is propaganda. I won’t say that...but effectively it is.’⁵²

With this in mind, it is imperative that influence activity driven by an information operations aim is executed within strict boundaries; boundaries that do not penetrate the boundaries of media operations. Nevertheless, when looking at doctrine it is clear that such boundaries are difficult to determine, and in complex counterinsurgency campaigns they become increasingly blurred: ‘it is essential that media ops staff and info ops staff at formation level work closely together to ensure that the right message is put across to the right audiences.’⁵³ Still, army officers and military strategists stress that information operations and media operations are executed through separate lines of command. However, when looking at doctrine, this distinction is less clear. And once again, *the message* becomes pivotal. As one British officer noted: ‘We have to get the right information to the right people at the right time.’⁵⁴ Yet in the increasingly messy communication network, determining who *the right people* are and what *the right information* consists of is, as we have seen, not straightforward. And because of the increasingly uncontrollable information network, ensuring that the distinction between media operations and information operations is maintained at the tactical level might prove increasingly challenging.

Further to the notion of the relationship between media operations and information operations at theatre level, the Army Field Manual states that ‘the information operations officer cannot be double-hatted as the media ops officer/spokesman.’⁵⁵ Yet some military personnel argue that the division between media and information activity has no real meaning as influence is the only thing that matters to military

⁵² Interview, British NATO officer engaged in information operations, March 2009.

⁵³ Army Field Manual, *Countering Insurgency*, Vol. 1, Part 10 (January 2010), p. 6-4.

⁵⁴ Interview, UK Commanding Officer, Helmand, Afghanistan, March 2009.

⁵⁵ Army Field Manual, *Countering Insurgency*, Vol. 1, Part 10 (January 2010), p. 6-4.

communication activity.⁵⁶ Moreover, since doctrine identifies the media as the ‘means’ to reach target audiences, influence activity is reliant on this media for its core purpose. Therefore, if the military are to secure the communication of specific messages central to influence activity, their communication principles must meet the needs of the media. Information distributed through independent media channels is more likely to secure message legitimacy and credibility. This effectively means that the military need to demonstrate an open relationship with the media,⁵⁷ ‘[t]o avoid giving the impression that the media are being manipulated in any way, which would undermine media operations activity.’⁵⁸

Understanding the foundation upon which this approach to communication activity is established, it is critical to recognise the military’s view of the media function. The UK media in particular is not held in high regard in the British military. Citing Matthew Kaminski from the Wall Street Journal, defence doctrine notes that ‘[n]owhere in Europe are the debates so heated, the boundaries of taste so stretched or the journalists so irreverent. Two cheers then, for British Democracy.’⁵⁹ In light of this, it is perhaps not surprising that the military see the UK media as ‘more confrontational, more cynical and less deferential than many others.’⁶⁰ The military view of the news media is characterised by a number of observations, selectively reproduced here:

- The majority of the news media are involved in commercial competition for audiences.
- Many correspondents will have only limited understanding of military operations and military issues.
- The media’s perspective in any given situation will be different from that of the military.
- The mainstream media is under pressure to meet tight and fleeting deadlines where their over-riding imperative is to be first with the news.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Interview British Information Officer, NATO, March 2009.

⁵⁷ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007).

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 1-3.

⁵⁹ Matthew Kaminski, Wall Street Journal, 29 October 2004, quoted in Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 3-3.

⁶⁰ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 3-3.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 3-2.

This view of the news media and of its function, expressed in military doctrine, has not only repercussions for the strategic approach to influence activity set out in the Information Strategy, it also drives the ways in which the military understand the media's logic. It is a view fostered through the cultural traits of the military, as it defines the media as external to the military institution.

Intensified through the historical relationship between the media and the military, and underlined by the paradoxical nature of defence structures, 'here comes the enemy' is a recurring expression used by military communication staff when faced with journalists in the theatre of operation.⁶² In many respects, the media is understood as a *necessary evil* in today's campaigns. Engrained in military culture, this almost generic response to media contact contrasts the current doctrinal line, which highlights the importance of 'getting the media on board'.⁶³ Again, this illustrates the distinction between the informal and formal aspects of British military culture. Even as doctrine prescribes that the media are central to military communication efforts, the Green Book shifts responsibility onto the media, the innate tension between the two institutions is deeply engrained in the informal culture of the military. This also confirms that in order to fully understand the military approach to communication activity, it is necessary to consider and acknowledge both the explicit and the implicit sides to military institutional memory, as emphasised by Rid.⁶⁴

International Influence

The UK military recognise that public perception of military performance in wars generates assumptions and actions among audiences. In this context, and as emphasised in the subsequent discussion, the main focus of the strategic narrative is the home audience, who increasingly understands military operations through information distributed through a wide variety of media outlets. Therefore, the need to ensure coherence and demonstrate a cohesive narrative at an international level becomes as important as maintaining a shared media line at the national level. Incorporating this international factor into an operation's overall strategic narrative, in a way that satisfies each national framework, is the primary task of communication

⁶² Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009.

⁶³ *Making the News*, Defence Media Operations Centre (DMOC), training video.

⁶⁴ Rid, *War and Media Operations* (2007).

planning in international coalitions. In line with this, recent military campaigns involving multinational forces have stressed the importance of synchronising significant media themes and messages across national borders in order to avoid counter-narratives and to present a unified campaign narrative. This is particularly important in telling a story of success. The absence of counter-narratives is one of the main criteria for securing a successful strategic narrative.

This particular aspect of military operations involving international forces is also central to operational training exercises carried out within NATO auspices. Here, the different national approaches to communication come to the fore in an explicit manner. As a result of the purposefully condensed and focused exercise scenario, and the tightly constructed exercise framework, aimed at testing strategic information planning and its functions at the tactical level, national differences are exposed and analysed.⁶⁵ These distinct institutional dynamics, framed by national military cultures but forced to co-exist within multinational coalitions, demand an Information Strategy that is flexible enough to accommodate different national defence and security perspectives. This aspect of the Information Strategy is highlighted in military doctrine:

A single, integrated strategic communication plan should be the aim. This aspiration is likely to be limited by different national objectives, legal frameworks, and constitutional or cultural positions. It is likely that a coalition strategic communication plan will be modest in scope and bland in order to achieve consensus between partners. Not all partners will have national plans to fall back on, but the UK will seek to reflect the agreed coalition communication plan in its own Information Strategy.⁶⁶

Against this backdrop, and emulating British military doctrine on communication activity in general and the notion of influence activity in particular, NATO doctrine specifies the use of Influence Operations (IO) to target international, regional and local audiences:

⁶⁵ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009.

⁶⁶ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40, *Security & Stabilisation: The Military Contribution* (November 2009), p. 3-13.

Influence Operations (IO) plans, integrates, and coordinates a range of capabilities, tools, and operations to influence, affect, attack, or defend information systems, decision-making systems, and the will of decision-makers themselves.⁶⁷

Critically, international defence doctrine on *influence* adds to the blurring of the intentions and execution of influence activity. It thus allows for influence operations to target decision-makers, whereas the UK Information Strategy clearly differentiates between influencing local audiences or adversaries and political decision-makers, as outlined below. Yet since militaries are not monolithic, devising a strategic narrative that is flexible enough to satisfy distinct national interests is problematic. In recent military campaigns (Iraq and Afghanistan, in particular), broad and value-driven political objectives of ‘establishing a safe and secure environment’ have been used to devise an Information Strategy that satisfies different national interests and thus manages to unify operational and tactical messages at an international level.⁶⁸ This is in spite of the fact that the UK specific strategic narrative on Afghanistan referred only peripherally to humanitarian, peacekeeping and development aspects. Rather, the UK message on Afghanistan was largely driven by protecting homeland security – at least, at the start of the campaign.

This approach, however, is founded upon the understanding that by promoting generic, and *universally shared* values, successful international information management can be achieved through standard and broad storylines to create desired unity. Framing an operation as ‘humane’ and promoting a military mission as a ‘humanitarian’ effort support the understanding of an Information Strategy that is driven by politically generated aims and objectives. However, as noted above, and in contrast to the general international approach, in Afghanistan the UK military were driven by the aim of maintaining a storyline, which specifically promoted ‘British security’: ‘Britain’s own security is at risk if we again allow Afghanistan to become a safe haven for terrorists.’⁶⁹ Yet because of international currents adopted as part of the NATO exit strategy, this UK specific narrative was gradually being adjusted to incorporate

⁶⁷ NATO (ARRC) exercise material distributed during Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner ‘09.

⁶⁸ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner ‘09, 1-15 March 2009.

⁶⁹ UK Ministry of Defence, UK forces: Operations in Afghanistan (2013).

humanitarian aspects during the period of troop withdrawal. This *new* storyline supported an exit strategy driven by extensive peacekeeping objectives.

Naturally, operating within an international framework that aims to satisfy a number of different national perspectives weakens the UK specific message targeting the home audience. A weaker narrative, therefore, demands stronger and more sophisticated communication activity at the tactical level to ‘gain and maintain popular support’.⁷⁰ To meet such challenges, the UK military devised their own Defence Communication Strategy,⁷¹ which focuses on military-specific goals aside from, or in addition to, the cross-government approach to communication activity. Whereas the Information Strategy is driven by political objectives, the Defence Communication Strategy is guided by military aims specific to a particular operation. This defence strategy thus holds the capacity to adapt its strategic direction to each individual military operation.

Evidently, the Information Strategy promotes strong political and value-laden goals but, it lacks clear military aims which can be translated into armed activity in the theatre of conflict. The idea of employing military force to achieve political aims is problematic from a military perspective, given that political aims and military objectives are not the same and can never be the same.⁷² The Defence Communication Strategy thus contains central themes, messages and audiences pertinent to the military approach to current operational engagements. It supplements the overall politically driven strategic narrative set out in the Information Strategy and it is designed to satisfy the strategic information needs of the UK military, while still adhering to the political goals outlined cross-governmentally as part of the Comprehensive Approach. In essence, communication activity is devised within the Information Strategy at the political level, and the Defence Communication Strategy at the military level:

The Media Ops plan will be formulated within the overall campaign planning process, and will ‘dovetail’ into the Info Strategy and the strategic media and communications plan.⁷³

⁷⁰ Army Field Manual, *Countering Insurgency*, Vol. 1, Part 10 (January 2010).

⁷¹ Defence Communication Strategy (revised March 2009).

⁷² Chapter Five presents a discussion on basic military objectives, as oppose to politically driven campaign goals.

⁷³ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 4-2.

With this in mind, the Defence Communication Strategy is military specific and makes allowances for military objectives to be achieved through the principles of influence and communication activity; not as an alternative to using armed force but as a supplement to military operations. In the Defence Communication Strategy remit, demonstrating that the MOD is an ‘open Department of State committed to providing internal and external audiences with the information they need to make up their mind on Defence issues’⁷⁴ is highlighted as one of the key concerns of the British military’s strategic approach to communication planning. Yet, this particular perspective must be contested as it is not clear from doctrinal texts how the military decide what information is necessary for audiences to know or how the military intend to maintain an image of an ‘open Department of State’. Confirming the strong sense of accountability, communication activity is designed to satisfy the public *need* for information about campaign activity, while still safeguarding the military *need* for confidentiality and secrecy in relation to operational security. From a military perspective, it is vital that the military themselves are in control of the operational themes and messages to ensure support and, critically, to be seen as being in control if not of the war itself then of their contribution to the war effort, at the very least. Therefore, formulating a communication strategy that distances the soldier (and the institution) from the war itself – from political and legal justifications for military intervention – is critical to their targeting of specific audiences.

Targeting Audiences⁷⁵

Audiences, for whom strategic narratives are formed, exist as a dynamic entity in military doctrine. Here, audiences comprise five distinct categories: UK audiences (including opinion formers, dependent audiences and the general British public); the wider international audience (mainly those of allied countries); the Joint Operations Area (JOA) regional audiences; the Joint Operations Area (JOA) local audiences; and internal audiences (military members at home and on deployment).⁷⁶ While doctrine acknowledges that such categories are not absolute since they overlap, any of these groups hold the power to affect how military communication efforts are

⁷⁴ Defence Communication Strategy (revised March 2009).

⁷⁵ Part 2 of Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007) details how the UK military understand *audiences*. Parts of the discussion here builds on the views and definitions set out in this doctrine publication.

⁷⁶ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 2-1.

conceptualised and implemented during operations. Hence, managing audience perception becomes an important element in relation to strategic communication.

The military strive to target each audience individually so as to exert maximum influence in order to communicate the *right* message to the *right* audiences. From a military perspective, therefore, effective strategic narratives are made up of messages that hold the ability to target audiences at both the regional and local levels (enemies and allies) and at the national and international levels (enemies and allies). This also means that the overall strategic narrative must be broad enough to accommodate a range of particular messages that will generate support among allies while neutralising enemy propaganda. Positive storylines are thus critical to the military aim of targeting audiences, which requires military communication staff to maintain the overall initiative:

...the Media Ops staff should endeavour to maintain the initiative by generating a constant flow of positive and accurate newsworthy material to meet the media's search for stories and images. Information vacuums should be avoided as they can hand the initiative to the media and may lead to the highlighting of negative aspects of the Campaign.⁷⁷

The increase in communication activity during the Afghanistan campaign, as noted above, demonstrated the importance of advancing *positive* and favourable narratives that yield domestic support. This is particularly significant as a mechanism for protecting military objectives and limiting external influences, such as media speculation. Therefore, even as the military recognise that their communication activity must accommodate the gathering needs of the media,⁷⁸ it is primarily with audiences in mind that they construct themes and messages pertinent to the Information Strategy: '[t]he media is a key body (the 'Means') by which opinion is shaped with theatre, national and international audiences.'⁷⁹ In line with this, the military acknowledge that they 'must make [their] narrative compelling, and use all

⁷⁷ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 3-2.

⁷⁸ This is particularly clear from the discussion on media facilitation in the subsequent chapter.

⁷⁹ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. v.

available means to deliver it, if it is to reach an audience that is bombarded with information 24 hours a day from a vast array of sources.’⁸⁰

This is particularly relevant in an increasingly messy information environment where controlling the message has become largely impossible. Hence, competing messages are a growing concern for military communication activity as alternative media outlets are often situated within the vicinity of the different audience groups. This means that they tend to be more attuned to the expectations of the audience. Another concern lies in the question of whether the military are capable of attuning their messaging to the cultural, religious, political and regional values of theatre level audiences. Therefore, the notion of *audience* has immense repercussions for the ways in which the military manage the different types of information about their activities released to sources external to their institution.

As we have seen, the military group their target audiences in broad, overlapping and fluid categories. And even as potential audience responses are difficult for the military to control, such responses are critical in the construction of the strategic narrative. The focus on popular support, and on securing resources, forces the military to plan their communication activity according to the expectations and values of largely imagined target audiences. Evidently, this creates a number of problems. First, when an operation is underway all audiences have to be addressed simultaneously. This does not mean, however, that the same themes and messages are used to target all audience groups. Quite the opposite, in fact.

The aim of Media Ops (Ways) is to provide information to a number of audiences (Ends) via the media (Means) in support of the UK Info Strategy. Successful Media Ops convey accurate and timely information as well as the right message to the right audiences.⁸¹

The military thus aim to construct targeted storylines for each audience category,⁸² which is particularly challenging in war amongst the people. The nature of war amongst the people means that the distinction between enemy and ally has become

⁸⁰ Defence Communication Strategy (revised March 2009).

⁸¹ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 2-1.

⁸² Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009.

increasingly blurred. In line with this, media operations and information operations have to target audiences at both the regional and local levels as well as at the national and international levels, whilst remaining distinct. Determining where information operations stop and media operations begin has thus become increasingly challenging.

Second, in order to shape audiences' perceptions of campaign activity the military need to understand the expectations and values of these multiple publics. Given their indirect relationship with their audiences (because they are primarily targeted through independent media) it is inherently difficult for the military to determine the composition of these categories. This makes targeting the expectations of audiences difficult, as predictions about which themes and messages will generate popular support are founded upon a supposed reality and not on identified truths. In most cases, dominant and politically generated strategic narratives are thus adopted to communicate meaning.

Therefore, the manner of constructing a narrative that is broad enough to satisfy individual national interests within a coalition holds multiple purposes. Generic themes and messages are vague, yet their broad nature helps to construct a narrative that most audiences (enemies and allies) are unlikely to contest or oppose. In addition, these tactics are also beneficial to the military in removing themselves from the war. If the messaging has been constructed at the political level, the military have the opportunity to renounce ownership without losing credibility. This is particularly useful if a particular narrative turns out to be flawed or unsuccessful.

Against this backdrop and if taking one step back, it is clear that the media are not the target of military communication activity. Rather, the media function as a vehicle for influencing audience attitudes and perceptions. But because the term 'audience' is a largely fluid and dynamic entity in military doctrine, the composition of different envisioned audience categories is based on the military's general understanding of such an audience. Within this framework, military strategic communication specialists Lee Rowland and Steve Tatham call for clear Target Audience Analysis (TAA)⁸³ to

⁸³ Target Audience Analysis is defined as: 'the systematic study of the population and environment of a target audience to enhance the understanding of a military psychological environment' (Army Field Manual, 'Countering Insurgency', p. 6-7).

be at the heart of any military operation. According to them, understanding the audience is critical to understanding how relevant messages are employed to influence attitudes and behaviours. However, they also stress that the military are not equipped or trained to undertake the necessary analysis. They argue that a fundamental weakness of current doctrine is that it builds false expectations.⁸⁴

In the latest UK Army Field Manual, however, *target audience* is understood to be pivotal to military communication:

Accurate identification and definition of the target audience is at the core of influence activity. The target audience may be an individual, an organisation or a section of society. The objective is to modify or reinforce opinion, position or prejudice of the group; activities that requires in-depth knowledge of the target audience. It is essential to identify the way that the target audience will be influenced.⁸⁵

Seen in light of Rowland and Tatham's assertions, the military understanding of audience rests upon vague and unsubstantiated belief-systems. And because the composition of audience categories builds on abstract knowledge, the objectives set out in doctrine are devoid of any critical examination. This is important, and may prove damaging to the military in the long run, especially in a context where 'understanding the audience is the beginning and end of all military influence endeavours.'⁸⁶ Executing functional and effective TAA in established and rigid military structures is thus not straightforward. One thing is to compose sophisticated doctrine, another and much more complex process is to implement such mechanisms into workable defence structures. As noted in Chapter One, doctrinal verities do not necessarily lead to effective tactical level activity.

Nevertheless, in an attempt to categorise their target audiences, for whom themes and messages are generated, the military devise five main groups. Depending on the operation and the strategic narrative any of these groups can affect how communication activity is conceptualised and implemented during operations.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Rowland and Tatham, 'Strategic Communication & Influence Operations' (2010).

⁸⁵ UK Army Field Manual, *Countering Insurgency*, Vol 1, Part 10 (January 2010), p. 6-6.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 2.

⁸⁷ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007).

Ultimately, this means that it is the expectations and values of the audiences and their perception of the military effort that determine the strategic approach to communication activity.

UK Audiences

First, at the politically driven strategic level, the UK audience is seen as the main target for communication and influence activity. Comprising a number of sub-categories, the UK audience is made up of the general domestic audience and the dependent audience.⁸⁸ Within this group, the principal sub-category comprises opinion formers, which are identified as the ‘most influential audience’.⁸⁹ The category includes a minor group of UK politicians, who hold the political and the financial power to effectively support military campaign activity. Central to strategic planning of military operations, this audience group is also made up of ‘members of think-tanks, academics, analysts and journalists.’⁹⁰ Political and financial backing, secured through functional communication activity, constitutes military success. Support from influential decision-makers and stakeholders, who hold the power to affect the direction of government and who can influence policy decision, is seen by the military as the ultimate goal of communication and influence activity.

Yet before moving onto the general domestic audience, it is interesting to note that the military list ‘journalists’ as one of their primary audiences. This should of course be seen in relation to the reality that journalists and the media in general hold the capacity to influence audiences and effectively oppose military constructed themes and messages. This assertion thus leads us to reconsider the clear distinction between *media* and *audience*. It conflicts with the idea that the media are not the target of communication activity, but that they are used as ‘the means’ through which specific audiences are reached. Doctrine thus reveals the extent to which some influential journalists can be targeted through communication activity. This problematizes what the military consider ‘the media’, as further discussed in subsequent chapters.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 2-1.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Even as the primary audience group comprises powerful opinion formers and political decision-makers, the military are not ignorant to the importance of general public opinion and the impact that this can have on political decision-making processes. Large parts of the military communication framework is concerned with gaining and upholding support within the broader UK population. This is particularly evident in relation to public accountability. Effectively, the military believe that support from the public – from the electorate – is instrumental in securing political and financial backing. And since most members of the electorate are dependent on the media for information about campaign activity, the media become critical to defence communication. Therefore, from a military perspective, positive responses to their operational achievements within the home audience help legitimise their exercise. Accepting this reasoning means that military accountability to the government and to the electorate is enacted (at least partially) through communication activity, and thus also through the media.

Furthermore, domestic support is also critical in the upholding of morale among the troops. This is critical for their ‘will to fight’, as noted by Smith in *The Utility of Force*.⁹¹ Therefore, in addition to the general home audience and powerful opinion formers, military doctrine specifies the importance of targeting, and being sensitive to, the requirements of the dependent audience. Because they hold a key position in affecting the morale of the individual service member, the military have put in place clear lines of communication between the deployed troops on the frontline and their friends and families on the home front, as exemplified here by one Intelligence Officer:

News of casualties goes through a very well established chain with set procedures. Everyone has a nominated next of kin who gets called in the event of anything bad happening. While the families are being tracked down all phone lines and internet links are cut to avoid the family/press hearing through other means. This system works both ways, so if something bad happens to a family member one will get sent home on compassionate leave.⁹²

⁹¹ Smith, *Utility of Force* (2005).

⁹² Email correspondence, UK Intelligence Officer (Helmand, Afghanistan), January-February 2009.

In addition to this, increased scrutiny and fast-paced media, enabled through new information technology, have forced the military to transform the ways by which they communicate with the dependent audience. Discussed in detail in Chapter Seven, it is clear that new communication channels from the frontline to the home front have been put in place to meet the challenges posed by the new media environment. This is critical as fast-paced and 24-hour media continue to penetrate military structures.

International Audiences

Noted in the *Future Character of Conflict* paper,⁹³ and discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, the British military are unlikely to take part in campaign activity without relying on international allies. In this respect, the international audience is identified by the military as both strategically and tactically important. This is also identified in communication doctrine: ‘success may well depend on continuing political support among ‘friendly’ audiences abroad, which will necessarily form a key target audience for the Info Strategy.’⁹⁴

Reflecting the discussion in relation to influence activity at an international level, referred to above, the international aspect of audience support broadens the scope of the Information Strategy. In this regard, it is important that the UK approach to information is streamlined with NATO doctrine, in the same way as the structures of UK military communication must be flexible enough to include the working practices of coalition partners.⁹⁵ This is necessary for a consistent distribution of information and a unification of strategically sound and consistent messaging. Broadening the tenet of the CA to include coalition partners, it is imperative that communication activity unifies information output within the alliance.

The most likely scenario for military action by UK forces at the medium or large-scale of operations will be as part of a coalition. In these cases, not only is it important to maintain a common media line at the national level, but also, it is equally important to ensure international cohesion and present a unified message.⁹⁶

⁹³ For a discussion on the internationalisation of conflict see: Development Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), ‘Future Character of Conflict’ (3 February 2010).

⁹⁴ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 2-2.

⁹⁵ Development Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC) ‘Future Character of Conflict’ (3 February 2010).

⁹⁶ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 4-4.

As will become apparent, this was particularly critical in a conflict driven by *exit* and a search for a plausible end-game strategy. In particular, this also led the British military to emphasise the need for the coordination of information, across national boundaries:

Recent campaigns have highlighted the need to coordinate key media themes and messages and to avoid exposing differences and so prevent their exploitation. In the first instance, this will be achieved at the Strategic level by close liaison between governments but Media Ops Staff, at each level, are required to engage with multinational partners, at an equivalent level, in order to discuss and agree upon a set of shared themes and messages. National differences will always remain but liaison must expose these differences and, where the divergence is significant and potentially damaging, these issues should be raised to the highest level necessary to achieve a satisfactory resolution.⁹⁷

Against this backdrop, it is evident that a significant aspect of communication activity is to make sure that the joint messages are upheld throughout the coalition, in order to avoid giving the media any opportunity to question coalition unity and internal workings.⁹⁸

Joint Operations Area Regional Audiences

In addition to coalition audiences, military doctrine specifies the wider international audience as a key sub-group. The international scope and technologically driven media environment mean that different target audiences on the international stage have access to a number of the same media outlets.

In a crisis there is a relentless and unforgiving trend towards an ever greater information transparency. In the most remote and hostile locations of the globe, hundreds of millions of electronic eyes and ears are creating a capacity for scrutiny and new demands of accountability.⁹⁹

Illustrated here by BBC news presenter and author of *Skyful of Lies*, Nik Gowing, the new complex media and war landscapes place greater demands on military structures to meet the challenges posed by these dynamic environments. A key target in this

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 4-4.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Gowing, 'Skyful of Lies' and Black Swans (2009), p. 1.

regard is the regional audience; identified by the British military as comprising the primary tactical level audience.¹⁰⁰ According to Smith, in wars amongst the people it is this tactical level audience that becomes the immediate spectators of the war in the theatre of operations.¹⁰¹ Communication activity is thus critical in ensuring that the right information and messages are available to this strategically and tactically sensitive regional audience within the JOA:

Depending on the nature of the operation, the audience in countries neighbouring the Joint Operations Area (JOA) could be considered either as the adversary's allies or part of the coalition audience or the wider international audience.¹⁰²

The multi-dimensional composition of this particular group makes it vital for the military to plan and execute influence that reflects not only the nature of the operation but also the composition of the regional audience. Demonstrating the difficulty in maintaining a visible distinction between media operations and information operations, most influence work taking place at the regional level falls within the scope of information operations. However, the individual boundaries of media operations, on the one hand, and of information operations, on the other, are not clearly defined in relation to tactical level operations. And given the fact that these boundaries are becoming increasingly blurred due to the fast-moving information environment, the distinction becomes ever more difficult to determine in relation to the theatre level audience.

Joint Operations Area Local Audiences

Coordinated alongside each other, media operations and information operations are also critical to influencing the perceptions generated within the local audience. Even as this target audience is mainly dealt with at the level of information operations, military doctrine states that: 'Close coordination of Media Ops and Info Ops activity is particularly important at the tactical level, whilst maintaining a distinction between the two.'¹⁰³ Therefore, reflecting the discussion in the previous section, which questioned the willingness of the military to keep the lines of media operations and

¹⁰⁰ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 2-2.

¹⁰¹ Smith, *Utility of Force* (2005).

¹⁰² Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 2-2.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 2-3.

information operations separate, an analysis of the tactical level audience clearly demonstrates the problems inherent in military organisational structures on influence activity.

Critical to influence activity at this level is the notion of *counter influence*. Recognising that the insurgents have an elaborate propaganda machine aimed at securing the support of local audiences, the military state that they need to put in place ‘a counter propaganda plan’.¹⁰⁴ This is particularly important in an environment where the adversary is becoming increasingly media-aware with sophisticated communication equipment at their disposal, as noted here by leading theorist on counterinsurgency, David Kilcullen:

We typically design physical operations first, then craft supporting information operations to explain our actions. This is the reverse of al-Qaida’s approach. For all our professionalism, compared to the enemy’s, our public information is an afterthought. In military terms, for al-Qaida the ‘main effort’ is information; for us, information is a ‘supporting effort’.¹⁰⁵

Building on this knowledge military doctrine places great weight on the ability to construct a distinct narrative aimed at this tactical level audience. In counterinsurgency campaigns information becomes the key to *influence*. As such, the UK Army Field Manual sets out clear guidance on how to counter enemy propaganda at the tactical level. This includes:

- Go on the information offensive by exploiting the weakness in the insurgent’s narrative. Being ‘first with the truth’ requires a proactive media cell. Build up evidence that the insurgent’s messages are inaccurate.
- Emphasise that the population will be protected rather than abandoned.
- Strengthen the credibility of the counter propaganda message by using trusted local leaders and local media.
- Use electronic measures to attack the insurgent’s ability to deliver his message through radio, TV and the Internet.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ UK Army Field Manual, *Countering Insurgency*, Vol 1, Part 10 (January 2010), p. 6-11.

¹⁰⁵ David Kilcullen, ‘New Paradigms for 21st Century Conflict’, quoted in Tatham, *Strategic Communication: A Primer* (2008), p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ UK Army Field Manual, *Countering Insurgency*, Vol 1, Part 10 (January 2010), p. 6-11.

Internal Audiences

Demonstrated by the discussion in the following chapters, deployed Service personnel become keen media consumers, pushing the military to transform their communication structures to meet this internal pressure.¹⁰⁷ Mainly due to political resistance, the military have been slow to integrate digital communication technology and social networking tools into their institutional communication structure. In line with this, one MOD Chief Press Officer highlights that there is a constant internal battle to get strategic level officers and policy-makers to understand the benefits of online engagement.¹⁰⁸ This is critical. Due to the hierarchical nature of military culture, and in order for new and rapidly developing communication technology to be incorporated into military structures, it must be endorsed and implemented at the highest level before filtering down to the tactical, battlefield level. Here, political resistance and conservative military structures thus act as a brake on military communication mechanisms.

However, the fact that Service personnel have rapidly adopted new communication technologies when these have been introduced, has forced the military to change their policies on such technologies. In 2007, the defence community introduced the Online Engagement Strategy.¹⁰⁹ And more recently, the Social Media Hub¹¹⁰ was launched as an attempt to engage directly with the different target audience groups. Furthermore, as stated in communication doctrine ‘on operations, deployed Service personnel become avid news watchers/listeners/readers, turning into Satellite TV, BBC World Service and the Internet.’¹¹¹ This is also confirmed by one Intelligence Officer in the British Army:

We try to follow the news but it’s difficult when out on patrol, which could last from between one to five weeks. When out we basically don’t get any news. When in camp there are papers, usually about a week old by the time they reach us, so we have a chance to catch up on old news. Also the Army has its own TV channel called BFBS which does

¹⁰⁷ This is particularly relevant in relation to online engagement, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven. As deployed soldiers are becoming increasingly dependent on new media technology to receive information about the operation in which they are involved, the military are forced to transform their online engagement strategy to meet such challenges.

¹⁰⁸ Interview, MOD Chief Press Officer, April 2011.

¹⁰⁹ Defence Online Engagement Strategy (August 2007).

¹¹⁰ Social Media Hub: <http://www.blogs.mod.uk/homepage.html>

¹¹¹ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 2-3.

news but with a defence angle, so tends to be a little more glowing about what we do than regular media. There's also Sky news 24 and BBC 24 when in camp, so it is very possible to stay in touch.¹¹²

Deployed forces are able to follow military activity as it unfolds through the media. At the same time, they are surrounded by the realities of it. This fact has also pushed the military to consider the effect on this internal audience. Military documentation states that 'Media Ops staff should be sensitive to the effects of media coverage on the Service personnel in the Joint Operations Area (JOA);'¹¹³ thus acknowledging the need to consider the effect of media influence on deployed service personnel and identifying this internal audience as key to military success and campaign progress.

Conclusions

This chapter has confirmed the importance of doctrine in relation to military media management, whilst raising questions about its practical application. It has shown that whilst doctrine is shaped by the culture in which it exists, it continues to play a critical part in shaping military communication activity itself. However, the discussion has also revealed that whereas the military rely on doctrine for establishing a framework for engaging with the media, the extent to which such a doctrinal framework can be translated into tactical aims and objectives is less clear. To this end, the chapter has demonstrated the strong political currents embedded in doctrinal discourses. Understanding these currents as critical to the military's approach to communication activity is important, even more so when seen in the context of the discussion that follows in the subsequent chapter; the notion that political aims and military objectives are never the same.

The overall key findings uncovered in this chapter centre round the extensive media awareness emerging within the military institution. By focusing on military communication doctrine, the discussion has cemented the strong media theoretical work being done within military academies and developed by specialised communication units within the MOD. Media engagement has become a key component of campaign planning and execution. Along with the wide-ranging

¹¹² Email correspondence, Intelligence Officer (Helmand, Afghanistan), January-February 2009.

¹¹³ Joint Discussion Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007).

integration of strategic communication principles into the heart of British military doctrine, the chapter has shown this to be indicative of a shift in UK military thinking from exclusively focusing on kinetic effects to incorporating *non*-kinetic effects. This notion of a shift in military thinking is also evident from the growing focus on influence activity within UK defence structures, exemplified here. It reflects a change in the ways in which the military approach campaign activity. Demonstrated in subsequent chapters, this shift has repercussions for those involved in military affairs. It has repercussions for military doctrine, and it has repercussions for the ways in which strategic narratives are developed and expressed.

Another key finding of this chapter should be found in the subtle distinction between media operations and information operations; a distinction that is critical to the forthcoming analysis. Whilst media operations are directed towards using the media to reach distant target audiences, information operations are employed to influence the immediate audience present in the theatre of operations. It is thus important that the two modes of operations are executed separately, to avoid giving the impression that the media are being manipulated by information operations strategies. Yet as demonstrated in this chapter, by incorporating influence activity into campaign planning the military establish a (theoretical) framework within which media operations and information operations can be executed alongside each other. The impact of this is examined in subsequent chapters.

This chapter has also shown the extent to which strategic communication is driven by a quest to foster attitudinal and behavioural change among target audiences. It has demonstrated the central positioning of target audiences in military doctrine, whilst also stressing the fact that the military have a distanced relationship with such audiences. Effectively, this means that, although the notion of target audiences requires the military to attune their messaging to the expectations of such audiences for whom strategic narratives are constructed, the military have only an *imagined* understanding of audience expectations. The military's distanced relationship with their target audiences means that military communication is based on anticipated audience responses. As we have seen, because they cannot determine the specific effect of their communication efforts on audience behaviour, given that audiences have access to an array of other sources than the military, the role of the audience must be taken into

account in all military operations. As a result, the audience can no longer be understood as only an observer of campaign activity. Now, the audience has come to play a central role in the manner in which military operations are planned, executed and communicated. Therefore, as the discussion in this chapter has shown, it is with audiences in mind that the British military conduct communication activity, it is with audiences in mind that they engage in influence activities, and it is with audiences in mind that they construct strategic narratives.

Chapter Five

Organising Military Communication

The information environment is just as much a part of the battlespace as the physical environment, and commanders at all levels must plan to operate in both environments simultaneously.

Lt General Odierno
Commander Multi-national Corps Iraq, Nov. 2007.

Traditionally in the course of conventional operations we use information operations to explain what we are doing, but in COIN¹ we should design operations to enact our influence campaign.

David Kilcullen
Senior Counterinsurgency Advisor to Gen. Patraeus, Iraq.

This chapter traces the large scale structure in place to direct British military communication activity. Acknowledging the growing scale of strategic communication and the extensive use of strategic narratives, it offers a descriptive overview of the structures and organisation of this rapidly escalating phenomenon; from media operations at the tactical level to the Information Strategy at the strategic level. It builds its framework on the organisational structure identified in defence doctrine. Moving beyond the prevailing British military understanding of influence and strategic communication in the context of communication activity, set out in the previous chapter, the present chapter also considers in more detail what the military attempt to achieve through the use of influence and the generation of strategic narratives. It is thus dedicated to assessing how the military organise communication

¹ COunterINsurgency.

activity, particularly in relation to identified external factors and specific audiences. In so doing, the chapter sets out the basic military institutional objectives as defined by the military themselves. Recognising previously documented discrepancies between defence aims and political goals, the UK armed forces identify their own institutional objectives as distinct from – but still in compliance with – political aims. This is important as both media facilitation at the tactical level and constructed strategic narratives are driven by military specific objectives but directed by political goals. This testifies to the paradoxical nature of the military institution; it is directed by political aims but constitutes an organisation with its own objectives and identity. A reality that is often ignored in much war and media literature.

Three Levels of Military Communication²

Based on doctrinal texts and framed within the innate culture of the UK armed forces, the following discussion allows for an understanding of the structure of military communication activity, as seen through the formal and informal cultural traits of the British military. Therefore, and because of the paradoxical nature of the military institution, the organisational structure of communication activity is driven by both political and military specific directions. Organised over three distinct, but interlinked, levels – strategic, operational and tactical – each separate level exists within either political and/or military frameworks.

As we discovered in the previous chapter, military communication activity is organised around the notion that the media are the ‘means’ through which target audiences can be reached through particular modes of influencing tactics and executed through either media operations or information operations. Furthermore, the rigid structure, through which communication activity is performed, testifies to both the cultural traits of the military and the legal constraints defining military-media relations, set out in Chapter One. The structure of communication activity is thus not only a military instrument used to ensure coherence and consistency in the messaging at the national and international level, it is also a political vehicle in the sense that it

² Chapters 4 and 5 of Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007) document the military understanding of the tactical, operational and strategic levels of media operations. The discussion presented here builds on this understanding.

aims to safeguard political achievements as part of the government's strategic objectives.³

Against this backdrop, military communication is directed at the highest (political-strategic) level of the organisational structure. In addition, commanders are increasingly expected to ensure support for and understanding of the military campaign by developing 'an appropriate narrative for each audience.'⁴ Communication activity therefore provides 'a vital link between military operations on the ground, and understanding from the general public back home.'⁵ Strategic communication and the strategic narrative have thus become important vehicles in the exploitation of the media in mobilising support for campaign activity.

By complying with the government-wide Information Strategy,⁶ the military structure their communication activity around advancing intended messages, demonstrating military success and targeting specific audiences by employing all information channels available. As such, military communication becomes the tool with which military-political aims are promoted and challenged. The structured institutional processes through which communication activity comes into existence reveal both military and political aspects of defence procedures. Therefore, characteristics of military practice, the vertical structure, the hierarchical culture and the character of the individual soldier, are also significant aspects of the dissemination, collaboration and organisation of strategic communication within the military organisation.

Strategic, Operational, Tactical

Positioned at the highest level in the UK Ministry of Defence, the politically-driven strategic approach to communication is framed within the previously discussed

³ Sir Lawrence Freedman has been instrumental in raising awareness of the use of purposely constructed and politically generated narratives to secure the support of the electorate. See, for instance: Lawrence Freedman, 'Networks, Culture and Narratives', *The Adelphi Papers* 379 (London: Routledge for IISS, 2006), pp. 11-26; Lawrence Freedman, 'The Age of Liberal Wars,' in David Armstrong, Theo Farrell and Bice Maiguashca (eds.) *Force and Legitimacy in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) pp. 93-115; and Lawrence Freedman, 'The Transformation of Strategic Affairs', *The Adelphi Papers* 379 (London: Routledge for IISS, 2006).

⁴ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-40, *Security & Stabilisation: The Military Contribution* (November 2009), p. 3-8.

⁵ British Army, 'Media Operations' (http://www.army.mod.uk/mog_v/13259.aspx#).

⁶ The Information Strategy is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Information Strategy. At this level, the importance of formulating a strategic narrative that is likely to establish coherence and consistency throughout the information system is critical. This is also recognised in doctrinal papers, which reflect proactive as well as reactive aspects of military communication, and where information management is described as:

‘a coherent, consistent narrative and context within which successful achievement of objectives [can] be recorded and reported by a wide range of audiences and which [will] enable successful rebuttal of hostile or false information.’⁷

When a crisis occurs, a media cell⁸ is established within the politically directed Defence Crisis Management Organisation (DCMO)⁹ to devise the overall strategic narrative and to manage media responses. On a broad scale, the DCMO’s primary task is to strategically organise the military’s reaction to any crisis. In so doing, it advises ministers on responding to media enquiries as well as co-ordinating crisis management procedures on the ground. The reality that a specialised communications cell is placed within the scope of the DCMO and physically placed within the Defence Crisis Management Centre (DCMC) confirms the critical positioning of communication activity at the strategic level of military operations. It also confirms the military’s growing awareness of the media’s function in crisis situations.

Yet this structure reveals another paradox. The previously media-friendly focus on promoting a narrative of conventional and straightforward military engagement is ill fitted to portray the role of peacekeeping and humanitarianism.¹⁰ To aid the transition, from concentrating on traditional storylines of war-fighting to incorporating humanitarian discourses, communication activity is organised centrally by the Directorate Media Communication (DMC). As the head of all military media and communication activity – from strategic planning to tactical execution – the DMC’s main objective is to ensure that the strategic approach to communication is clear and

⁷ Joint Discussion Note 4/06, *Information Management* (June 2006).

⁸ The media operations cell is part of the Directorate Media Communication (DMC), which is the central hub for all strategic media operational planning.

⁹ The DCMO is identified in the Comprehensive Approach as key to cross-government transformation towards cohesion and unity. Managing information flow during times of crises is the primary task of the DCMO.

¹⁰ See the following two chapters for a wider discussion on the transformation of the strategic narrative in relation to Afghanistan exit strategy.

effective in order for it to be translated into tactical level storytelling. In general terms, the DMC is in charge of every aspect of external as well as internal communication activity linked to military operations. This is particularly demonstrated by the five distinct media and communications directorates set up within the DMC: Directorate of Communication Planning (DCP), in charge of handling all strategic communications planning within the Ministry of Defence; Director of News (D News), in charge of dealing with particular news events or announcements; Directorate of Operational Planning (D Op), in charge of planning media output specific to certain operations; Online Engagement, responsible for engaging the public, the media and the internal audience in military affairs through the online medium; and Directorate of Defence Public Relations (D Def PR), in charge of long-term interaction with all media.¹¹ Together these distinct directorates cover every aspect of the military communication hierarchy.

Cohesion in messaging is perhaps the most critical aspect of communication activity at the strategic level. Here, the importance of ensuring that all lines of command and all corners of the defence community remain updated on *the media message* determines most, if not all, policy papers:

At all stages, careful coordination of contact between the media, the MOD and the wider UK Armed Forces community is vital to engender accurate reporting and to build trust. Accordingly, on matters of political and strategic importance, the 2 principal sources of news and information, D News and/or the Joint Task Force Commander (JTFC) may communicate directly with the media while keeping PJHQ, each other, and the chain of command fully informed about what has been said and why.¹²

This strategic approach, which encompasses all aspects of the military communication structure, reveals a system founded upon an unprecedented level of information control; from dedicated public relations units to new online engagement principles. Evidently, the aim of such an all-encompassing communication structure is to dominate the campaign storyline being told by the military themselves, and crucially, communicated through the media. At first glance, this may indeed satisfy Hall's

¹¹ *Contact with the Media and Communicating in Public* (November 2008).

¹² Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 4-3.

assertion that the military should ‘control their own narrative’.¹³ However, when looking at the manner in which distinct directorates are launched so as to manage every aspect of the military communication framework, a different picture emerges; a picture which tells a story of a military not only trying to manage their own narrative, but also the level of scrutiny by the media.¹⁴ Again, this is supported by Willcox’s criticism of the manner in which the British military have shifted responsibility onto the media, as discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis.

As such D News is responsible for the overall management of information for the media, and for developing functional and effective guidelines and notices expected to advance military-media relations. The D News directorate thus outlines strategically sound instructions in compliance with the overall campaign narrative set out in the Information Strategy, as well as coordinating and synchronising information output.¹⁵ Any release of information to the media is thus co-ordinated by D News through the Defence Press Office (DPO) and supported by the other four DMC directorates.

When moving from the purely politically driven strategic level to the combined military and politically directed operational level, military communication activity takes on a different form. Here, strategic directives are operationalized for tactical employment. Importantly, the focus of communication at this level, centres round translating politically generated instructions into workable military systems of operation; from strategic D News notices to tactical level guidelines used by the JTFC. It is thus in the hands of the operational communications staff to bridge the gap between strategic aims and tactical level procedures. In most cases, this is one of the most challenging tasks within the overall communication structure.¹⁶ Here, the dual aspect of the military institution, being accountable to Parliament but driven by military specific objectives, becomes particularly clear. Therefore, it is at the operational level that the strategic narrative is given military substance.

¹³ Hall, *Review of Media Access to Personnel* (2007).

¹⁴ This contention should also be seen in light of the requirements set out in the MOD Green Book, discussed in Chapter Two.

¹⁵ Interview, MOD Chief Press Officer, April 2011, and documented in Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007).

¹⁶ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007).

The operational level of the military communication structure – managed at the military-driven Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) in Northwood, London – is also in charge of translating strategic directives into military messaging and ground-level media approaches.¹⁷ The purpose of the PJHQ communication branch is to:

Plan, deploy and direct Media Ops capability to support operational commanders and the Permanent Joint Operations Bases (PJOBS), in order to support HMG's strategic Information Strategy(s).¹⁸

Communication activity in the PJHQ thus provides a direct link to the tactical level Joint Task Force Headquarters (JTFHQ) in the theatre of operations.¹⁹ Yet it is important to note that communication staff in the PJHQ does not communicate directly with the media as this is done by the Defence Press Office (DPO).²⁰ Media interaction thus only takes place at two levels in the military organisational structure, at the strategic (above) level and at the tactical (below) level.²¹

The PJHQ comprises both a strategic communication and a media operational branch. However, while the strategic branch has a political aim, the media branch is run with a military operational objective. Between these two levels, the Joint Media Operations Teams (JMOTs) – based at the Defence Media Operations Centre (DMOC) – are deployed to the JTFHQ as an 'early engagement' media component. According to the MOD Green Book, the main role of a deployed JMOT is its ability to enter an operation at an early stage, which can pave the way for the establishment of a more long-lasting media component.²² On balance, it is evident that the capability of JMOTs to meet the needs of the media at the start of an operation is critical. It helps the media gather information about campaign activity in the days after the launch of an operation. This can be particularly useful in cases where the media have not been given much warning. However, if we turn the argument it is clear that the 'early engagement' function of JMOTs also testifies to the military's desire to manage information coming from the theatre of operation. Therefore, while the JMOT capability to provide media

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 5-2.

¹⁹ Observational data, PJHQ Northwood, 7-14 April 2010.

²⁰ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 4-5.

²¹ Ibid.

²² MOD Green Book, *MOD Working Arrangements with the Media* (November 2008).

facilitation is explicitly documented in doctrine, its function in the management of campaign information flows is less recognised.

Offering a final level to consider in the large-scale, three stage, organisational communication structure, the JTFHQ is responsible for tactical level communication activity. Situated within the deployment area, this is where most media interaction happens. It is thus within the deployment area that the MOD Green Book plays an increasingly significant role. While it is the responsibility of the operational communications staff to translate strategic communication directives at the operational level, it is the responsibility of the communication personnel at the JTFHQ to interpret the objectives set out at the operational level in the PJHQ and to translate them into practical planning and execution in the deployment area.²³

The capability of tactical level communication and media operations centres round six distinctive elements:

1. The JTFHQ Media Ops staff.
2. A Press Information Centre (PIC).
3. A Combat Camera Team capability (CCT).
4. Media Production Team (MPT).
5. Military escorts for the media.
6. Administrative and logistic support personnel.²⁴

Planning informed media responses, advising military personnel on central messaging and coordinating the flow of information from the theatre of operation are, therefore, key tasks performed by the tactical level communications staff.²⁵ In overall terms, it is the challenging job of this staff; to ensure that the strategic objectives set out in the Information Strategy are executed on the ground, through established media facilities.

²³ Observational data, PJHQ Northwood, 7-14 April 2010; and documented in Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007).

²⁴ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 5-3.

²⁵ Ibid.

With media facilitation being at the heart of tactical level communication activity, the Press Information Centre (PIC) serves as the central hub for military-media interaction in the theatre of operation. Yet in order to gain access to such media facilitation, reporters have to be registered with the PIC. As noted in Chapter Two, this kind of accreditation is facilitated through the UK Ministry of Defence. Effectively,



Image 5.1: Press Information Centre (PIC), exercise scenario, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09 (ARRC, NATO).

Personal photo.

this means that who will gain access to theatre level PICs is solely in the hands of the strategic level military communications staff, at the top of the hierarchical structure. As is perhaps to be expected, the military are in complete control of who and how many reporters are allowed to access the PICs within the Joint Operations Area (JOA). The main point about these centres is that they provide the military with a specific location for where military communications staff can interact with reporters. Therefore, through such facilitation the military aim to disseminate storylines which they believe will appeal to target audiences at home.²⁶ This is confirmed by an ex-media minder during operations in Kosovo and Iraq, supplying the media with *good* stories of on-going campaigns is the prime function of the PIC staff:

I wrote loads of articles for commanders, press releases etc, but the problem was finding real stories of interest. Which you can't of course, the media will get them themselves. All the commanders want you to do is send home to local papers 'home town' stories of lads and lasses grinning at the camera saying how great it is and they look forward to coming home. So all I did was dedicate myself to looking after media and taking all their flak as they struggled to get near stories.²⁷

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Email correspondence, ex-media operations branch press officer, April 2011.

Military communications staff within the PIC thus spend a lot of time assessing their strategic communication approach and evaluating the effectiveness of the strategic narrative. In charge of dealing with the media at the tactical level, these press centres take care of everyday media requests in the theatre of operation and supply information to media representatives in the battlefield, 24 hours a day.²⁸

Still, the press centre is not an isolated entity but it works alongside, and in frequent liaison with, the JTFHQ, the PJHQ and other press centres set up in the JOA. As noted above, and as an example of some of the work carried out by communications staff based at these press centres, military doctrine specifies the use of Combat Camera Teams (CCTs) and Media Production Teams (MPTs). The MPTs are critical to supplying the media with positive stories through selected material, as they gather, process and package visual imagery and video footage for use by the media:²⁹ ‘[o]ften when you see “MOD pictures” on the TV screen, those images will have been collected by a CCT and distributed to the media outlets.’³⁰ Therefore, in



Image 5.2: *Combat Camera Team Videographer at Work in Afghanistan.* ‘Pictured is a Media Operations officer working from PB (Patrol Base) Almas and filming during operations in the Green Zone on Op Herrick 12’.

Photographer:
LA(PHOT) Si Ethell

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²⁸ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009.

²⁹ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007).

³⁰ From the MOG(V) page on the British Army Website (http://www.army.mod.uk/mog_v/13259.aspx#).

operationalizing military doctrine, practical facilitation such as CCTs and MPTs are put in place to collect and produce pre-packed *campaign information bundles* for the use by the media.

Consequently, in the absence of independent access to frontline campaign activity in Helmand and as a result of a decline in resources for mainstream media, news organisations are more often than not willing to use interviews with soldiers gathered by army press officers, or video shot by the military's CCTs and pre-packed by the MPTs.³¹ With ultimate editorial control over the content, military footage and photography are particularly beneficial to the dissemination of specific themes and messages that support the strategic narrative, whilst providing the media with the images they require for media reportage.³²

We must embrace the media. It is very much part of everything we do now. No longer can we keep the media separate, and we have seen that in all recent events, they are part of the event and we must take them with us, which means keep them well-briefed and quite often actually have them at the heart of an operation.³³

Returning to the six elements making up the military's tactical level communications capability, we see that media facilitation also comprises 'military escorts for the media' as well as 'administrative and logistic support personnel'. These capabilities hold binary aims. They allow embedded reporters to witness specific tactical level activity. Yet by using media escorts and by making logistic facilitation (in the form of secure transportation, for instance) available to the media, the military are in control of sites and events visited by the media.³⁴ These media facilities are organised to allow accredited war correspondents some degree of access to the battlefield. However, as we discovered in Chapter Two, where such facilitation is made available, the MOD Green Book specifies that media reports are subject to security checking:³⁵

³¹ Interview, Media Advisor to the UK military, March 2010.

³² The Defence Image Database (www.defenceimages.mod.uk) is the central hub for all MOD distributed imagery. See Chapter Seven for more details on the Defence Image Database and the re-use/distribution of such imagery.

³³ Interview, Capt Trevor Soar RN in *Making the News*, Defence Media Operations Centre (DMOC) training video.

³⁴ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009.

³⁵ MOD, *The Green Book* (October 2010), p. 15.

...journalists will be required to submit their material for security checking and to undertake not to publish or divulge any operationally sensitive information gained as a member of a unit, without specific permission of commanders [...] In addition they will have to agree not to cover events from the opposing side at any stage, without the prior agreement of the MOD.³⁶

Reporters using MOD media facilitation are thus put through two sets of security checks: first, the application process through which the Ministry of Defence decides who will be embedded; and second, frontline military restrictions in the form of vetting of media material. In line with such restrictions imposed on reporters in the field, Smith argues that the initial ‘security check [...] will often favour popular commentators, like Ross Kemp, over critical journalists’.³⁷ He also notes that ‘the primary control exerted by the military is through determining who actually gets embedded and unfavourable reporting is not often rewarded with further opportunity’.³⁸

Against this backdrop, media facilitation at the tactical level holds multiple purposes. First, these media events and this form of vetting provide the media with ‘big pictures’, ‘action’ shots and human storylines, which are likely to resonate with target audiences. Second, it is clear that such media facilitations also provide the military with some form of *information control*. This kind of control may, however, prove to have serious secondary effects for the military. In their quest to manage the story and limit independent scrutiny from the frontline, the military lose out on stories which may prove favourable but which do not comply with the military’s understanding of *good* media coverage. This is critical. Not only do audiences get less information than they need ‘to make up their mind about defence issues’,³⁹ the military also risk being trapped by their own communication strategy as they get less scrutiny than they need. Ultimately, the rigid communication structure fuels the argument that the military are deceiving themselves as much as their audience. This should be seen in the light of the fact that the communication structure fails to account for the media’s logic. Executing communication activity through extensive, unprecedented and rigid organisational

³⁶ Ibid., p. 13.

³⁷ Smith, ‘The “brittle” compact between the military and the media (2010).

³⁸ Ibid., p. 44.

³⁹ Defence Communication Strategy (revised March 2009).

structures thus offers a false sense of security. It may ‘fix’ the problem of media access to the theatre of operations, but it fails to tell a convincing story of *success* as the dynamic and new communication environment is largely uncontrollable.

In addition to this top-down structure, which requires strategic level documents to filter down through the operational level before being implemented at the tactical level, the communication structure is flexible enough to allow for communication to take place at any of the three levels. Military doctrine testifies to this particular aspect of military communication and notes that the three levels of the military structure have become gradually more interlinked:

The division between strategic, operational and tactical levels are becoming increasingly blurred. Through the media spotlight, minor tactical events can escalate to have strategic effects and generate a need for strategic leaders, such as government ministers to respond quickly. Clear command and control structures, well-understood areas of delegated responsibility and effective military-media relations are required at all levels. On occasions, in order to get tactical details straight to the strategic level (and vice versa) without delay, it may be necessary to short circuit the primary command and control channels for the flow of information. When this occurs, immediate efforts will be required to bring all those circumvented up to date.⁴⁰

This is not a small matter in military culture, which, as we have seen, traditionally rests on set vertical, top-down lines of command. Yet in relation to communication activity the structure has had to adopt a more flexible nature so as to meet the demands of the media and of the technology-driven and fast-moving communication environment. In this context, it is vital that tactical level military communication staff is updated frequently on changes to the strategic direction. Here, military culture values the innate nature of ‘can-do’ soldiers. The ability of the communication and media staff to react quickly to stories emerging in the media, to limit the impact of negative stories, is seen as central to the function of the military communication structure. This is particularly important as changes to the Information Strategy can alter the focus of the themes and messages implemented as part of the strategic narrative.

⁴⁰ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 1-4.

Furthermore, and due to its naturally vertical structure, alterations at the strategic level tend to directly affect pre-constructed themes and messages promoted through tactical level information channels. Therefore, it is important to note that strategic communication and the formation of a strategic narrative as part of the Information Strategy are not static entities. Rather, each aspect of the military communication structure is dynamic and evolves as conditions at either the tactical or strategic level change. This requires flexibility, within an organisation that is principally designed for continuity. This is done in order to unify independent messages coming from all corners of the military institution; and to avoid discrepancies in the strategic narrative.

With this in mind, modern and dynamic communication activity has forced the military institution to break with traditionally vertical systems of operation. The reasons for this is that media contact takes place at the strategic level, through press briefings and conferences in the MOD, and at the tactical level, through direct media interaction in theatre of operations. The military communication structure thus needs to be flexible enough to allow for theatre level incidents and developments at the tactical level to influence the strategic approach to operations. Whereas previously military systems were primarily focused on adapting to evolving and dynamic warfare paradigms, today they have to also account for the role of the media and instant communication channels.

While change has indeed been a constant factor of military culture, this form of change has mainly been fuelled by changes to the tactical level. Fostering change in the light of transforming communication channels is not engrained in military culture. Nevertheless, change in a military sense is more likely to be successful if pressured by both external (the media in this case) and internal (the adaptation of digital communication tools by soldiers) factors. Moreover, because all information output must be synchronised throughout the organisational structure, the military realise that they are unable to compete with the speed of the media and of modern information technology. Ensuring a coherent output, synchronised at all levels, takes time.

Despite the fact that military culture is founded on solid, tried and tested hierarchical mechanisms, the external influences of, for instance, media interaction and fast-paced communication mechanisms hold the capacity to force change at the heart of the

military structure, even if such change may be only minimal. Due to inherent cultural traits, which essentially rely on the character of the individual service man and woman, the institution manages to adapt to such external influences without weakening the institution itself. It is thus the strength of the culture, and of the individual military members, that ensure stability and coherence in the face of adverse challenges. These aspects of military communication are problematized in subsequent chapters.

Military Objectives

Military engagements are driven by *objectives*: political objectives and military objectives. Evidently, these may not rest on identical aims, as noted in previous chapters. In fact, military objectives and political objectives are never the same. This is important as the strategic narrative predominantly promotes political values. How military messaging, framed within the strategic narrative, manages to tell a story in military terms thus becomes important to the understanding of communication activity as well as to the positioning of the military institution within a democratic establishment. Without clear, strategically sound and tactically achievable objectives in place to direct military intervention, communication activity has no function. Therefore, it is particularly useful to understand the military approach to communication and influence activity as goal-oriented and driven by two distinct, but inherently interlinked, systems of accountability.

As we will see, the military have *successfully* formulated a communication strategy that distances the soldier (and the institution) from the war itself; from political and legal justifications. Still, as determined by their position in a democratically led department of state, the military show strong adherence to political accountability. The notion of goal-driven military engagements thus reveals a paradox. Even as accountability might remove military responsibility in relation to the war, it demands that the military justify their campaign activity; making basic military objectives pivotal in communication activity. And even as military doctrine does not necessarily specify how communication can be executed to satisfy military and political objectives simultaneously, it makes allowances for military specific messaging to be integrated in the politically directed strategic narrative. The organisational communication structure, the operational level in particular, thus becomes a key element in ensuring that military objectives resonate with the strategic narrative.

The point of departure for discussing military objectives in relation to communication activity is found in military culture. Looking at this culture, basic institutional objectives emerge. One of the key debates set out in Chapter One – dealing with the formal and informal traits of military culture – thus helps us bring the nature of such objectives to light. Not surprisingly, securing the future of the institution through sustained resources (financial support, recruitment and freedom of operation) emerges as fundamental to military activity. Here, communication is increasingly seen as a vehicle for ensuring credibility and legitimacy, which the military believe are critical to the securing of resources for the institution. Maintaining a favourable public image is seen as an essential element in safeguarding the future of the institution.

The fact that basic military objectives, which run parallel to political aims, originate from the culture in which they exist, demonstrates the strong reliance on military aims found in doctrine. Framed within this culture, any discussion on military objectives must, therefore, start with the institution. They reflect what the military see as important for their own institution, separate from the wider political goals. And they testify to the notion of defence collectivism and shared values as well as common historical and contextual frames of reference. Such basic military objectives are thus designed to encompass the central aspects of military culture and institutional practice. Moreover, they are constant and do not change despite shifts in the media and warfare landscape. In essence, these objectives function as a framework through which the military aim to secure legitimacy for their actions.

In order to set out a clear purpose, a prospect of success, consistent messaging and the capacity to discredit counter-narratives,⁴¹ the strategic storyline must exemplify a convincing mission purpose, in the short as well as in the long run (from a military perspective). This is important in order to convince audiences that the campaign is both worthwhile and necessary. If this is not achieved from the outset, generating support through communication activity becomes challenging, if not impossible. To clarify these assertions by example, ever since the NATO Lisbon Summit in November 2010 in which coalition forces agreed on an Afghanistan exit strategy,

⁴¹ In their paper on strategic narratives and public opinion, 'Shaping public attitudes towards the deployment of military power' (2011), Ringsmose and Børgesen contest that these four objectives are critical to successful messaging through strategic narratives.

military messaging relating to the Afghanistan campaign centred round *exit* and *end-game* strategies. As a result, value-laden and symbolic messaging gradually crept into the strategic narrative framing the story in terms of reconstruction and development. Defending military engagement through political justifications thus became pivotal to promoting campaign success, meaning that politically sound messaging gradually eroded the military storyline. During Afghanistan exit, success was measured against clear political objectives:

Success in the mission requires three parallel strands:

1. Afghan Security Forces capable of keeping the Taliban from regaining control
2. Credible governance at national and local level to give the Afghan people confidence in their democratically elected government
3. Economic development that gives Afghans a stake in their own future.⁴²

At a military level, these clearly stated objectives are founded upon strong political concepts of campaign success. Therefore, the shift in campaign goals challenges the basic military objective of success on operations. From focusing on protecting UK security to adjusting all communication activity to tell the story of nation-building and peacekeeping is difficult within an institution driven by traditional war-fighting objectives. Effective strategic communication thus involves an integrated politico-military effort that stretches beyond what militaries have traditionally been designed to do: 'take, hold and destroy'.

Because the military function at both the political and at the diplomatic level, the political justifications for the Afghanistan mission became critical to the military storyline, as we will also discover in subsequent chapters. In the context of securing campaign success, doctrine highlights the essentiality of maintaining troop morale: 'No doctrine, plan or formula for conducting warfare is likely to succeed without the maintenance of morale which, except in the most extreme circumstances, depends upon affording personnel the best chances of success or survival.'⁴³ If soldiers do not believe that what they are doing is worthwhile or that their actions are supported *back*

⁴² UK Ministry of Defence, *UK forces: operations in Afghanistan* (2013).

⁴³ Joint Doctrine Publication 0-01, *British Defence Doctrine – Fourth Edition* (November 2011) p. 2-4.

home, they are more likely to lose their ‘will to fight’. Positive media coverage is crucial in this respect.

The reason why we put so much effort into our public relations activities is because we need the support of the general public. We need the general public’s support not only from a financial point of view and for justification for going away and spending a lot of time abroad on long operations but also because you can never underestimate the power of morale and it is the support of the general public that influence the morale of our troops.⁴⁴

Yet whereas these basic military objectives exist as separate from specific political aims, strategic narratives encompass both prevailing political aims as well as military objectives, relevant to the immediate conflict landscape and identified in the dynamic Information Strategy. Exemplified by the Afghanistan campaign, the strategic narrative holds multiple purposes. On one hand, it must satisfy the political aim of promoting an achievable end-state, and, on the other hand, it must adhere to the principles relating to the overall military institutional goals by demonstrating successful strategic and tactical level campaign progress.

Therefore, in order to successfully achieve such aims, the military have put in place specific objectives for communication activity. These objectives thus function as the underpinnings of the strategic narrative, but because they exist at a conceptual level, they are purposefully vague. This means that they can be applied to all campaign activity – at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. In contrast to the overall military aims, set out above, these objectives are not static. Yet importantly, they reveal how the military understand the media’s logic:

Military operations undertaken by nations in pursuits of their national and international interests depend on public and political support for their success. Commanders at all levels should contribute to building and sustaining this support through positive engagement and effective media handling for a number of related reasons:

- a. Deployed forces must continually demonstrate their accountability to their democratically elected governments.

⁴⁴ Interview, Capt Tania Gatheridge, *Making the News* (Defence Media Operations Centre (DMOC) Training video).

- b. Public support from the UK audience enhances a commander's freedom of action, making him less vulnerable to external interference and overly restrictive Rules of Engagement (ROE). Support from international and regional audiences tends to enhance freedom of manoeuvre through consent.
- c. Positive media coverage of deployed military operations sustains morale and promotes an image of the Armed Forces as relevant, professional, and valued by the nation.
- d. Public support assists in maintaining cohesion between allies and/or coalition partners.
- e. A positive portrayal of the military, particularly when operational success is achieved, supports the longer-term justification for resources as well as aids recruiting and retention.
- f. To provide rebuttal of inaccurate or untrue stories.⁴⁵

Even as such objectives are both vague and broad in scope, they reveal the twofold aspect of military communication activity. On the one hand, the media represent a problem for the military in the sense that they challenge how military operations are communicated. Moreover, they force the military to integrate specific communication components into their organisational structure and to make particular allowances for the media. The media and advances in communications technology thus push the military to develop a new dynamic communication structure to respond to the role of the media and to the developments in communication. On the other hand, the media present a valuable vehicle for the military as they offer a direct channel to influence domestic audiences, who receive most, if not all, of their knowledge of campaign activity through the media. To this end, *Telling Afghanistan at home* was made significantly easier (and seen as more legit) if military constructed themes and messages – strategic narratives – could be promoted through independent media – and not through the military's own communication channels, some of which are discussed further in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

Aiming to put in place the means through which the envisaged objectives for communication activity can be achieved is central to current military thinking. Most of the transformation currently underway in the military, framed and put in place as a result of organisational learning and of the military move towards an effects-based

⁴⁵ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 1-3, 1-4.

approach, is a shift from exclusively focusing on kinetic effects (firing weapons for instance) to incorporating *non*-kinetic effects (to ‘reassure’, ‘influence’ and ‘inform’ target groups),⁴⁶ in which specific military communication objectives are essential. These objectives thus signify a change in military thinking; a change which sees the military develop wide-ranging and all-encompassing communication structures along with specific objectives for communication and influence activity.

In order to improve the likelihood that military messaging attracts media attention and in order to secure the communication of campaign activity according to military objectives and in line with the messaging set out in the strategic narrative, the military aim to cater to the needs of the media. As noted in relation to tactical level communication activity and media facilitation above, the military are increasingly producing media copy to be distributed to reporters in the field and to editors managing national and international news desks at home. As a means of managing the story, this form of manufactured *media bundles* circumvents the media function as the only guarantee of independent scrutiny. However, so as to ensure that the military are the main providers of information from the theatre of operation, doctrine sets out specific ‘principles’ aimed at providing the media with relevant and timely information – selectively listed here:

- a. Force Protection/Operations Security.
- b. Focus on the Desired Effect.
- c. Effects-Based Media Operations. The Media is another dimension of the operating environment and, in common aspects of military operations, the planning and conduct of Media Ops must remain focused upon the overall effect(s) to be achieved.
- d. Truth. All communication with the media must be truthful.
- e. Credibility. Media Ops staff must be credible, both with the military and the media.
- f. Timeliness. The globalisation of communications and the accelerating demand for information have turned newsgathering by the media into an unrelenting, 24-hour activity [...] Media Ops staff should engage with the media at the earliest opportunity.
- g. Preparation. The conduct of Media Ops involves building relationships with journalists and within staff organisations [...] Strong relationships are required to cope with the inevitable tensions that will occur on operations.

⁴⁶ Farrell, ‘Dynamics of British military transformation’ (2008), p. 795.

- h. Openness. A key function of Media Ops is to explain in clear, unambiguous terms the military perspective.
- i. Countering Disinformation. [...] Media Ops staff must establish effective, credible and timely rebuttal procedures to counter the effects of inaccurate and unbalanced media stories.⁴⁷

Acknowledging that the media's logic works along different lines to their own logic, the military structure their communication activity according to the dominant characteristics of the media. Effectively, the principles listed here show that military communication structures increasingly resemble those of media organisations. The military institution is thus experiencing a growing infiltration of media features. However, one feature central to the media function, and which continues to prove challenging for the military, is *speed*. Because the military organisational structure requires all communication to be synchronised at the strategic, operational and tactical levels, simultaneously, the military realise that they are unable to compete with the speed of the media and of modern information technology. Ensuring a coherent output, synchronised at all levels, takes time. The institutional processes of the media are designed to react immediately, it is engrained in the DNA of media institutions. However, inherent military processes run through traditionally slow organisational structures, as dictated by the cultural traits of the military.

In line with this, the Information Strategy, put in place to harmonise government-wide information output, problematizes how military specific communication activity can be executed efficiently to meet tight media deadlines. Especially in terms of online engagement,⁴⁸ the military believe that the institutional structures as well as individual attitudes have to change significantly if the means of using online tools to engage the public and to counter negative media coverage are to be effective across defence. This is not purely a military matter. As emphasised by one MOD Chief Press Officer, the problem lies as much in the political leadership, which continuously fails to recognise the benefits of implementing less limiting online tools for soldiers.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), pp.1-4, 1-5, 1-6.

⁴⁸ The UK military have put in place an Online Engagement Strategy, which aims to harness all online tools for the benefit of the campaign narrative. This initiative is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

⁴⁹ Interview, MOD Chief Press Officer, April 2011.

In light of these principles, the fact that the military communication structure is effectively driven by the aim of securing basic military objectives through strategically managed and tactically executed media operations, questions the extent to which the military are capable of meeting such principles without jeopardising media relations. If we briefly return to Rowland and Tatham, we learn that the military are not equipped to conduct efficient Target Audience Analysis (TAA).⁵⁰ Therefore, without a clear understanding of the audiences, for whom media storylines are created, the principles directing media products lose credibility. Because it is with audiences in mind that the military develop their communication structure. However, instead of facilitating independent reporting the military have sought to manage and produce material for the media. This thus questions the extent to which the British military, in their quest for popular support, not only mislead their audience, for whom storylines are generated, but may also risk being trapped by their own communication strategy by upholding a false sense of message control in a largely uncontrollable information system.

Essentially, communication activity is organised to prevent external influences, like the media, affecting the military institution, its work and its members. Therefore, and reflecting the nature of military culture, dominant hierarchical structures work as a shield from external pressure and critique. However, penetrating this shield, rumours and speculation about campaign activity drive much of military communication activity; termed *fire fighting* in military jargon. As noted in doctrine:

The breaking story is all-important; sometimes this can be at the expense of depth, completeness or accuracy [...] The media are inherently suspicious, particularly of government spokesmen. Bad news stories can develop a life of their own and can swiftly outpace any attempt to control them. Inaccuracy and rumour can gain legitimacy simply through repetition⁵¹

As highlighted by Ringsmose and Børgesen, ‘strong strategic narratives are characterised by having few and/or weak competitors.’⁵² Therefore, media rumours

⁵⁰ Rowland and Tatham, ‘Strategic Communication & Influence Operations’ (2010).

⁵¹ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), pp. 3-2 and 4-6.

⁵² Ringsmose and Børgesen, ‘Shaping public attitudes towards the deployment of military power’ (2011), p. 514

that contradict the messaging set out in the Information Strategy are likely to have a detrimental effect on the strategic narrative. Resembling the principles set out above, and in an attempt to counter rumours and as a way of stopping such stories spreading in the media, military doctrine states that military communication activity must increase the pace of information flow so as to compete with media timings:

Media Ops staff should endeavour to maintain the initiative by generating a constant flow of positive and accurate newsworthy material to meet the media's search for stories and images. Information vacuums should be avoided as they can hand the initiative to the media and may lead to the highlighting of negative aspects of the Campaign.⁵³

This reveals a key aspect of military communication; the objective of promoting positive aspects of the strategic narrative. In so doing, the military also aim to detract media attention from less favourable events or incidents. This mechanism of proactively engaging with the media in order to secure positive coverage strengthens the argument that independent reporting from the battlefield has declined significantly as the *military media machine* has become increasingly proactive. As noted in the introduction, this is problematic not only for the media but also for the military who get less scrutiny than they need. Therefore, the military's communication strategy may be successful in promoting positive aspect of campaign activity but it may also jeopardise the legitimacy with which the military, as a department of state, carry out and communicate campaign activity.

Conclusions

The findings set out in this chapter demonstrate that military doctrine and military practice are not only driven by the aim of securing basic military objectives. They are shaped and driven by a desire to respond to external influences, a need to neutralise enemy propaganda and a willingness to exclude independent reporting so as to manage information flows from the theatre of operations; to manage the storyline. As a complex institution, driven by both political and military objectives, the ways in which the British military devise and implement communication activity at the strategic, operational and tactical levels is thus a result of these distinct driving forces. Building on the discussion on doctrine set out in the previous chapter, the present chapter has

⁵³ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 3-2.

demonstrated the sophisticated structure of military communication activity; a structure which we have discovered is aimed at ensuring consistency and coherence, at the strategic, operational and tactical levels.

Against the backdrop of this discussion, what is new in relation to Afghanistan is the scale of such communication activity, as reflected in military doctrine and applied across defence. What is also new is the positioning of communication within the wider scope of political as well as military influence objectives. In response to internal and external challenges, and reflecting vertical military structures, this chapter has revealed that communication is now situated at the highest level inside the Ministry of Defence. This development, which has seen communication strategies move up the military agenda, allows for the use of subtle influence tactics. Given that *effectiveness* is essentially dependent on the communication of favourable military storylines, the military recognise that perceptions of campaign activity shape audience attitudes. As we have seen, the military aim to use the media to influence their target audiences, to control their image, to gain public and political support for their actions, to achieve financial backing, to express their concerns in policy discussions and to live up to their obligation of public accountability.

In line with this, for the military, the strategic approach of incorporating communication components as a central concept of military practice is essential in a climate where the military is constantly facing new challenges. Therefore, as we have discovered, the organisational structure of communication activity is flexible enough to allow for external factors – the logic of the media in particular – to shape the military approach to campaign activity. In theory, tactical level challenges, understood as external to the military institution, hold the power to shape the overall strategic approach. Essentially, this means that the military's willingness to proactively engage with the media and to incorporate conventional communication practices into their organisational structure may ultimately break with the hierarchical standards of military culture. Whilst existing knowledge contends that military culture rests upon a stable top-down structure, the discussion in this chapter has shown that the military's communication structure challenges military culture itself, as it allows the media to engage in interactions with the military at the strategic, the operational and the tactical level; thus circumventing traditional top-down structures.

Drawing on empirical data from the Afghanistan campaign, the following two chapters consider in more detail how the military frame their activities in a manner that attempts to secure their effective communication through different media outlets as well as appealing to the different audience groups. The following chapters thus examine the main strategic narratives in relation to the Afghanistan exit strategy. By understanding the central position of target audiences, the military promote particular narratives that aim to generate support amongst the people.

MANAGING PERCEPTIONS: AFGHANISTAN DISCOURSES

Carefully constructed, broadly accepted and flexible strategic narratives, which can be adapted to meet the attitudes and expectations of target audiences, were pivotal in framing military activity in the theatre of operation in Afghanistan. Branding the mission in ways that supported the dominant political discourses became a more widely accepted mechanism in generating real success by winning support on the home front. As these discourses were increasingly driven by *exit* and troop withdrawal the strategic narrative shifted from focusing on UK security to framing tactical level activity through notions of peacekeeping, reconstruction and humanitarian aid. Identified in previous chapters, the necessity of reassuring the domestic audience that the Afghanistan mission was worthwhile was a critical aspect of communication activity throughout the campaign – and of the themes and messages the military attached to their actions. Against this backdrop, and in continuation of doctrinal discussions, the two chapters in this section explore the ways by which the UK military narrated and constructed meaning of their activity in Afghanistan; as allied forces implementing their exit strategy. Textual, visual and online storylines were employed to *tell Afghanistan at home* so as to influence audience perceptions and to secure popular support and future resources. The two chapters are thus concerned with evaluating the ways in which the military proactively explained and legitimised their action with accountability as the key.

Chapter Six

Telling Afghanistan at Home

It is obviously more important to win the military campaign than win a popularity contest back home but it seems those priorities are being reversed.

Richard Kemp, former UK commander, Afghanistan (October 2011).¹

Today, military operations have more to do with communicating a story than ever before; to secure wide-spread popular support. Coupled with advances in communication technology, the military acknowledge that the media are now able to obtain a diverse array of information about campaign activity and, therefore, do not always have to rely on official military storylines or have to accept the messaging promoted as part of the strategic narratives. In light of this, and as a result of increased patterns of access, the military have (as we have seen) put in place a wide range of information management structures and vehicles that, while they shift responsibility onto the media, hand initiative to the military. Through such mechanisms the military aim to communicate politically aware strategic narratives that are solid enough to withstand increased media access in order to influence target audiences. It is through these campaign specific narratives that the military try to proactively draw attention to favourable aspects of operational outcome, while obscuring less favourable aspects of a campaign. This chapter thus explores the use of strategic narratives pertinent to the Afghanistan exit strategy. It aims to understand how the military promoted particular storylines derived from political circles. It examines the themes and messages employed by the UK military to advance certain aspect of the Afghanistan

¹ Cited in: Jason Groves, 'British troops should not be withdrawn from Afghanistan for another year, top general warns,' *Daily Mail Online*, (1 June, 2011).

campaign. The underlying argument running through this chapter is that *telling* Afghanistan at home held a dual purpose for the military: it allowed them to tell the story in terms that the general public understood (reduce army jargon, limit military strategic terms and avoid technical specifications), and it gave them the opportunity to tell a story that they believed would generate support (a story of campaign *success*).

Why Communicating Security Matters

The point of departure for this chapter is the strategic narrative formulated in relation to the Afghanistan campaign. Public attitudes towards military intervention in conflicts without critical national interests at stake are increasingly formed by the content and the consistency of the strategic narrative, voiced by policy-makers and implemented by the military. Framed within the work of, among others, Professor and former foreign policy advisor to Tony Blair, Sir Lawrence Freedman, strategic narratives are understood as ‘compelling storylines which can explain events convincingly and from which inferences can be drawn.’² The communication of strategic narratives is thus important because they tell the story of why politicians resort to armed intervention. And they tell the story of what *success* might look like. In the words of Freedman, ‘[a] successful narrative will link certain events while disentangling others, distinguish good news from bad tidings, and explain who is winning and who is losing’.³ Furthermore, according to Ringsmose and Børgesen, if a government succeeds in telling a consistent and persuasive story of military intervention the prospects of achieving public support increases.⁴

As we have seen, a strong emphasis on *influencing* people’s attitudes and behaviours through carefully planned strategic and tactical level communication activity has climbed up the military agenda; to the point where it has become as important as the war fought on the ground.⁵ In this *battle* over narratives, the most compelling and powerful stories win. The narratives that tell the story of Afghanistan in line with the expectations and values of the target audience are also the most likely to exert the greatest influence on such an audience. In a UK context, this gradually became ever

² Freedman, ‘Networks, Culture and Narratives’ (2006), p. 22.

³ Ibid., p. 23.

⁴ Ringsmose and Børgesen, ‘Shaping public attitudes towards the deployment of military power (2011).

⁵ Badsey, ‘Media War and Media Management’ (2010).

more critical as public support for the Afghanistan conflict began to diminish.⁶ Therefore, and perhaps not surprisingly, the military mission increasingly became a war waged over perceptions as much as over actions, which positioned the strategic narrative centre stage.

As Ringsmose and Børgesen have told us, the strategic narratives likely to succeed, and likely to have a positive impact on public opinion, will: 1) offer a clarity of purpose; 2) state a prospect of success; 3) generate consistent messaging; and 4) limit counter-narratives.⁷ Evidently, increased access to tactical military information heightens the military need of narrating a story that is solid enough to endure growing new media scrutiny, and it intensifies the need for cohesion and consistency at all levels within the military organisational structure. It is through such messaging that the military attempt to tell their story. Thus the multiple means through which the media can acquire information about military activity (at both the strategic and the tactical levels) has a direct influence on the ways in which the military design their strategic narrative. In light of this reality, it is clear that by limiting independent journalistic scrutiny in the theatre of operations – through restrictive measures in the Green Book – the military aim to control the one aspect of the media industry which is within their power. They may not be able to control online communication measures, which are largely external to the institution, but they are still capable of determining what journalists see in the theatre of operations. Restricting tangible independent scrutiny thus gives the military some form of control in the largely uncontrollable information network. As we will see in the following chapter, the Defence Online Engagement Strategy is aimed at doing precisely that; harness online communication tools for the strategic narrative.

The previous chapter told us that military objectives and political aims are not the same. Therefore, the themes and messages promoted as part of the strategic narrative are politically generated. They comprise enduring and generic concepts designed to

⁶ Even as a general feeling of support for the military institution itself does still exist, recent opinion polls have shown a decline in public support for the military mission in Afghanistan, in particular. An October 2011 survey indicated that more than half of all Britons (57 per cent) want UK troops to be withdrawn from Afghanistan and 71 per cent of people asked believed the war in Afghanistan to be ‘unwinnable’.

⁷ Ringsmose and Børgesen, ‘Shaping public attitudes towards the deployment of military power’ (2011), p. 514-515.

appeal and be communicable to multiple audience groups simultaneously. Strategic narratives arising from the Information Strategy are constructed to be nonspecific and idealised in a manner that incorporates and reaffirms common moral values to maximise potential audience perception.

Largely due to the drawn-out nature of the Afghanistan campaign and because of changes to the conflict environment, military and political discourses continued to change accordingly. From solely concentrating on protecting security at home by ensuring that Afghanistan would no longer be a safe-haven for terrorists⁸ to telling a story of humanitarian objectives, the strategic narrative increasingly incorporated a notion of *exit* into its core. Therefore, political discourses framing the Afghanistan campaign stressed concepts such as freedom, protection, determination and democracy. Explaining Afghanistan exit strategy in terms that resemble humanitarian and human rights discourses complies with, and supports, the general international political discourse increasingly employed to justify the mission.

At a separate level, but important for the forthcoming discussion on strategic narratives, the development of human rights and humanitarianism in current Western-led world politics is based on the belief that they represent universally shared values.⁹ In imagining their target audience, for whom they construct messages, the UK military base their understanding of the expectations of such audiences on these *shared* values. The use of human rights rhetoric thus works as an effective tool for justifying military intervention, as it is difficult to argue against this widely shared discourse of *universal* human rights and humanitarian arguments. With this in mind, critics of such discourses have claimed that humanitarianism is now used as a cover for powerful Western states to satisfy their own self-interests.¹⁰

The power and applicability of humanitarian features as a central aspect of the *military media machine*, and in influencing domestic audiences to support military campaigns, are both effective and useful. The rise of humane values and universal principles of

⁸ UK Ministry of Defence, 'UK forces: Operations in Afghanistan' (2013).

⁹ Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

¹⁰ Roberto Belloni, 'Is humanitarianism part of the Problem,' *Nine Thesis*. BCSIA Discussion Paper 2005-03 (Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University: April 2005).

human rights in world politics – and, therefore, also in military interventions – has meant that such values are seen as representing the *truth* and are thus self-evident and beyond criticism. Military narratives that aim to meet the values and expectations of target audiences are thus increasingly founded upon such truths and *undeniable facts*. However, as discussed in greater detail in the subsequent chapter, because the military frame their campaign activity within such apparent truths they risk being trapped by their own communication strategy. This is based on the assumption that in framing the operation within politically driven frameworks, which are not necessarily supported by military objectives, and because their audience is a largely abstract audience, the military may be deceiving themselves as much as the audience for whom themes and messages are generated.

Against this backdrop, the chapter explores the *construction* of strategic narratives pertinent to Afghanistan exit strategy, as something that occurs within a fast-moving and comprehensive information network. It examines the frames employed by the UK military to promote intended themes and messages. The chapter questions the storylines used to control what is exposed about military work relating to the Afghanistan campaign; storylines designed to incorporate and strengthen the strategic and tactical objectives of the Information Strategy. Through strategic discourses, communicated as part of online as well as offline information structures, the military try to justify, demonstrate, defend and explain actions in a way that influences the behaviours and attitudes of their target audience.¹¹

In line with this, the different approaches and politically sound strategic narratives are engineered to generate certain perceptions from which the military institution stands to gain. Essentially, they provide the military mission with a branded ‘front’ within which communication activity functions. However, because of the long-stretched Afghanistan campaign re-branding the campaign a success became problematic. This is perhaps best described by Betz in *Communication Breakdown*: ‘It is a classic dilemma of political marketing with a martial twist: how to sell something which is old and discredited [...] as new and exciting?’¹²

¹¹ This is based on Mackay and Tatham’s *Behavioural Conflict* (2009), in which they stress the importance of changing attitudes and behaviours so as to increase the likelihood of campaign success.

¹² Betz, David ‘Communication Breakdown’ 55(2011), p. 617.

Strategic Narratives & the Story of Success

Because the military categorise their target audiences as ranging from the local and regional audience to the domestic audience, the military emphasise that conceptual words must be broad in their idealisation, reaching across all political, religious and ethnic groups.¹³ Yet there is another reason for this. Because the military narrative is advanced as part of the Comprehensive Approach, broad and generic messages are more likely to satisfy views pertinent to the workings of other government departments – the FCO and DfID in particular. More specifically, the growing use of humanitarian narratives supports the cross-government approach. The strategically generated narrative is thus not a small matter within the military communication remit. This is also recognised by Smith in *The Utility of Force*. Here, Smith calls for a ‘narrator’ that can ‘capture the story’:

To link actions in theatre to the context and to exploit them to the next act there is a need to capture the story – to which end a ‘narrator’ is necessary, one who explains to the audience what has happened, its significance and where events might lead. This person is more than just a spokesman: he is telling the story, by linking the events as they occur, constantly recalling there are two sets of players and two scripts, into the most convincing story in the circumstances.’¹⁴

Betz, however, disagrees with this assertion. Whereas Smith uses the allegory of a ‘narrator’ to explain the role of the commander, Betz sees this as an attempt to ascribe to the commander more powers of information control than he holds.¹⁵ Indeed, Betz does not accept that the commander should possess this form of power in relation to the strategic narrative, since the narrative is planned and executed at the strategic-political level, and not at tactical level where the JTFC is in charge: ‘[i]t is a dreadful failure of political leadership and an inversion of strategic logic when the onus of explaining “why are we there” seems to rest most heavily on the theatre commander. The question is perfectly legitimate, but [...] it is not really within the power of the soldier to answer.’¹⁶

¹³ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner ’09, 1-15 March 2009.

¹⁴ Smith, *The Utility of Force* (2005), p. 391.

¹⁵ Betz, David ‘Communication Breakdown’ 55(2011), p. 619.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Still, the recognition that the military, as an institution and a department of state, need to *tell a story* that appeals to the audience for whom they aim to generate meaning is particularly noticeable within defence structures. However, at the local level in the Afghanistan campaign, and because of the changes to mission purpose developed throughout the campaign, the politico-military storyline became increasingly complicated due to a seeming lack of local audience awareness. As such, while the UK military were seen as being mostly effective in *branding* the campaign in ways that met the expectations of domestic audiences (as this is also their primary focus), on occasions the messaging was not attuned to the cultural and religious values of the Afghan people or to the dominant media profile in the region. This was particularly apparent in the first phase of ‘the military build-up’ to respond to the attacks of 9/11, which led to international troops entering Afghanistan. The initial phrase used to frame the campaign, ‘Operation Infinite Justice’, was replaced with a less controversial name ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’, so as to circumvent fierce opposition in the Muslim world.¹⁷

In order to avoid such misunderstandings, the military aimed to put in place culturally aware systems, facilitated through information operations at the local level. However, due to their abstract knowledge of their audience, this also became one of the biggest problems inherent in international missions. Tactical level themes and messages aimed at local civilians tend to be generated based on, at best, limited understandings of this audience. This was indeed the case with the phrase ‘Operation Infinite Justice’, which caused Muslim groups to protest because in the Islamic faith ‘infinite justice’ can only be provided by God. Effective attitudinal and behavioural change – the cornerstone in strategic communication policy¹⁸ – is unlikely to take place if the story being told does not meet local or regional values and systems of belief.

Yet there are no guarantees in strategic communication. As we have seen, because of multiple target audiences, increasingly transparent media systems and independent media organisations, military communication strategists are faced with considerable challenges to control and to communicate messages. A key issue in relation to

¹⁷ BBC News, ‘Infinite Justice, out – Enduring Freedom in’ (25 September 2001). <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/americas/1563722.stm>

¹⁸ Mackay and Tatham’s *Behavioural Conflict* (2009).

generating strong and generic campaign storylines, aimed at one particular group of audiences, thus lies in the largely uncontrollable information system. Here, narratives attuned to the expectations and values of domestic publics rapidly find their way to audiences whose expectations and attitudes are very different from those of the intended home audience. As Gowing told us in a previous chapter: ‘In the most remote and hostile locations of the globe, hundreds of millions of electronic eyes and ears are creating a capacity for scrutiny and new demands of accountability.’¹⁹ Such characteristics of modern communication and information provision have thus become an obstacle as much as a vehicle for targeted communication and influence activity.

It is, therefore, apparent that the framing and branding of military operations, through the use of conceptualised rhetoric, not only exists at an abstract or a theoretical level. Rather, the construction of strategically sound and tactically viable narratives have a real impact on the progress of an operation, as alienating audiences through misrepresentation or flawed communication activity can have devastating consequences.

Furthermore, and returning to the cultural traits of the military institution, ensuring cohesion and unity of output through defence communication training remains essential. As discussed in greater detail below, the training of military personnel, from which much of the evidence used in this particular chapter stems, thus bears witness to the informal and formal characteristics of military culture. It also reveals the centrality of the narrative – the *story* – in the overall military approach to communication activity during conflicts. From a military perspective, this approach ensures that the politically generated strategic narrative is integrated into military workings. In essence, military training of media and communication staff is used to reiterate the *messaging*. It is used to incorporate strategic narratives into military cultural practice. And it is used to ensure that Service personnel are not only familiar with themes and messages pertinent to the Information Strategy, but are able to promote them when interacting with the media.

¹⁹ Gowing, ‘Skyful of Lies’ (2009).

By unpacking this argument through an examination of the messaging employed to *tell* the UK's Afghanistan campaign, we discover that under the command of the politically driven Information Strategy the military incorporated specific concepts and carefully chosen frames of reference to explain their operations. From the outset of UK military involvement in ISAF's Afghanistan mission, the British government (and in particular the Labour government until May 2010) managed to advance a cohesive, straightforward and consistent campaign narrative; a narrative that that did not build on humanitarian and human rights arguments but which emphasised the necessity of keeping the UK public safe.²⁰ In continuation of this argument – outlining UK security interests and resembling the underlying reasoning found in NATO documentation – the MOD Top Level Message on Afghanistan read:

British forces are in Afghanistan for one overriding reason: to protect British national security by helping the Afghans take control of theirs. This means building up the capability of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) so that they can prevent Afghanistan from ever again becoming a safe-haven for international terrorist organisations, such as al-Qaeda who would pose a threat to the UK and our allies around the world. The UK Government does not seek a perfect Afghanistan, but a stable Afghanistan, able to manage its own security effectively.²¹

In light of this, and significantly different from dominant scholarly views on the Afghanistan campaign, the political messaging categorised the mission as a *necessity* rather than a *choice*.²² Since security issues continued to dominate the UK reasoning for deploying troops to Helmand province, narratives of humanitarian and reconstruction efforts were only embedded in such overall reasoning discursively and only as an attempt to re-brand the operation in order to regain credibility – which, according to Betz was challenging, if not impossible.²³

²⁰ Ringsmose and Børgesen, 'Shaping public attitudes towards the deployment of military power' (2011).

²¹ MOD Top Level Message, February 2013.

²² This perspective has been voiced by a number of defence ministers, chiefs of staff and government officials. See, for instance: Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP, 'Delivering on the Frontline: Operational Success and Sustainable Armed Forces', Speech delivered by Secretary of State for Defence at the Royal United Services Institute, London, 8 December 2011; General Sir David Richards, '11th Annual Chief of Defence Staff Lecture', Speech delivered by Chief of Defence Staff at the Royal United Services Institute, London, 14 December 2010; or Rt Hon Dr Liam Fox MP, 'The Strategy on Afghanistan', Speech delivered by Secretary of State for Defence at the 8th International Institute for Strategic Studies Global Strategic Review in Geneva, 11 September 2010.

²³ Betz, David 'Communication Breakdown' 55(2011), p. 617.

Effectively, this meant that the story of Afghanistan was generally told through the lens of British national security interests; a narrative that encountered only limited opposition in the media.²⁴ Yet the notion of *exit*, which gradually crept into the storyline during the latter stage of the Afghanistan campaign, offered a new set of objectives for the British, and indeed for NATO's, mission in the country. Hence, symbolical and value laden rhetoric was increasingly employed to describe the mission in positive terms. Phrases such as 'protect the Afghan people,' 'create a better future for the Afghan people' and 'we do not seek a perfect Afghanistan, but a stable Afghanistan,'²⁵ were reiterated as key messages in the UK's approach to this period of Afghanistan security transition. This approach was perhaps not surprising when comparing it to strategic narratives employed in other conflicts involving coalition forces.²⁶ And by framing the operation as a liberation exercise, this form of messaging became significant as it was used to reassure target audiences (internal and external) that the operation was worthwhile. Furthermore, from a political perspective, this form of messaging was seen as powerful as it supported the dominant political line employed to frame the final stage of the mission.

However, if we turn to the notion of campaign *success*, the picture becomes increasingly muddled. The UK's strategic narrative has consistently been a story of continued progress, in spite of extensive competing storylines emerging in the media, and among opposition parties. In fact in June 2008, the then Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Jock Stirrup, noted that Afghanistan would not be 'that long-term an endeavour for the military.'²⁷ In the same way, when deployed British troops initially entered Helmand in 2006, they were told that they were there to support aid, leading the government to suggest that they would not 'fire one shot'.²⁸ As we now know, the

²⁴ Despite the fact that the overall purpose for UK engagement in the Afghanistan mission has met only limited competing narratives in the media and among opposition parties, issues relating to military equipment has been challenged on multiple fronts. Therefore, ever since the UK government sent troops to Helmand (2006), the lack of equipment and protection for UK soldiers in Afghanistan has been high on both the media and the political agenda.

²⁵ Statements like these continue to form the underlying reasoning for UK military intervention in Afghanistan, as documented by the monthly updated Top Level Message.

²⁶ An Epilogue, which discusses the role of strategic communication and the strategic narrative in NATO's operations in Libya in 2011, has been included here to show the generic nature of this form of messaging.

²⁷ Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Jock Stirrup, cited in David Loyn, *Butcher & Bolt: Two Hundred Years of Foreign Engagement in Afghanistan* (London: Hutchinson, 2008), p. xxxix.

²⁸ Loyn, *Butcher & Bolt* (2008).

nature of the tactical environment did not support this story. This also meant that the initial narrative of ‘fast and unproblematic success’ quickly had to be re-adjusted. Yet whereas dominant storylines continued to centre round progress, the introduction of the Afghanistan exit strategy meant that the strategic narrative also had to be re-adjusted. In this respect, the decision to withdraw international fighting troops from Afghanistan placed notions of peacekeeping and reconstruction at the heart of the story.

Against this backdrop, and since the notion of exit, accompanied by ‘lines to take’²⁹ that support humanitarian efforts, dominated the messaging at the strategic-political level as well as the tactical-military level (secured through training), the military believed that they were able to maintain a strong unison of output and cohesion on Afghanistan. They believed that this was both likely to provide the media with ‘good’ stories and ensure domestic audiences that the mission was worthwhile.³⁰ However, essentially this approach also meant that emerging (unforeseen) stories that did not support the strategic narrative were omitted in military communication efforts.

At first glance, this may seem logical and beneficial to the military who categorise most of such stories as ‘counter-narratives’; storylines that hold the potential to undermine the strategic narrative. Yet by rigidly adhering to the conceptual, politically endorsed strategic narrative, and reiterating the themes and messages that support this narrative, the military also risk losing out on favourable stories that do not fit within the structure. This is where the media, understood as the fundamental level of independent scrutiny in military campaigns, play an essential part – the value of which is not properly recognised by the military or by political elites.

Serving personnel and specialised media operations staff are being trained in formulating mission statements that support the strategic narrative, as highlighted in strategic communication doctrine and as evident from fieldwork settings. Therefore, and due to hierarchical military cultural traits that rest on accountability and responsibility, military personnel dealing with the media will always frame military

²⁹ British military doctrine legitimises the employment of ‘lines to take’ to sell specific storylines. Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 4-2.

³⁰ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner ’09, 1-15 March 2009

operations within the themes and messages that have been set out during military training. It is in their nature and is central to the socialisation processes that sit at the heart of military culture. The strong link between doctrine and tactical level structures are rendered visible through military training. Importantly, in relation to the Afghanistan mission, the reiteration and promotion of the phrase: ‘we are here to create a safe and secure environment’³¹ was specifically employed to support the notion of liberation and freedom set out in the monthly MOD Top Level Message. The document read:

The international strategy involves protecting the civilian population from the insurgents, building up the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and supporting more effective governance at every level.³²

There was thus a direct link from the strategic, politically generated messages to tactical, military driven performance. However, it is also important to note that using pre-constructed storylines to frame an operation in certain, favourable ways, is not a new phenomenon within the British military. Speaking about his role during the Kosovo conflict, one ex-media operations branch press officer noted that he ‘hated’ working in the Ministry of Defence, not only because of the internal work culture, but because of the imposed restrictions on what to communicate:

I was familiar with the inside of No 10 and the media planning process. I hated working at MoD (Kosovo) on secondment, knowing what was going on but unable to say, and ‘down the whole’ at PJHQ – the further from Northwood the better as they bullied like mad and were always having major power struggles with MoD in London, where a macho all hours bullying culture existed too.³³

Unlike previous conflicts, and unlike the culture that existed during the Kosovo conflict as exemplified here, the extensive media training, which is mandatory for all military personnel likely to come into contact with the media during deployment, has progressively become a key component of the military communication framework.

³¹ Ibid.

³² MOD Top Level Message, May 2012.

³³ Email correspondence, ex-Media Operations Branch Press Officer, April-May 2011.

The reasons behind the military use of such standard messages to frame an operation are manifold. From a military perspective, these messages are important to the generation of support among all audience groups. They simplify and reduce the military mission to easily digestible statements or sound bites that most audiences are unlikely to contest. They enable the military to generate a consistent narrative that holds the capacity to meet the expectations and values of most target audiences, simultaneously. They epitomise the narrative set out in the Information Strategy in a concise manner. They boost internal morale. And because of their generic nature, they can easily be adapted to different military scenarios.

However, Mackay and Tatham point to the danger of over-simplifying complicated matters when using standard phrases and easily digestible statements.³⁴ While promoting a strategic narrative founded on key concepts and communicated through pre-constructed storylines, the complexities inherent in joint military operations tend to be left largely unresolved. And whereas the ‘narrator’, to use Smith’s notion, aims to simplify the story so as not to alienate people unfamiliar with military affairs, to cater to the needs of a fast-moving information environment, and to improve military chances of campaign success, over-simplification runs the risk of resulting in counter-narratives. Therefore, by simplifying the situation, the strategic narrative may build false expectations which can prove increasingly counter-effective. Moreover, over-simplification also runs the risk of creating a false sense of information management and media control.

Reiterated through military exercises, where commanders, military spokesmen and communication staff are put through their paces by simulated press members,³⁵ these carefully constructed storylines are integrated into military routines. Reflecting the military work culture, which is based on team work, repetition and common codes of conduct, these messages function as a mechanism of standardising military responses to media scrutiny so as to ensure unity of output. Military culture rests on collaboration and teamwork; between serving personnel at war, between coalition forces and

³⁴ Mackay and Tatham, *Behavioural Conflict* (2009).

³⁵ Professional journalists are contracted to function as simulated media during military exercises so as to train military commanders and appointed spokesmen to deal with media interaction on operation, to hold press conferences and to respond to critical questioning.

between military and politicians. In fact every serving military man or woman as well as the military as an institution and the political leadership need to be telling the same story of campaign progress. This is at the core of the strategic narrative.

At all stages, careful coordination of contact between the media, the MOD and the wider UK Armed Forces community is vital to engender accurate reporting and to build trust.³⁶

The military stress the importance of maintaining unison, which is effectively engrained in military culture,³⁷ but less so in the political environment. UK politics and the workings of Parliament is characterised by opposing viewpoints represented by different party politics and individual political beliefs. Ultimately, this may generate counter-narratives at the top of the national political hierarchy. Yet the military internal unity of effort is secured through the function of the culture. In line with this, military guidelines on *Contact with the Media and Communicating in Public* state that: ‘Personnel seeking to have contact with the media or communicate in public should familiarise themselves with the Department’s latest Top-Level Messages.’³⁸ This is particularly important so as to ensure definitional cohesion, and in order to secure a satisfactory end-state.



Image 6.1: Media skills training with Lt Col Mark Wenham, Chief Public Affairs, ARRC, NATO (Elmpt, Germany: March 2009).

Personal photo.

For clarification, MOD Top Level Messages set out the military’s official line to critical themes and messages affecting the institution and they are updated on a monthly basis. Not surprisingly, the ‘top line’ on the Afghanistan mission explained the mission as a *liberation* exercise throughout most of the campaign, which, from a political perspective, was a more *saleable*

³⁶ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 4-3.

³⁷ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner ’09, 1-15 March 2009.

³⁸ DIN03-020, *Contact with the Media and Communicating in Public* (November 2008), p. 2.

product than a storyline focusing on military combat. As such, the Top Level Message from May 2012 stated:

The UK does not seek a perfect Afghanistan. There will be many challenges. But Afghanistan today is quite different to only three years ago:

- The level of insurgent attacks are [sic] down.
- Afghan security force capacity and capability is [sic] up.
- More people able to achieve a basic standard of living and security.³⁹

In spite of the strong focus on unison of output, ensured through Top Level Messages and military guidelines on how to communicate with the media, the multinational aspect of alliance work in Afghanistan problematized the national perspective. Domestic audiences tended to understand the mission through a national (British) rather than an international (NATO) lens. Streamlined and coherent messages were thus difficult to communicate within multinational coalitions, such as the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. *Exit* also problematized this even further. Fewer nations were taking on more responsibility as national governments had to withdraw troops because of strong opposition within the nation – voiced through national public opinion.⁴⁰ Even as UK military doctrine stressed the importance of maintaining a ‘common media line at the national level’ it was equally critical to ‘ensure cohesion and present a unified message’ at the international level.⁴¹ However, as demonstrated by the Dutch example, where the government was *forced* to withdraw troops because of strong opposition to the war in the general public, individual national interests and responses in public opinion play a critical part in the construction of a strategic narrative, at the national level. Therefore, instead of one single message, Afghanistan *exit* continued to foster a variety of messages that not always supported the overall campaign narrative, at coalition level. In line with this, and according to Betz, ‘[i]nefficiency is built into the system.’⁴²

³⁹ MOD Top Level Message, May 2012.

⁴⁰ The Dutch military mission in Afghanistan provides a particular clear example of this, as documented by George Dimitriu and Beatrice de Graaf, ‘Fighting the war at home: How counternarratives eroded support for the Dutch Military Mission in Uruzgan, 2006-2010’ in George Dimitriu, Beatrice de Graaf and Jens Ringsmose (eds.), *Shaping Societies for War: Public support, strategic narratives and the war in Afghanistan, 2001 until present* (London: Routledge, late 2013/early 2014 – **forthcoming**).

⁴¹ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 4-4.

⁴² Betz, David ‘Communication Breakdown’ 55(2011), p. 617.

Military Communication Training

However, if we briefly return to the training of soldiers, it is evident that the manner in which strategic narratives are incorporated into tactical level performance is through such training. It is in the exercise scenarios that such narratives, constructed at the strategic level, are adapted to and incorporated into tactical level communication activity. Therefore, communication training of military personnel is used to integrate official lines into military procedures. And in order to exert maximum influence, the military use specific techniques to reinforce the themes and messages set out in the Information Strategy. Hence, military personnel are trained to communicate selected storylines to the media so as to prevent media speculation. This particular mechanism is employed to ensure that media interpretations of a situation do not contradict military objectives.⁴³ Military guidelines on how to communicate specifically refer to the necessity of all military communication staff, as well as military individuals likely to engage with the media, to undertake communication and media training:

Individuals who are likely to engage with the media should undertake appropriate training to develop the skills necessary to do so effectively.⁴⁴

In order to meet such communication training requirements – critical to the organisational structure and central to informal military culture – military members are educated in communication practices. Not only does the UK Defence Academy run communication and media-related staff courses, the Defence School of Media and Communications (DSMC) at the Defence Media Operations Centre (DMOC)⁴⁵ was established to meet the demands of the media and to train military members in interview techniques, media interaction and general communication mechanisms. Here, courses range from individual media skills training, over Combat Camera Team (CCT) training to international media and communication training involving NATO, EU and other international partners. Moreover, the Defence Doctrine and Concepts Centre (DDCC) as well as other military units produce a range of guidelines and notices with the purpose of providing guidance for commanders and staff involved in

⁴³ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009.

⁴⁴ DIN03-020, *Contact with the Media and Communicating in Public* (November 2008), p. 2.

⁴⁵ The Defence Media Operations Centre (DMOC) was launched in 2005 as a result of UK military engagement in the Iraq War (2003) in particular. Established to support the military's dealings with the media in complex conflicts, DMOC reports to the DMC and is made up of staff from the Army, the Royal Navy, the Royal Air Force and the Civil Service – a Joint Services approach.

communication activity. Such documents are thus specifically employed to educate military members in the nature of the media function. In addition to these texts, military communication units have published a long list of communication and media related manuals. With this in mind, military communication and the military-media relationship are not left to their own devices; they are framed and structured by military directives and by organisational structures, memory and learning. All of this is clear from the training of military personnel, which places a lot of emphasis on achieving basic military institutional objectives as a means through which to secure certain aspects of the defence community.⁴⁶

In the same way as communication activity has been integrated into the core of strategic military planning, tactical level communication builds on set structures and methods. The military stress that all briefings, statements and interviews must adhere to a standardised structure. Because of this, the military put in place dedicated interview training lessons for all service personnel likely to come into contact with the media. These lessons take place at either DMOC and during military training exercises, where simulated press members are contracted to teach interviewing methods. Lessons range from simple and friendly interviews with young military personnel, who have never had to deal with media questioning, to critical interviews with military spokesmen and high-ranked officers, who are frequently tasked with responding to media requests.⁴⁷ Essentially such lessons are meant to prepare military personnel for increased media interest in their workings.

Communicating with the media is thus not left to its own devices. Rather, the selection and interpretation of information is critical in the process of military storytelling. By linking factual information to the overall storyline the military believe that they are able to secure their own military objectives while still adhering to the politically driven strategic narrative and key messaging set out in the Information Strategy. Summarised in the Ministry of Defence guidelines on *Contact with the Media and Communicating in Public*:

⁴⁶ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009

⁴⁷ Interview training conducted with NATO soldiers and officers in exercise scenario. Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009

It is a core task of all personnel to consider how to portray their activities in an interesting and accessible way, for both the internal and external audiences. Everyone – military and civilian – should look for opportunities to explain what defence is about, and to communicate the roles and achievements of the Armed Forces and MoD, to the public and other stakeholders...⁴⁸

Evident from exercise scenarios, for some members not used to dealing with the media, this system of constructing meaning within set information frames is challenging at best. While this system may prove useful in providing a consistent framework for communicating with the media as it gives military members some form of freedom to talk to media representatives, it hinders natural responses to questioning. It results in awkward, static and uncomfortable interviews.⁴⁹ Admitting to the difficulties in applying the prescribed technique when being interviewed, one army officer noted:

It's difficult [...] you're trying to fit what you want to say into this structure, which means it ends up taking much longer than it's supposed to [...] because you're constantly evaluating what to say and what not to say, and how to say it. I was once interviewed for my local paper and it took me 45 minutes to say what I wanted to say, it probably shouldn't have taken more than 10 minutes.⁵⁰

The structure of such techniques centres round using facts as the primary information to respond to media questioning. This is a recognition that facts are easier to communicate consistently. In addition to providing factual information, communicating the key themes and messages of the strategic narrative is critical to military interviewing techniques – effectively linking tactical level events with strategic storylines. This approach aims to ensure that the military and service personnel remain truthful in their interaction with the media. However, this should not be seen as a complete submission to the media's logic. Yet by appearing open to journalistic questioning the military believe that they are more likely to get the opportunity to communicate their own key messages.⁵¹

⁴⁸ DIN03-020, *Contact with the Media and Communicating in Public* (November 2008), p. 2.

⁴⁹ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009.

⁵⁰ Conversation, British army officers, returned from Basra, Iraq and Helmand, Afghanistan, February 2009.

⁵¹ Observational data, PJHQ Northwood, 7-14 April 2010.

This two-step technique (responding to media questioning with factual information before linking to the wider themes and messages) thus functions as a process of not only telling the story of war, but generating perceptions of key messages. Clarifying the system of communicating tactical level facts that can be connected to wider strategic themes, the UK military's *Strategy for Success* in Afghanistan served as a clear example. Here, the military emphasised that one of the reasons why success was achievable was because the 'Taliban cannot defeat ISAF':

Whenever the Taliban take on our forces head-to-head, they lose. That's why they have turned increasingly to "asymmetric" tactics like laying IEDs which are killing and maiming not only Afghan civilians and ISAF troops, but large numbers of Afghan civilians.⁵²

Here, the military discursively managed to provide factual information that set out the realities incurred when fighting in Afghanistan. At the same time, the assertion that Taliban fighters were inferior to the power of the coalition linked tactical level events to the wider account of the war. In general terms, the military believed that this form of messaging could prove reassuring to the UK domestic public and could convince audiences that the campaign was, or would be, successful. Another example provided by the military in trying to communicate a story of mission success related to the price paid by Afghan civilians on the ground:

...where we are implementing our counter-insurgency strategy, Afghan people are embracing the greater security and opportunity it brings. In Helmand, HM Armed Forces and the UK Civil-Military Mission have been executing this Counter-Insurgency strategy. We are very aware of the human price that we – and the Afghan people – have already paid. But we, our international allies and the Afghans are making progress.⁵³

This brief statement presents a clear indication of the manner in which storylines were formulated within the military communication system during the Afghanistan campaign. It shows how factual information from the tactical level was framed to generate an understanding of the danger posed by the enemy – the Taliban – rather than giving an impression of military failure because the allied forces had not been

⁵² UK Ministry of Defence, 'UK forces: Operations in Afghanistan' (2013).

⁵³ MOD, *Background Briefing on Afghanistan* (2012).

able to create a 'safe and secure environment'. The responsibility for the situation in Afghanistan, and the 'price paid' by civilians and by coalition members, was removed from the shoulders of coalition members; 'we' are paying a heavy price, so is 'the Afghan people'. The military thus juxtaposed the price paid by themselves to the price paid by local civilians, removing themselves from the justification for the war itself.

However, given the fact that the future of Afghanistan and the future of the Afghan people is still very much unknown, there is reason to argue that the local civilians continue to pay a heavy price. The image of the campaign as a success and the promise of a 'better future for the Afghan people' thus also gradually deteriorated as the messaging underlining such an image began to appear increasingly ambiguous. In the words of Betz:

At the end of the day, any marketing campaign whatever its nature – political, commercial or military – depends upon the existence of a saleable product. Clarity about we are “selling” – the desired end state, in other words – is required urgently, assuming the situation is not now utterly beyond recovery. And if it is then what can we learn from the bitter harvest? Perhaps the problem is the ideal itself which is clear and perfect.⁵⁴

However, this did not change the fact that the military continued to resort to subtle framing tactics through which they were able to separate themselves from the situation in Afghanistan. Within the military framework, therefore, responsibility was increasingly placed on the Taliban and on the UK political leadership. Military communication pointed to the *reality* that whereas the Taliban created an unsafe environment for local Afghans and for the allied forces, the UK political leadership set out the mission purpose as part of the strategic narrative. The ways in which the military tell Afghanistan at home was thus based on the prospects of likely military benefits and the ability to shed the blame for potential failures.

As we have seen, through military training the strategically generated narrative is enhanced by the use of certain interviewing and framing techniques, which aim to establish a favourable military contextual setting. In this regard, military training is particularly instrumental in harnessing all communication channels available. Based

⁵⁴ Betz, David 'Communication Breakdown' 55(2011), p. 629.

on the shared approach to communication and the rigid system in place to respond to media queries, it is not surprising that key themes and messages often appear repetitive and almost identical. And indeed they are. In the training of soldiers, the notion that ‘we are here to create a safe and secure environment’ is echoed throughout the institution.⁵⁵ Purposefully vague, nonspecific and generic in nature it provides the military with a seemingly unproblematic framework through which to tell their story. It does not challenge the messaging set out in the strategic narrative, at the political level. It represents core military values, meaning that it does not change during campaigns. It applies to all military work. And it is easily picked up by military personnel, even if they have never before been confronted with media questioning.

From the point of view of the media, this form of static, recurring and identical messaging is unsatisfying. Commenting on the military approach to communication activity, BBC News defence correspondent, Caroline Wyatt states:

Not all the developments over the three decades since the Falklands have been welcomed by journalists. Today, British service personnel in Helmand or elsewhere are almost given ‘lines to take’ before being allowed to take part in interviews. The stilted nature of some of those interviews – with the same lines repeated time and time again – suggests that perhaps the media training of servicemen and women has gone a little too far, while senior officers are well-aware that an excess of candour can prove career-limiting.⁵⁶

In Afghanistan, these ‘lines to take’, as noted here by Wyatt, increasingly centred round measurable progress. As we have discovered, communicating campaign success was critical to the Afghanistan exit strategy. In order to neutralise negative media coverage and counter-narratives, the military assured that: ‘There is a clear, realistic, and achievable strategy to bring about success in this mission, and a properly resourced campaign plan to deliver it.’⁵⁷ Through this form of messaging the military believed that they were capable of setting the tone of media output. The reason for this is that they continue to see themselves as the main provider of information for the media. Military members thus understand the media to be reliant on material produced

⁵⁵ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner ’09, 1-15 March 2009.

⁵⁶ Caroline Wyatt, ‘How has embedding changed since the Falklands?’ blog, 2 April 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/journalism/blog/2012/04/falklands-2.shtml> (accessed 3 April 2012).

⁵⁷ MOD, *Background Briefing on Afghanistan* (2012).

by military Combat Camera Teams (CCTs), Media Production Teams (MPTs) and Press Information Centres (PICs) in theatre.⁵⁸ As one member suggested, media facilities in Afghanistan were organised on the basis of what the military wanted to show the media, rather than what the media wanted to see.⁵⁹

Counter-Narratives

Exemplified by the Afghanistan campaign, it may be easier to raise a counter-narrative at a time when the nation is involved in a large-scale military operation, where political debates on security are polarised because stakes are high. Counter-narratives are also more likely to thrive if the mission is widely debated in the media, and challenged by political opposition parties. In relation to the UK mission in Afghanistan, on several occasions, such counter-narratives limited the prospects for unchallenged strategic and tactical level successes to be promoted in the official campaign narrative. In particular, competing arguments voiced in the context of the British involvement in the Afghanistan campaign highlighted ‘too few British troops and inadequate equipment as well as unequal burden sharing.’⁶⁰

In line with this, it is clear that the counter-narratives that may prove most damaging and may have a lasting effect are those storylines generated by the military themselves. Largely due to the nature of military engagements, which puts pressure on the institution and on individual serving personnel, maintaining a united front can be difficult. As we noted above, in multinational coalitions maintaining a united front becomes yet more problematic. Telling a consistent story is challenging if the strategic narrative holds inconsistencies. And because the military aim to provide the media with a never-stopping flow of information about campaign activity – ‘[i]nformation vacuums should be avoided as they can hand the initiative to the media and may lead to the highlighting of negative aspects of the Campaign’⁶¹ – they may be more likely to reveal aspects of their activities not intended for media exposure. They may reveal negative aspects such as internal disagreements, factually wrong information, international divergence or differences between military and political campaign

⁵⁸ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner ’09, 1-15 March 2009.

⁵⁹ Interview, British NATO officer engaged in information operations, March 2009.

⁶⁰ Ringsmose and Børgesen, ‘Shaping public attitudes towards the deployment of military power (2011), p. 517.

⁶¹ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 3-2.

objectives. Despite the obvious dangers related to generating counter-narratives, exposing the differences between military and political aims has proved useful for the military as a mechanism of removing themselves from political and legal justifications for armed conflict.

However, even as the military sometime find it necessary to defend their own institutional objectives, which may diverge from political aims, the manner in which such counter-narratives are presented is important. And because inconsistencies in campaign messaging can have a damaging effect at both the strategic and the tactical level, discrepancies in the military, in the political or in the coalition storyline are difficult to expose. Furthermore, military culture tells us that a shared understanding of the world is central to the institution and to communication activity. Message consistency requires cooperation throughout the military structure, at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. This is clear. Therefore, revealing internal differences – be it within the institution, within the coalition or within the political leadership – is not a common trait of military culture.

In Afghanistan, however, one of the problems were found in the lack of clear communication structures among coalition partners. In exercise scenarios such problems were exposed and analysed.⁶² From these exercise scenarios, it was clear that the ways in which national forces approached communication activity differed according to their experience, their legal and political constraints as well as their quest for support. Whereas the US military have had a long history of developing sophisticated public affairs doctrine, the British are still transforming their communication approach to suit the new media and conflict environments, and adjust their reliance on influence to meet strategic communication aims. This was also evident in the training of military personnel within NATO public affairs units. Here, the gradual move from a reactive to a more proactive approach to media engagement was reiterated by the UK military's practical and tactical understanding that the media could be used as a means to reach and influence specific audiences;⁶³ to get specific

⁶² Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009.

⁶³ Ibid.

themes and messages across to such an audience and to limit counter-narratives generated external to the institution.

One example demonstrating fractions within the international coalition is found in the United States (US) diplomatic documents released by Wikileaks in 2010. Containing strong criticism of the UK military leadership in Helmand, Afghanistan from 2007 to 2009, the documents revealed inconsistencies in the UK and US storylines. The leaked documents stated that US officials and Afghan President Karzai believed that UK forces were not up to the task of securing Helmand on their own. In one document, US General Dan McNeill was said to be ‘particularly dismayed by the British effort’ in fighting the drugs trade in Afghanistan. He is quoted as saying that British forces had ‘made a mess’ of counter-narcotics operations in Helmand by employing the ‘wrong’ tactics.⁶⁴ Countering the leaked information, Colonel Stuart Tootal, former commander of 3 Para, the first battle group sent to Helmand province, tried to downplay the importance of the documents:

They reflect individual views, within an alliance, which were also about a period where there were challenges due to a lack of resources.⁶⁵

Given that military personnel are specifically trained to conceal fractures in coalition alliances – reflecting military culture and communication training exemplified above – this comment along with the leaked documents were particularly undermining of military communication aims. Not only did the leaked documents expose inconsistencies in the overall strategic narrative set out for the operation, it also revealed the extent to which fractions within a coalition can be rendered visible by individual military members. Yet even as the Wikileaks documents illustrate the potential for discord between coalition partners, Colonel Tootal’s comment reflected the UK military’s approach to communicating with and through the media. Here, he not only downplayed the incident by stating that the accusations represented individual views and not the views of the institution, he also related the episode to the wider military objective of securing resources.

⁶⁴ BBC News, ‘Wikileaks cables criticise UK military in Afghanistan’ (3 December 2010). <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11906147>

⁶⁵ Colonel Stuart Tootal, interviewed on BBC Breakfast 3 December 2010 (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11906147>).

The case thus demonstrated the extent to which negative individual views tend to prove significantly damaging to an institution like the military, precisely because of its constant quest for unity and cohesion as required by military culture, communication structures and doctrine. Because of the traditionally strong adherence to unity of output within defence organisations, any divergence from the official narrative is often seen as indicative of a wider problem. Limiting such counter-narratives is thus at the heart of communication doctrine.

All of this together is demonstrative of how collaborative communication and information management strategies that unify objectives and working practices can be more difficult to achieve than British military training of communication staff suggests. Apart from this assertion, the military state that there may be occasions where they are willing to compromise the collaborative strategic narrative in order to assert their own understanding of a situation.⁶⁶ Again, this confirms the paradoxical nature of the military institution; an accountable Department of State, on the one hand, and an institution with its own goals and objectives, on the other.

For the British military, the key to effectively telling the story of Afghanistan was the speed of their response to media reports of campaign activity. As noted in the subsequent chapter, the new and fast-paced information network transformed the manner in which the military understood communication. From the military perspective, they believed that the speed at which they could *tell their story* was critical to their ability to shape media coverage and thus ultimately influence audience perceptions. However, it is also clear that a fast, reactive structure goes against the characteristics of military culture, which rests on stability and slow-paced change. And as Betz told us earlier, '[i]nefficiency is built into the system.'⁶⁷

To counter this 'inefficient' approach, the early engagement function of the Joint Media Operations Teams (JMOTs) helps the military push their storyline. JMOTs are thus a key vehicle for the military framing of events. Still, however, because of the speed at which theatre level events occur, JMOTs are not always able to provide

⁶⁶ Observational data, PJHQ Northwood, NATO Exercise, 7-14 April 2010.

⁶⁷ Betz, David 'Communication Breakdown' 55(2011), p. 617.

accurate accounts of operational activity, which may result in factually wrong information being released to the media in the theatre operations. Even as this goes against military communication principles, which rests on providing the media with facts of campaign activity, the military believe that it is better for them to get their story out. Waiting for specific information to be checked, cross-checked and confirmed takes time. Within this period of time the military may have lost the battle of narratives and at which time the media may have produced a strong narrative or resorted to speculation.⁶⁸

Speed remains a constantly underlying problem for military communication activity. However, in cases where information provided for the media turns out to be factually misleading, the military believe that this is largely a consequence of media pressure. However, in some cases media speculation may also prove beneficial to campaign activity in the short run as it holds the potential to generate perceptions among audiences. For example, rumours that the Taliban had agreed to enter talks with Afghan government officials in neutral Saudi Arabia in 2012,⁶⁹ may have served to make a significant dent in the morale of Taliban supporters. It is, therefore, important to recognise that it may occasionally be in the military's interest to accept media speculation.

If military messaging is exposed as factually wrong, the British military resort to 'damage limitation'⁷⁰ efforts.⁷¹ In addition, the growing exclusion of independent reporting from military settings challenges the media's watchdog function, which allows the military to resort to tactics of denial. Denial may prove particularly useful in a military context where independent scrutiny is limited. According to Badsey, even as military units dealing with the media promote themselves as being truthful 'they may withhold the entire truth or employ careful phrasing.'⁷²

⁶⁸ Observational data, PJHQ Northwood, NATO Exercise, 7-14 April 2010. See also Chapter 3 in Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ This method is also found in the Danish military where it has been termed 'fire fighting' – illustrating the need to minimise the damages of the 'fire'.

⁷¹ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009.

⁷² Badsey, 'Media War and Media Management' (2010), p. 405.

When describing the military relation to the truth in a historical context, journalist and author of the seminal book, *The First Casualty*, Philip Knightley states: '[L]ie directly only when certain that the lie will not be found out during the course of the war.'⁷³ In fact, defence doctrine stresses that the military should not attempt to hide the fact that information is being hidden from the media. But instead staff should explain why certain information needs to remain secret. Interestingly, however, in relation to the notion of truth, the previous version of media operations doctrine from 2001 noted that:

All communication with the media must be honest, transparent and accurate. Commanders and staffs should ensure the integrity of the information which they pass to the media. Information should be withheld only when disclosure would adversely affect OPSEC, force safety or individual privacy. Deliberately misleading the media must be avoided, no matter how tempting or tactically advantageous it may seem.⁷⁴

In the latest version this was reduced to:

All communication with the media must be truthful. Deliberately misleading the media must be avoided, no matter how tempting or tactically advantageous it may appear.⁷⁵

With the aim of re-branding their institution and re-branding their interaction with the media, the military accept that they need to be seen to be open and truthful, as noted above. This is important in order to change the popular view of the military system as controlling and secretive and hostile to external interference. Military spokesmen have become more and more open about the fact that the aim of military communication activity is to obtain positive coverage of campaign affairs and of the institution as a whole.⁷⁶ This is also done so as to establish the best possible relations with the media through which the military aim to tell their story. As one ex-media operations branch press officer explained:

⁷³ Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: The War Correspondent as Hero and Myth-Maker from the Crimea to Kosovo* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000 (1975)), p. 405.

⁷⁴ Joint Warfare Publication 3-45, *Media Operations* (November 2001), p. 1-3

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 1-5.

⁷⁶ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009; and Interview, MOD Chief Press Officer, April 2011.

[I] advised admirals and generals to keep their head above the parapet, be open rather than defensive, accept interviews bids when in doubt, give press facilities, don't wait for approval from the dreaded dead hand of PJHQ.⁷⁷

However, reflecting the hierarchical structure of the military, he also noted the problems inherent in many commanders' approach to media relations:

The problem with career officers is that they are career mad and dare not upset the bosses for fear of spoiling their progression, so they take no risk media wise and clam up, which is why we as reservist media minders did what we could to help media, on a very simple level.⁷⁸

As unfavourable storylines are unavoidable in a military campaign, commanders driven by career prospects may be expected to deny such narratives. However, in relation to the above mentioned leaked official documents, the British military came under fierce attack as it was revealed that hundreds of Afghan civilians had been killed or injured by NATO forces. Even as British troops were mentioned on more than 20 occasions, the UK Ministry of Defence denied that there had been 'any policy to cover up such killings'. No British military spokesman was reported making direct statements about the leaked files, but an MOD official said:

We deeply regret all civilian casualties. Protecting the Afghan civilian population is a cornerstone of ISAF's mission, and all British troops undergo comprehensive training on the strict rules of engagement. This contrasts directly with the attitude of the insurgents, whose indiscriminate use of suicide bombs, roadside explosive devices and human shields cause the majority of civilian deaths and injuries in Afghanistan. We will continue our efforts to prevent insurgents harming civilians and to develop the capacity of Afghan security forces to protect the population.⁷⁹

Reiterating military objectives and asserting the strategic narrative by including messaging such as 'protecting the Afghan civilian population', and linking to the wider political objectives in Afghanistan, this statement exemplifies the manner in which potentially damaging incidents are framed. It illustrates how responsibility for

⁷⁷ Email correspondence, ex-media operations branch press officer, April-May 2011.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ MOD spokesman quoted in *The Guardian*, 26 October 2010.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/oct/26/afghanistan-civilians-ministry-defence-wikileaks>

possible civilian deaths is shifted onto the insurgents, thus emphasising the legitimacy of the UK military function. As a mechanism for shifting responsibility and distancing themselves from the war, the military employ defensive practices which often lead to blaming an adversary or the political decision-making for creating a difficult environment for the use of military force. It is the core aim of such defensive mechanisms to re-frame an unfavourable situation through positive messaging.⁸⁰ These measures were certainly evident in the Afghanistan campaign as all warring parties continued to compete to be the primary definer of the situation.

As we have noted in previous chapters, the military communication remit is increasingly driven by the need to demonstrate their openness and their willingness to collaborate with media organisations. For example, in the military response to the BBC Panorama programme, *A Very British Hero*,⁸¹ which paid tribute to a high threat ammunition technical officer, who was killed in Afghanistan in October 2009, the British military stressed that '[t]he making of the programme was supported by the UK Ministry of Defence, through access to military premises and the facilitation of interviews with Service personnel.'⁸² Similarly, the BBC3 documentary series, 'Our War: 10 Years in Afghanistan', which used footage shot by serving soldiers in Helmand,⁸³ was endorsed by the UK Ministry of Defence. According to the military, '[the soldiers] had all decided to fit cameras to their helmets to gather their own video footage for themselves. But once the BBC learned that this footage existed, the soldiers were keen to help make the programmes and offer their unique view of the combat mission in Afghanistan.'⁸⁴

Yet whereas the military are eager to promote their own controlled and institutionalised storyline, they are less eager to allow alternative, 'populist', narratives to emerge from within their ranks, unless they have been cleared by the

⁸⁰ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner'09, 1-15 March 2009.

⁸¹ The programme was broadcast on 24 May 2010.

⁸² DMC, Defence Daily Update: 25 May 2010.

⁸³ This notion of soldiers becoming reporters and photographers of war is discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.

⁸⁴ Leigh Hamilton, 'BBC documentary to show Helmand through soldiers' eyes', *Defence Focus*, June 2011. Also found online:

<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/PeopleInDefence/BbcDocumentaryToShowHelmandThroughSoldiersEyes.htm>

appropriate communication branch.⁸⁵ In the same way as all media reports from embedded correspondents go through clearance procedures, books written by serving military personnel and ex-military members are cleared by the Directorate Media and Communication (DMC). As an example, high-profiled British Army General Sir Mike Jackson acknowledges this in his critically acclaimed book, *Soldier*:

Thanks are also very much due to Colonel Ben Bathurst and Nick Gurr of the MOD's Directorate General of Media and Communication for their rapid examination of the text for errors of security and fact.⁸⁶

Similarly, in his book *Lifeline in Helmand*, Roger Annett offered his thanks to both the MOD and the media operations branch:

My special thanks go to 'the Boss' of 27 Squadron 'C' Flight, and the Media and Communications Officers of RAF Odiham and Lyneham, Flight Lieutenants Leigh Shaughnessy and Louise Daily – all three exceptionally helpful in getting the project started and completed. Thanks are also due to their chiefs at Air Command and the Ministry of Defence for their assistance in steering the book through the hoops of contractual and other processes.⁸⁷

And finally, Doug Beattie started his book, *Task Force Helmand*, by acknowledging the input of the MOD:

...I am pleased to acknowledge the advice and co-operation of those at the Ministry of Defence who smoothed the passage towards publication of *Task Force Helmand*. Thank you to the staff at the Directorate of Defence Public Relations (Army).⁸⁸

Demonstrated by these examples, the military objective of limiting counter-narratives stretches beyond direct interaction with the media. The military public image is equally important in relation to popular culture. And from a military perspective, portrayals of the military institution found in popular culture – through books, dramas

⁸⁵ This is particularly evident in military guidelines on communicating in public and contact with the media, which the military state must go through 'proper authoritative channels.'

⁸⁶ Jackson, *Soldier* (2007), p.14.

⁸⁷ Roger Annett, *Lifeline in Helmand: RAF Battlefield Mobility in Afghanistan* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, 2010), p.7.

⁸⁸ Doug Beattie, *Task Force Helmand: A Soldier's Story of Life, Death and Combat on the Afghan Front Line* (London: Simon & Schuster UK, 2009), ix.

and documentaries, for instance – may have a ‘significant impact on longer term perception of the military and their actions in the minds of the wider public.’⁸⁹ Yet it is important to recognise that these examples are only illustrative of the involvement of the UK Ministry of Defence and established communication units in the shaping of military contributions to popular culture. By no means do they represent an exhaustive argument. Rather, they should merely be seen as examples of the broad range of communication and PR units present in the military, as they point to an ever-expanding military communication structure.

All of these examples are thus indicative of the degree to which counter-narratives may arise as a result of internal conflicts within or between the military, their political governors or coalition partners. Even as the military have devised sophisticated communication strategies and influencing measures reaching beyond the immediate scope of media operations in an attempt to contain such definitional discrepancies, there are times when fractures in the cooperation with partners will undermine their efforts to maintain a united front, or a consistent explanation of an event. This is dangerous territory from a military perspective as inconsistencies in the political strategic narrative and military messaging can lead to loss of credibility among the domestic audience. These ‘clashes of narratives’ diminish the military objective of creating favourable perceptions from the theatre of operation and they may contradict the expectations and values of the domestic audiences.

Conclusions

In examining the strategic narrative generated for UK troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, this chapter has shown the extent to which such a narrative is aimed at promoting campaign success, consistency, and a clarity of purpose. As we have discovered, the military formulate storylines that attract media attention in order to secure their communication. To this end, the chapter has demonstrated that by providing media products for dissemination through independent communication channels, the military aim to not only cater to the needs of the media, but to manage the ways in which storylines are communicated, portrayed and received. In line with this, the chapter has highlighted and exemplified the role of constructed military

⁸⁹ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 3-3.

storylines in limiting the emergence of counter narratives as well as preventing the exposure of internal fractions and disagreements.

Considering the central positioning of the audience in military doctrine, explored in Chapter Four, this chapter has illustrated the manner in which reactive and defensive storytelling is used to promote favourable perceptions. The strategic narrative and the accompanying messaging are thus consciously and intentionally produced to evoke perceptions from which the military stand to gain. To this end, one of the key findings of this particular chapter is the notion that the strategies employed by the military to frame their activities are founded upon the extent to which they are able to control the information that is made available to the media. Building upon this argument, the chapter reveals how the military attempt to meet the media need for information through staged communication activity. As we have seen, by making information available to the media (through media ‘bundles’ created by dedicated Media Production Teams, for example), the military attempt to exert control over which storylines are communicated through the media and how such storylines are framed and understood by target audiences. One aspect of this discussion thus points to the notion that, because they use pre-constructed narratives of campaign activity, the military are not only concerned with maintaining a cohesive front (through unity of output), but also to attempt to control media coverage itself.

Furthermore, one of the strong arguments of this chapter is found in the ability of the military to maintain authority and credibility in their strategic narrative. As noted here, this is particularly critical in order for the military to succeed in selling their story to the media. This chapter has shown that by incorporating messages that focus on freedom, liberation and humanitarianism, the military aimed to tell the story of Afghanistan *exit* within a particular framework; within a humanitarian framework with which their target audiences were unlikely to disagree. To this end, the discussion points to a transition in the strategic narrative; from the initial storyline generated for the Afghanistan campaign driven by clear and consistent messaging to a narrative focusing on the prospects of success in a conflict landscape driven by *exit* and value-laden objectives.

The subsequent chapter follows along the same lines by bringing the notions of carefully constructed campaign narratives into a framework that builds on the military's online approach to communication and through visual representation. Whereas this chapter has concentrated on the ways in which the military aim to tell their story through favourable narratives in their interaction with the media, the following chapter broadens this discussion by examining how these storylines are used in the military's online engagement approach and the ways in which these narratives are reflected in the visual representations promoted by the military. The following chapter aims to understand the ways in which the UK military manage to transform their communication structure to suit the increasingly technology driven information network and how they use their own communication channels to exert direct, and largely unmediated, influence on target audiences.

Chapter Seven

New Media, New Narrative & Afghanistan¹

...Afghanistan and Iraq are becoming the first internet wars. Global and digital visual culture makes the production and circulation of images cheap and easy enough for any participant in the war may take on the role of war photographer... 'The new eyewitness', as I call this powerful figure, has entered the global arena of politics and the media.

Mette Mortensen, *The Camera at War* (2009).

It is evident from the discussion in the previous chapter that strategic narratives play a significant role in the UK military's Afghanistan story – a story of war, a story of soldiers at war, a story of progress and a story of the military institution as a whole. For those of us who have never experienced what it is like to patrol the streets of Kabul or to dive for cover in a Forward Operating Base (FOB) in Southern Helmand, the messaging promoted through strategic narratives shape our perception of this distant reality. Therefore, the manner in which home audiences become eyewitnesses to the conditions of war and to military action is through the wide range of information

¹ This chapter makes use of images sourced through the Defence Images Database (www.defenceimages.mod.uk). All of such images have been made available for re-use through the Open Government License (OGL) and are marked '© Crown copyright' followed by the year they were taken – as requested by the MOD. Other images featured in this chapter are sourced through the UK 'Defence Images' photostream' on Flickr. These images have all been attributed in the manner requested by the copyright and Creative Commons attributes specified by the MOD.

outlets; including new and online media. In an age of internet media and real-time communication, mobile phones and social media, controlling the messaging, the storyline and the managing of campaign imagery is virtually impossible. Today, battlefields are not restricted by geographical borders. The Afghanistan campaign was not a war fought within established boundaries and it had no identifiable frontline. There are thus no neat lines on a map that mark the military frontier in terms of information outreach.

In continuation of the discussion presented in Chapter Six, this chapter aims to illustrate the extent to which new and alternative military communication channels are employed to progress the strategic narrative. With this in mind, it is empirically founded on narratives promoted by the military through online, unconventional means and through visual representations. More precisely, these storylines comprise those strategically constructed messages integrated on the Defence Social Media Hub² and promoted through the UK's Defence Online Engagement Strategy.³ By examining these particular components of military communication activity, it is possible to trace the military approach to communication from the strategic level, over the operational level, to the tactical level.

Online Communication & Counter-Narratives

Going back to *The Utility of Force*, the starting point for this chapter is Smith's notion of 'the theatre of operations',⁴ which reaches beyond the immediate warzone. Referring to 'the global theatre of war, with audience participation'⁵ Smith argues that wars amongst the people are fought on a broad scale, through traditional media and

² See Image 7.1 for an overview of the MOD Official Channels (online) listed on the Defence Social Media Hub. It is important to stress that the forthcoming analysis focuses on the official military narrative – messages promoted through online channels listed on the Defence Social Media Hub and representing the MOD's official approach to the Afghan campaign. Even as it acknowledges the existence of alternative online counter-narratives, expressed through unofficial communication channels such as personal blogs and YouTube videos, the chapter does not engage in extensive examination of these resources. Rather, these alternative storylines are employed to establish a solid understanding of the growing use of online communication tools in times of war. As the intention is to understand the ways in which the military, as an institution, communicate campaign activity at a number of levels, it is important to focus on official sources that can shed light on such aspects of the military organisational structure.

³ Defence Online Engagement Strategy (August 2007).

⁴ See Chapter One for a discussion of Smith's use of the term 'theatre' in defining war amongst the people.

⁵ Smith, *Utility of Force* (2005), p. 285.

increasingly through online communication channels. As we have seen, this theatre of operation thus puts pressure on the military to communicate their strategic, operational and tactical level activity, in order to meet the challenges of the new information environment. Within this theatre, technology savvy soldiers push the military to engage with different media and information technologies in new and alternative ways. Constructing narratives through virtual means, throughout the information network, is thus an attractive method for reaching a global audience in a direct and speedy manner.

The Internet can be used to spread or circulate information and opinion, including rumour, with a speed inconceivable a few years ago. All this reinforces the need for a proactive information stance with a global reach.⁶

Military doctrine clearly demonstrates the extent to which new media factors force the military to transform their communication practices. Moreover, as the construction of strategic narratives is vital to the government in the legitimisation of military campaigns, these legitimising practices have become increasingly complicated to manage as counter-narratives emerge on social media sites like Wikileaks, online blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and elsewhere. Yet scholarly work remains inconclusive on whether new media narratives serve to undermine governmental legitimising practices. The following discussion aims to contribute to this debate by exploring the UK military's use of new media tools, while recognising the dual and paradoxical nature of the military institution set out in Chapter One of this thesis.

Scholars have noted that in previous conflicts the media generally supported the national strategic narrative as they were almost fully reliant on the military for information about campaign activity and military affairs.⁷ And as we noted in the introductory chapter, broad-ranging studies into the use of government censorship during crises and military control of embedded reporters have been carried out by a number of media and communication academics.⁸ However, today, the picture is remarkably different, with a variety of sources available throughout the information

⁶ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 1-1.

⁷ See, for instance: Simon Cottle, *Global Crisis Reporting: Journalism in the Global Age* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2009), p. 112.

⁸ See: Carruthers, *The Media at War* (2000); Allan and Zelizer, *Reporting War* (2004); among others.

system. New digital media offer platforms for promoting alternative storylines, exemplified in conflicts such as Iraq and Afghanistan and perhaps more so in Tunisia and Egypt. In line with this, online media tools force the military to engage with these new platforms. However, it is important to stress that authors continue to disagree on the actual impact of new media on public opinion. Whereas some scholars understand these new platforms as a 'disruptive force' in government messaging,⁹ others see it as a vehicle for military communication.¹⁰

Indeed, as we have learned, the UK military place great weight on strategic communication and invest extensive resources into establishing their own new media outlets, enabling them to communicate directly with target audiences. The military thus place themselves in a position where they can use such new media channels to advance their own storyline. Chapter Five showed us that the organisation of military communication imitates many of the core structures inherent in media institutions. The military have thus become both more dependent on the media as well as significantly more independent from this media. And since military communication structures have become more like those of media institutions, new information technologies allow them to put in place their own communication channels.

Another aspect of the new communication environment is that there is now a growing demand for constant and new information about campaign activity. Previously military media facilitation at theatre level would supply most of such information. Today, pervasive media can easily obtain information and unique insights into military affairs without having to go through military channels. This is also recognised within the military institution. Coupled with the advances in communication technologies such as lightweight camera equipment, improved communication speeds and real-time technology, the military acknowledge that journalists get and transmit stories without

⁹ See, for instance: Maria Touri, 'Transparency in the age of cyberpolitics', in Athina Karatzogianni (ed.), *A Cyber conflict and Global Politics* (London: Routledge, 2008); Nik Gowing, 'Time to move on: new media realities - new vulnerabilities of power 2011', *Media, War & Conflict* 4(2011), pp. 13-19; Kari Anden-Papadopoulos, 'Body horror on the internet: US soldiers recording the war in Iraq and Afghanistan', *Media, Culture & Society*, 31(2009), pp. 921-38; and Kari Anden-Papadopoulos, 'US Soldiers Imaging the Iraq War on YouTube', *Popular Communication*, 7(2011), pp. 17-27.

¹⁰ Marisol Sandoval and Christian Fuchs, 'Towards a critical theory of alternative media', *Telematics and Informatics*, 27(2011), pp. 141-150.

having to rely on military facilitation.¹¹ Consequently, their ability to control how strategic narratives are framed in the media is increasingly limited. Unilateral reporting and social networking sites are understood to be particularly challenging in this regard, as the military have little control over these sources of alternative information about campaign activity and military affairs.¹²

There will be correspondents [...] who work independently throughout the Joint Operations Area (JOA), equipped with their own facilities and transport. These correspondents will undoubtedly attempt to cross the 'front line' and report on the activities of both sides in real time.¹³

In order to counter the narratives produced by these 'independent' reporters and through these separate outlets, the military aim to strengthen their own *storytelling* through online means. Exploiting the increased patterns of access to information about their activities, they have resorted to using online communication tools for reaching audiences through direct messaging. The incorporation of online engagement in the military communication structure, therefore, holds a dual purpose. On the one hand, the new information landscape has exposed some of the previously less visible aspects of campaign activity and military affairs. Yet on the other hand, it has also resulted in greater information control being implemented in the military as a system of limiting unwanted storylines emerging from within the defence community.¹⁴

Engaging Audiences Online

In addition to those counter-narratives developing outside of campaign hosting facilities, over which the military have no or only limited control, other counter-narratives likely to influence the perception of military performance increasingly emerge from the large number of new media users within the military organisation. Because of the size of the UK military organisation, moderating counter-narratives from within their own ranks is difficult. This is also confirmed by the discussion set out in Chapter One of this thesis, which highlighted that speaking with one voice within the armed forces is as difficult as it is in many other large-scale human institutions. Yet

¹¹ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009.

¹² Interview, US Officer, Rheindahlen, Germany, March 2009.

¹³ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 3-1.

¹⁴ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009.

it is also important to recognise the weight of military culture and the effect that this has on the possibility of socialising military personnel into reproducing strategic narratives and organisational messaging. Military culture may act as a brake on the incorporation of new communication methods being integrated into institutional structures, but it also builds trust among military members and it entrusts responsibility in each service member. Therefore, the socialisation of military personnel into communicating the themes and messages set out in the Information Strategy is critical as the online presence of individual service members may ultimately have a strategic effect on campaign activity and military performance.

As we have seen, the training of military personnel strengthens this form of socialisation. The messaging underpinning the purpose of the mission is thus internalised through extensive training and as a central aspect of informal and formal military culture. With this in mind, online communication narratives originating from military members is managed indirectly to some extent, as military personnel identify with the norms of the institution and of the culture in which they exist and function. Effectively, this means that the strategic narrative is reiterated through individual storylines with which the general public can identify. It establishes a personal, a human perspective, which tends to appeal to those of us who have never experienced the reality of war. In this manner, the use of new media platforms holds the capacity to strengthen the official strategic narrative, through less official and more human(e) channels.¹⁵

Moreover, given the central positioning of the individual military member in military culture, each military member is also key to incorporating new and emerging technologies in a way that favours the military institution. As a human organisation, the military rely on the character of the individual Service man and woman to tactically execute strategic and politically driven campaign objectives. Furthermore, it is in the

¹⁵ Naturally, there are a wide range of channels available through which individual soldiers express their views on operations in which they are or have been involved, the nature of their work as well as military conditions. In recent years, a number of blogs, social media entries, YouTube videos and Flickr images countering the strategic narrative have emerged from within the ranks. Not surprisingly, this has resulted in number of studies examining the effect of such a development on public opinion and on the military institution as a whole. See, for instance: Mette Mortensen, 'The Camera at War: When Soldiers become War Photographers' in Rikke Schubart et al. (eds.), *War isn't Hell, it's Entertainment: War in Modern Culture and Visual Media* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009), pp. 44-61; Melissa Wall, 'In the battle(field): the US military, blogging and the struggle for authority', *Media, Culture & Society*, 32(2010), pp. 863-872; and Anden-Papadopoulos, 'Body horror on the internet' (2009).

informal culture, to which each military member subscribes, that the foundation for an efficient and fluid information management structure is found. To this end, it is important to recognise that serving personnel are constantly pushing the military to adapt their communication structure and strategic approach to meet the new challenges of the information environment, as noted below.

In addition to the online presence of individual military members, the UK military have added new channels to their traditional organisational communication structure and well-trodden paths of information management. Through digital communication tools the military aim to engage audiences at all levels within the technologically driven information system. UK defence structures have thus placed more weight on information provision via the use of new media communication tools such as Facebook and Twitter as well as photo- and video-sharing communities like Flickr and YouTube.¹⁶ The use of unconventional communication platforms, more extensive use of the internet and the 24-hour information environment, as well as targeted messages aimed at addressing the previously inaccessible and largely ignored levels of the domestic population, have become more prominent in recent UK communication strategies.¹⁷ Consequently, the military have put in place a range of guidelines meant to, on the one hand, limit the use of such information technologies among military members in order to avoid counter-narratives emerging from within the institution itself and, on the other hand, encourage serving personnel to engage with the media as well as the public through online tools.

Evident from discussions in previous chapters, military communication endeavours, be it through traditional media channels or through online engagement practices, are founded upon an inherent paradoxical approach to communication: encouraging as well as limiting the communication of campaign activity. Balancing these two aims has proved increasingly difficult in the context of new and digital communication structures, largely because such structures build on generally uncontrollable systems.¹⁸

¹⁶ Defence Online Engagement Strategy (August 2007).

¹⁷ Observational data, PJHQ Northwood, NATO Exercise, 7-14 April 2010.

¹⁸ The Defence Online Engagement Strategy (August 2007) emphasises a number of ways in which military personnel at all levels are encouraged to engage with the public through online tools. However, it, along with the Online Engagement Guidelines (August 2009), also lists a wide range of precautions for each individual military member to take before engaging with others online.

Therefore, harnessing online channels to benefit their own aims is central to the remit of the Defence Online Engagement Strategy from 2007 and the Defence Online Engagement Guidelines from 2009. The Strategy emphasises that the aim of the new approach is to incorporate new technologies into existing defence structures in a way that:

Harnesses new and emerging technologies, and new unofficial online channels, for the purpose of disseminating defence and Service messages and building defence and Service reputation.

Harnesses unofficial electronic content, including content generated unofficially by Service and MOD civilian personnel, also for the purpose of disseminating defence and Service messages and building defence and Service reputation.

Minimises the risk to personal, informational and operational security, to Service and MOD reputation, and of litigation to MOD, that the exploitation of such technologies and engagement with such channels can pose.¹⁹

The strategy from the MOD's perspective is clear. The purpose of including new information technology in military communication structures is to promote strategic narratives, set themes and messages and improve the military public image. Therefore, the Defence Online Engagement Strategy stresses that all communication channels likely to influence target audiences must be 'harnessed' to ensure that messages coming from new media channels within the ranks are not detrimental to the strategic narrative. The Strategy thus not only considers ways through which to engage audiences, it also legitimises the military's aim of managing storylines promoted through both official and unofficial online channels, as demonstrated in Appendix A. However, as noted in the previous chapters, the ability to control the story in a largely uncontrollable system is impossible. Therefore, even as efficient communication of a strategic narrative through online means has become increasingly important to the UK military, it is also a task that has become progressively more challenging as new and sophisticated methods of communication continue to emerge. It is thus paradoxical that the British military build their online communication strategy upon the ideal that they can both

¹⁹ Defence Online Engagement Strategy (August 2007), p. 2.

control and promote effective storylines of successful campaign activity through online communication structures.

As online media exist and operate in coexistence with traditional media, it is important not to understand the online military approach to communication as an isolated phenomenon in the military strategic communication framework. This also means that the strategic narrative, organisational communication structure, cultural traits, codes of conduct and basic military objectives are as relevant in relation to online engagement as they are in relation to direct, traditional military-media interaction in the theatre of operations. The media – online and offline – remain the ‘means’ through which target audiences can be reached and through which their attitudes and behaviours can be influenced. Understanding online engagement as an extension of already existing military communication is also identified in the Defence Online Engagement Strategy:

Just as with the mainstream media, our ability to succeed and to enforce these rules will be dependent on our ability to identify and monitor who is speaking to whom and where. DGMC²⁰ will begin monitoring of online media and establish more detailed guidelines on when to engage.²¹

Such guidelines came in the form of the Online Engagement Guidelines in 2009, which state that ‘Service and MOD civilian personnel are encouraged to talk about what they do, but within certain limits to protect security, reputation and privacy.’²² Reflecting already discussed strategic communication approaches, the guidelines, epitomised by the above citation, demonstrate once again the binary nature of military communication activity. On the one hand, the military want to be seen to be open, to engage with audiences and to allow external access to information about military operations. Yet on the other hand, they rely on structures that build on restriction of access to information about military processes ‘to protect security, reputation and privacy.’ Once again we see history repeat itself. We may no longer be dealing with embedded media on board ships bound for the South Atlantic. But many of the concerns voiced about the *new*

²⁰ In 2011, the Directorate General Media and Communication (DGMC) was renamed the Directorate Media and Communication (DMC).

²¹ Defence Online Engagement Strategy (August 2007).

²² Defence Online Engagement Guidelines, DMC-PR-05-07-02 (August 2009).

media landscape reflect those identified in the media guidelines distributed to crews and officers on board ships during the Falklands campaign.

Concerns about operational security thus remain powerful in defence communication strategies. From a military perspective they are important to the function of the institution, to the protection of deployed personnel and to the execution of campaign activity. It is, therefore, essential to recognise that this form of ‘secrecy’ is not necessarily anti-democratic, in the same way as it does not necessarily violate the military’s adherence to public accountability. Even as operational security continues to dominate the military’s approach to communication and information management, the term still serves a real purpose during military deployment. It is thus not always employed to deflect media attention, but is used to protect the operation and the lives of deployed personnel. It is, however, critical to be wary of obscuration.

The new and increasingly technology driven information network presents opportunities as well as problems for military communication. This does not mean that the military’s use of digital communication tools to promote favourable storylines should be examined in a vacuum. Rather, as briefly noted above, the Afghanistan campaign can be described as a newspaper, radio, television and, indeed, internet war. Military digital communication tools should thus be seen as an integral element in the overarching military communication structure, demonstrated in previous chapters. Given the weight placed on consistency and unity of output, online messaging resembles the campaign narrative set out at the strategic level. Yet whereas the previously discussed military communication doctrine has a number of particular audiences in mind, the Defence Online Engagement Strategy aims to engage ‘new audiences’:

The publishing of authorised content or material on unofficial channels will be governed by a new strategy designed to bring our existing messages to new audiences, by (1) pushing our material onto external channels, and (2) engaging with specific external conversations on a case-by-case basis. Analogous to writing a newspaper, this will only take place when approved by licensed media and communication staff.²³

²³ Defence Online Engagement Strategy (August 2007).

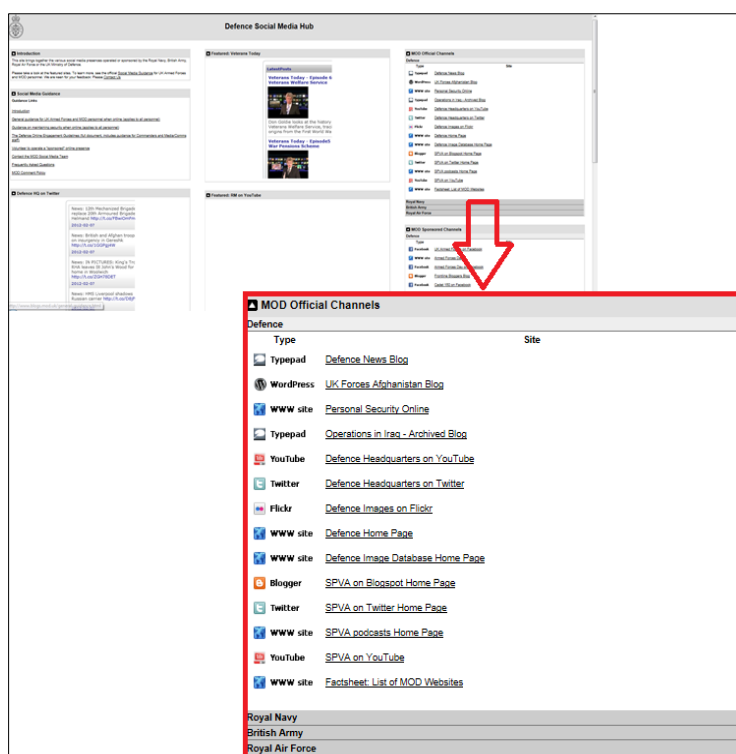


Image 7.1: Screenshot of the UK Defence Social Media Hub, which includes links to all official UK defence related online (re)sources (<http://www.blogs.mod.uk/homepage.html>).

Demonstrated by the defence objectives for online engagement set out in Appendix A, the military aim to integrate both ‘authorised’ and ‘unauthorised’ content on ‘official’ as well as ‘unofficial’ defence online channels. This form of engaging ‘new audiences’ by communicating directly through official and unofficial online channels is substantiated by a recent UK military initiative to launch a central hub for all online activity. Integrating all social media pages ‘sponsored’ by the different single Services this initiative ‘brings together the various social media presences operated or sponsored by the Royal Navy, British Army, Royal Air Force or the UK Ministry of Defence.’²⁴ The site also makes clear that whereas social media outlets listed on the Defence Social Media Hub are sponsored and authorised by the UK Armed Forces or the MOD, ‘social media presences not listed here have no official connection to the UK Armed Forces or MOD.’²⁵ In line with this, the military specify that if soldiers wish to officially engage with social media it ‘must be via or with knowledge of the DGMC’.²⁶

²⁴ Defence Social Media Hub (<http://www.blogs.mod.uk/>).

²⁵ Defence Social Media Hub, guidelines (<http://www.blogs.mod.uk/social-media-guidelines.html>).

²⁶ Defence Online Engagement Guidelines, DMC-PR-05-07-02 (August 2009).

Visual Online Narratives

Staying within this framework, an important aspect of engaging audiences through online means is the military's ability to provide a visual component to their strategic narrative. The importance of 'the image' in conflict has long been recognised within western cultures. Yet only recently has the British military incorporated visual representations into their communication structure: 'A visual component can help make a story which would otherwise fail.'²⁷ Not surprisingly, the increasingly online aspect of communication has speeded up this process. However, historically, visual representations have been employed to tell stories of war and fighting, and to paint images of war heroes – as well as villains.²⁸ The power of a picture lies in its ability to allow the viewer – the audience – a ground-level view of events taking place not in their sight. Moreover, visual imagery are much more likely to make people emote, to make them form an opinion about a topic or to even change already established views of a particular situation; to re-brand events. From a military perspective, therefore, visual representations of soldiers at war offer an important opportunity for them to tell their story in a manner that textual messaging cannot do. Generally, there is a greater reliance on pictures *showing* the truth rather than the military *telling* the truth.

The UK military's online presence consists of hundreds of images telling stories of the military mission in Afghanistan in general, and activity in Helmand in particular. The pictures tell stories of serving soldiers, of military activity, of reconstruction efforts, of the local people and of everyday situations on the ground. This particular aspect of the military approach to strategic communication through the use of social media pages like Flickr, Facebook and Twitter is important in the overall campaign narrative and it is critical to any understanding of modern military messaging. This is also strengthened by the fact that the military frame their online communication approach within the strategic narrative set out at the political level. Therefore, understanding the images promoted through online channels as an extension of the communication mechanisms

²⁷ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 3-2.

²⁸ For more on this, see, for instance: Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003); Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and Cynthia Weber, *Imagining America at War: Morality, Politics and Film* (New York: Routledge, 2006). Also, for a discussion on the use of images on ISAF's Flickr pages see: Kotilainen, 'Humanitarian Soldiers, Colonialised Others and Invisible Enemies' (2011).

exerted through traditional media – documented in previous chapters – helps broaden the discussion.

Military produced imagery is mainly published through two specific channels: direct online channels and bundles for the media. In line with this, in an attempt to push the strategically formulated storyline, the military state that such images can be freely used by members of the media as well as a wider audience, thus supporting the military aim of promoting military produced media products: 'Media product can be [...] posted on publicly accessible military websites. Active marketing of such product [...] is essential to give such material a chance to being used by the media.'²⁹ Against this backdrop, the images, shot by military personnel³⁰ and distributed through online communication channels, work to make the Afghan mission visible, imaginable and available to the intended audiences. The images are thus designed to give audiences a ground level account of the everyday lives of deployed personnel and of military activity, with the aim of visualising and humanising the military effort.

From an international military perspective, online imagery is employed to influence the perceptions of target audiences by 'striving to make our mission in Afghanistan as accessible to *our audience* as possible.'³¹ The notion of our audience reiterates the strategic targeting of domestic, internal and external audiences, as set out in military communication doctrine. This also suggests that the effort in Afghanistan was a shared and collective endeavour, thus igniting support through audience attitudes and behaviours. Not surprisingly perhaps, the images often hold more information than that intended by the military, precisely because they are representatives of their way of thinking.³² They unveil features, partly subconscious perceptions, inherent in military culture. The danger in the 'active marketing' of military generated imagery thus lies in the cultural codes and historically formed ways of thinking present in the military

²⁹ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 5-6.

³⁰ Usually, the images are shot by Combat Camera Team (CCT) photographers, but sometimes an aid organisation is mentioned.

³¹ ISAF press release, cited in Kotilainen, 'Humanitarian Soldiers, Colonialised Others and Invisible Enemies' (2011), p. 23.

³² See: Kotilainen, 'Humanitarian Soldiers, Colonialised Others and Invisible Enemies' (2011).

institution;³³ codes which do not necessarily correspond to those present within the general population.

Visual narratives, therefore, testify to the culture in which they have been produced. Instead of providing evidence of campaign activity, military imagery represents a kind of reality; they have been produced and selected by the military. They offer a controlled view of ground-level activity. Images framed and distributed by the British military in relation to Afghanistan thus tell as much about the military, about the internal structures and about deployed personnel, as they do about the events shown in the images. And they tell us as much about the military communication structure as those themes and messages promoted through media interviews and pre-constructed media scripts.

This is important, as any analysis of defence imagery is also an analysis of the military themselves and of their approach to communication activity. In addition, in order to address target audiences and persuade them to support military operations and specific campaign activity, the visually constructed themes and messages have to utilise and be constructed upon culturally derived mind-sets and widely accepted world views of their audiences. Understanding the expectations and values of these audiences is thus equally important when generating visual representations of military activity as it is in the context of textual messaging in the form of 'lines to take'. However, as noted above and according to Rowland and Tatham, the UK military are not equipped to conduct this kind of effective Target Audience Analysis.³⁴

Framing the Afghanistan campaign in particular ways thus becomes a powerful weapon in the military influencing arsenal. It becomes an important component of the overall story of how the British military tell Afghanistan at home. Realising that images, like online narratives, can result in counter-narratives and thus jeopardise the legitimacy of the strategic narrative, the military use visuals to convey intended themes and messages. Not surprisingly, framing an operation through visual online representation is emerging as an effective way of influencing domestic audiences. Furthermore,

³³ See, for instance, Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion Books: London, 2001).

³⁴ Rowland and Tatham, 'Strategic Communication & Influence Operations?' (2010).

communicating sustainable security and exit strategy may prove easier if communicated through value-laden imagery that centres round humanitarian activity rather than military combat, as discussed in greater details in the following section. This does not necessarily mean that the visual component of military online communication promotes different storylines to those examined in Chapter Six of this thesis – yet the image is the difference. If we look at the strategic narrative for Afghanistan, it is clear that *exit* became a dominant factor. MOD Top Level Messages also confirmed this:

Transition to Afghan control, as agreed at Lisbon Summit in 2010, is on track, is realistic and achievable. International forces are gradually handing over security responsibility to the Afghans who will have full responsibility in all provinces by the end of 2014.³⁵

...the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) capability continues to improve and they take on increasing responsibility for their own security, the focus of the UK's efforts will shift from a combat role, to a training, advisory and assistance role.³⁶

As international forces were gradually returning security responsibility to the Afghans, the military needed to convey a message that *showed* that the ANSF and the Afghan National Army (ANA) were equipped and ready to protect the civilian population. This included a visual component that not only supported this storyline, but which also developed it further. Adding another layer to the story told through images, it is important to recognise that they hold the capacity to influence the attitudes and behaviours of the local population (those being protected). Since pictures are not language specific, they can convey particular narratives in a manner that military messaging is generally unable to do. Pictures can thus be considered important to both the communication of specific messages, and to the reinforcement of particular strategic messaging; at the strategic-political and tactical-military levels.

³⁵ MOD Top Level Message, May 2012.

³⁶ MOD Top Level Message, February 2013.

A key aspect of the exit strategy was to demonstrate that Afghan security forces were capable of protecting the local civilian population, and that they were equipped for the task ahead. This message was not only important from a domestic audience perspective – powerful opinion formers and stakeholders in particular – it was equally important from the perspective of the local audience in the theatre of operation. The juxtaposition of the Afghanistan flag and the British troops leaving (Image 7.3), captured and framed the notion of security transition in a symbolic manner. The accompanying captions in images 7.2 and 7.3 also bridge to the wider context of the implementation of the exit strategy: ‘This was a significant milestone in a process of transition that will continue to 2014 and beyond.’

Through these images the military managed to reinforce the strategic narrative of *exit* by demonstrating the competence of local security forces (documented by the number



Image 7.2: The flag of Afghanistan flies [sic] over the Afghan National Army on parade as British troops formally hand over the lead responsibility for security to Afghan Forces in Lashkar Gah in July 2011. This was a significant milestone in a process of transition that will continue to 2014 and beyond.

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Image 7.3: The flag of Afghanistan flutters in the breeze as British troops formally hand over the lead responsibility for security to Afghan Forces in Lashkar Gah, the capital of Helmand Province in July 2011. This was a significant milestone in a process of transition that will continue to 2014 and beyond.



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of troops) and their willingness to continue the work initiated by the coalition. This was particularly important at a time when UK forces in Afghanistan were gradually moving from a combat role to a ‘train and advice’ function. Another key aspect to note in relation to these images is that even if the local audience – for whom protection is necessary – is not pictured, the perceived effectiveness of this form of imagery still lies in their demonstrable display of support for the Afghan people, through the strength of local power.

Against the backdrop of this discussion on online military engagement, technological novelties and media practices – such as the development of photography and cameras and television and, more recently, the internet, digital cameras and social media – have transformed the form and use of visual representation of events. Today, videos and pictures of deployed personnel at war reach the home audience faster than ever before due to sophisticated information technology. Such imagery narrates and tells stories of the visible war, it shapes audience perception of the role of the British soldier in Afghanistan and it epitomises the military’s increased online presence. Here, military-specific storylines are not only being framed within easily identifiable military ‘lines to take’, themes and messages, but are increasingly being projected through visual representations captured and distributed within the online information system.

Why Communicating Human(e) Rights Matters

Even as visual components of the military communication remit are increasingly disseminated through online channels, they also continue to form part of the military’s pre-packed media bundles compiled and structured by the MPTs in the theatre of operation. In fact, precisely because of the military’s and the media’s growing online presence, the visual narrative – along with competing storylines and counter-narratives – has become an increasingly important factor in the military approach to communication. During times of war and crises, telling a public that ‘the focus of the UK’s efforts will gradually shift from a combat role, to a training, advisory and assistance role’³⁷ can be difficult. However, showing this public the humanitarian function of the British armed forces and of the international ISAF mission in Afghanistan allowed for strong imagery that promoted this exact narrative – and which

³⁷ MOD Top Level Message, February 2013.

may prove more effective in generating popular support. This is made possible because military doctrine does not differentiate between the uses of visuals, on the one hand, and direct messaging, on the other, to communicate the strategic narrative; it is the narrative itself that matters.

Indeed, throughout the fieldwork conducted with the British military³⁸ and with coalition forces in NATO,³⁹ the importance of the process of using visual representation to tell the story became increasingly apparent. During communication training with military personnel, the notion of ‘showing rather than telling’ proved an important factor in the portrayal of military activity, and a critical element in subsequent evaluations of their performance in front of the camera. This is perhaps not surprising when considering the influence that counter-narratives, documented by visual representations of campaign activity, can have on troop morale and on public support for the military and for the mission. Whereas interviews, press releases and ‘lines to take’ can be contested, visuals serve as evidence. History tells us that conflict imagery has indeed served as a revealing and an iconic platform for the suffering inflicted by wars, misconducts and even war crimes.⁴⁰ Therefore, in addition to holding the capacity to promote favourable aspects of the war effort, uncontrolled visual representations of campaign activity can critically damage the reputation and public image of military operations and increase opposition towards military involvement in international conflicts.

Yet demonstrated through the growing visibility of strategic narratives, and epitomised by communication training of armed forces personnel, the military are increasingly realising the power of the image. And while humanitarian arguments were only rarely employed specifically to justify the purpose of UK military involvement in Afghanistan – notions of nation-building, reconstruction and development were only scarcely embedded within narratives emphasising the need for Afghans to be able to manage

³⁸ Observational data, PJHQ Northwood, NATO Exercise, 7-14 April 2010.

³⁹ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009.

⁴⁰ Perhaps the most obvious and iconic example of this is the imagery which emerged from the Vietnam War; Nick Ut's photograph of nine-year-old Phan Thi Kim Phuc after a napalm attack on her village remains an iconic image of war at its worst. For more on the historical aspects of war photography see, for instance: Susan Moeller, *Shooting War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat* (New York: Basic Books, 1989).

their own security to stop terrorists from occupying the country – the storyline emerging from military produced imagery held clear humanitarian features.

However, photographs stripped of enemy combat but showing British soldiers interacting with local civilians, smiling or helping to construct schools and roads (see below and Appendix B for more images) do not simply testify to the humanitarian aspects of war amongst the people. More precisely, they depict and underline the gradual transformation of international military presence in Afghanistan: from a combat role to an advisory and assistance role. Therefore, the military produced image does not necessarily tell a different story to that promoted through constructed messaging, it simply comes in a different packaging. Disseminated through online channels, and because images are not language specific, they are likely to have a broader reach than traditional defence messaging. And since such imagery holds significantly dissimilar meanings depending on the audience, controlling that the *right* message reaches the *right* audience is impossible in a virtually uncontrollable information system. Consequently, military produced imagery must promote clear-cut and unambiguous storylines; imagery that can stand alone and function without the accompanying caption. This is one of the critical differences between the use of messaging and images.

Evidently, this form of storytelling has different purposes depending on the audience. At the local level, it aims to encourage trust, confidence and support for British and international military endeavours. At the domestic level, it is used to further the notion of a human(e) war, which the military believe meets the expectations and values of the home audience. In effect, they advance a story that no audience, at either the tactical or the strategic level, is likely to contest. This kind of imagery is staged with the tactical aim of influencing attitudes and behaviours among the local population, and with the strategic purpose of demonstrating progress to the home audience.⁴¹ And because images are difficult, or even impossible, to control, unequivocal storytelling is critical to the overall strategic narrative.

⁴¹ Observational data, PJHQ Northwood, NATO Exercise, 7-14 April 2010.

With this in mind, the following discussion on pictorial representations of the soldier is an attempt at exemplifying the themes and messages promoted through military visual storytelling. It thus offers a case through which military communication activity can be understood when seen through the lens of military imagery. It offers a framework within which it is possible to examine political driven storylines through tactical level imagery. The examples provided here are by no means exhaustive. Rather, they are indicative of the underlying themes and messages represented in the strategic narrative, and which are only occasionally reiterated through subtle military messaging. They thus *show* us some of the less obvious objectives embedded in the military discourse.

*The Human(e) Soldier*⁴²



Image 7.4: *Soldier talks to Children while on patrol in Afghanistan.* A soldier with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 5th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, talks to local children while carrying out searches on compounds in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

Photographer:
Sgt Rupert Frere RLC

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⁴² For a selection of more defence images on the ‘human(e) soldier’ see Appendix B, which also includes the full accompanying text for each of the images included in this section. Moreover, Kotilainen, ‘Humanitarian Soldiers, Colonialised Others and Invisible Enemies’ (2011), analyses ISAF Flickr images depicting what she calls ‘humanitarian soldiers’. In her view, this is ‘a picture of war today’.

This is war when seen through the lens of a military photographer. This image is in many ways symbolic in visualising the transition of military responsibility in Afghanistan; from combative fighters to human(e) protectors. It is particularly evident in the juxtaposition of the smiling soldier and the local Afghan children. In a representative manner, this image shows the picture of war that the military want their target audiences to see. However, in many ways it also shows the transitional process of soldiering work in Afghanistan. Looking at military documentation this transition is characterised by ‘supporting Afghanistan’s development’. Underlining this perspective, doctrine states that ‘British Military personnel are working in Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in Afghanistan to pave the way for reconstruction of the country and help extend the authority of the Afghan Government.’⁴³ Particularly, these PRTs have three primary tasks, which all drive the military approach to troop withdrawal as part of an international coalition with a joint mission:

1. to support the extension of the authority of the Afghan central government
2. to support reform of the security sector
3. to facilitate development and reconstruction⁴⁴

Telling the story of development and nation-building is thus not only emerging as the key to military storytelling, it also testifies to the military move from a fighting to an overtly humanitarian role. Against this backdrop, it is clear that during *exit*, the distinction between combat fighters and human(e) soldiers is blurred, at least from an outsider’s perspective. These two soldiering functions might thus be less obvious than has traditionally been the case in conflicts involving international forces. In fact, even as the soldier is depicted as ready for combat, heavily armed and wearing what we recognise as a military uniform, he is not acting the way we would expect a soldier to act. Instead of depicting enemy engagement and combat – what we have learned to associate with military activity, throughout history – he is pictured in an overtly human(e) position. As we will see, this is not a rare image of the British soldier in in Afghanistan.

⁴³ UK Ministry of Defence, UK forces: Operations in Afghanistan (2013).

⁴⁴ Ibid.



Image 7.5: *Afghan Girl with British Soldier.* An Afghan girl pokes her tongue out at the camera. British Soldiers from Delta Company, 5th Battalion The Rifles (5 Rifles) known as The Delta Dogs who were based at Patrol Base 4, took part in multiple foot patrols in order to find, feel and understand insurgent activities in the southern part of the Nahr-e Saraj district, Afghanistan.

Photographer:
Sgt Wes Calder RLC
© Crown copyright 2011

Image 7.6: *Soldier Talks with Local Children in Afghanistan.*

Afghan children talk with a soldier from 23 Pioneer Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps, during a patrol near Lashkar Gah, Helmand, Afghanistan.

Photographer:
Sgt Rupert Frere RLC

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Cast in the role of hero and protector, the British soldier – identified by his uniform – is seen interacting with local Afghans (children in particular). Underpinning the narrative that the UK armed forces are in Afghanistan to protect the local Afghans, this form of imagery helps boost strategic messaging. While it represents one kind of reality of the activity taking place at the tactical level, it also offers symbolic value to the humanitarian argument; an argument which gradually crept into the strategic narrative in recent years. Following the implementation of ISAF's exit strategy, supported by the UK political leadership, value-laden arguments promoted at government level also became more visible in the military storyline. As discussed previously, while trying to proactively push one particular reality, or an impression of a particular reality, military messaging purposefully and, on occasions, effectively excludes other campaign truths. The notions of development and peacekeeping, symbolised through the pictures of the smiling and helpful soldier, serve important political as well as military purposes. Not

only does such a storyline help progress and legitimise troop withdrawal on the ground, it also strengthens the public image of the military institution. Images of the human(e) soldier, therefore, satisfy the political storyline of security transition and it helps the military generate public support for the soldiers – at the heart of military culture.

Through this form of friendly interaction with local Afghans, our understanding of traditional forms of war-fighting might be challenged. Images of soldiers engaging in functions that can be broadly termed as humanitarian⁴⁵ strengthens this, perhaps, unconventional narrative. The messaging is clear-cut: the well-equipped, strong and helpful soldier is key to the protection of the vulnerable, un-protected and grateful Afghans. Once again, this image of the soldier (Image 7.4) demonstrates the paradoxical features embedded in military culture. Smiling, yet strong and protected. Kind and friendly, but armed. Secure and trustworthy, yet militaristic. Presented in overly human(e) situations, but ready for combat.

Even as the army uniform blends in with the landscape, the dry and bare Helmand landscape, the soldier also represents an alien figure. Looking at Smith's notion of the soldier in war amongst the people, he contends that the soldier represents 'an other':

The desire to protect the soldier so as to maintain his morale, which I wholeheartedly support, often manifests itself in measures that isolate him from the people. He appears helmeted, armoured and armed amongst them, or in his armoured vehicle on the street. His behaviour as he patrols is threatening. His bases are heavily fortified and often sited to overlook the people. These measures, while most necessary in particular cases, do not have my general support. They all define the soldier as 'the other'; the opponent amongst the people is gaining advantage every day they are in place.⁴⁶

In line with this, and exposing another paradox, even as the images depict smiling and friendly soldiers, ultimately, the soldier represents a foreign military power deployed to a conflict zone where people (civilian and military) are being killed on an almost daily basis. The visual narrative constructed by these carefully selected images

⁴⁵ Appendix B includes additional images relating to 'the human(e) soldier'.

⁴⁶ Smith, *The Utility of Force* (2005), p. 401-402.

(selected for public consumption)⁴⁷ thus also present a new understanding of the role of the soldier.

Yet to home UK audiences, this figure has become symbolic of the strategic narrative which dictated Afghanistan exit. The functional and visual transition from fighter to a human(e) figure, paradoxically juxtaposed with the soldier's strong and protected exterior, can be seen to represent the transformation of the overall campaign. As the military institution is increasingly measured against humanitarian frameworks,⁴⁸ the image of the human(e) soldier not only represents an embodiment of UK military



Image 7.7: ANA Soldier on Patrol with British Soldier in Operation Omid Char. This image shows an Afghan soldier patrolling with ISAF troops in the village of Saidan near Gereschk on day one of Op Omid Char.

Photographer:
Cpl Mark Webster

© Crown copyright 2010

Image 7.8: Afghan and British Soldier. An Afghan soldier shares a joke with his British counterpart from 1st Battalion The Royal Welsh (Royal Welsh Fusiliers 23rd Foot) prior to Operation Moshtarak in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

Photographer:
Sgt Mark Jones RLC

© Crown copyright 2010



⁴⁷ Defence imagery also includes a wide range of pictures used only for internal purposes: training and documentation.

⁴⁸ See, for instance: Chandler, *From Kosovo to Kabul and Beyond* (2006 (2002)); and Costas Douzinas, *The Many Faces of Humanitarianism, Parrhesia*, 2(2007), pp. 1–28.

presence in Afghanistan, it also testifies to – in a particular direct and illustrative manner – the growing notion of changing international military responsibility.

In addition, not only do such images allow home audiences to become eyewitness to the realities of war amongst the people, they serve to present the campaign as a desirable mission; thus satisfying the expectations of the target audience and supporting the belief that the mission is worthwhile. Moreover, the ways in which the soldier is presented visually show the changing role and identity of today's soldiers. They illustrate the indistinguishable line between humanitarian work and military humanitarianism. Even as this aspect is only referred to peripherally in the strategic narrative, it is clearly and descriptively expressed in the visual narrative. It is used in the military strategic communication effort aimed at securing domestic public support for the Afghanistan campaign, for the military institution and for the soldier.

However, because the strategic narrative only refers to humanitarian aspects of campaign activity as a means of ensuring that the Afghans can take care of their own security, this form of strong humanitarian driven storytelling challenges the overall understanding of campaign purpose. It confuses it. This should particularly be understood in light of the fact that military imagery also includes a variety of pictures promoting a notion of unity of effort between UK and Afghan security forces.⁴⁹ So, while humanitarian aspects, exemplified by the human(e) soldier, dominate the storyline communicated using visual and online means, the narrative of boosting Afghan local security has a strong presence in the visually constructed narrative as well. With this in mind, much of the military imagery sourced through online channels, show interaction between UK soldiers and local Afghans as well as cooperation between international forces and Afghan security forces.⁵⁰ Both of such storylines – the human(e) soldier and the capability of the Afghan forces – drive the politically generated approach to security transition and exit strategy. However, they do not satisfy the media's quest for dramatic footage and events.

⁴⁹ See Appendix B for examples of images supporting this narrative.

⁵⁰ For a wider discussion on the role of images in the Afghanistan war see: Paul Verschueren, *Picturing Afghanistan: the role of photo-texts in framing conflict, identity and the nation*, PhD Thesis, School of Journalism and Communication, The University of Queensland, (2007).

As noted in the discussion that follows, media prefer big pictures. In other words, they prefer ‘bang-bang’ action between two opposing forces. In fact, looking at the military as an independent institution, it is evident that this narrative of combat is indeed one that appeals to the military as well; a narrative that rests upon victory, identifiable enemy, military power, clear frontlines and tactically sound military goals is significantly easier to manage than a narrative driven by political, humanitarian aims. Therefore, given that campaign success in Afghanistan is increasingly measured against value-laden objectives and achievements, the campaign narrative is not necessarily in tune with basic military objectives, set out in Chapter Five of this thesis. Therefore, directed by a strategic narrative envisioned at the government level and aiming to please politicians to whom the military are accountable, constructed campaign objectives and separate military goals have become ever more distinct. This may not be apparent in the military storyline examined here, as the notion of *exit* has brought to the front a strategic narrative that centres round unity of effort. Therefore, understanding where political messaging ends and the military story starts has become almost impossible.

In addition to this, new information technology and fast-growing digital communication networks have created a constant demand for information about military affairs. In an attempt to meet this demand – and because it allows them to tell their story – the military, as we have seen, rely on easily identifiable and symbolic messaging. This is important. In an over-saturated communication environment, the story needs to be made up of strong imagery and clear-cut messaging that are unlikely to be misinterpreted. And even as they may prefer narratives that document victory and enemy combat, this form of messaging provides the military with a plausible storyline, a safe storyline that ultimately leads back to decisions made at the strategic-political level. Therefore, if unsuccessful such a narrative is more likely to reflect badly on the nation’s political elite rather than on the military. And perhaps precisely therefore, online channels are increasingly used to tell a story that supports the overall strategic-political storyline.

Big Pictures & the Media

Moving on from the use of imagery to foster support through online means, the military also recognise that providing good imagery, or opportunities for the media to capture good imagery, is a prerequisite for successful media coverage. As stated in military doctrine:

The media seek a visual component to all stories. Dramatic TV footage frequently determines whether a story is given airtime or not. The availability of striking photographs will often determine how and where a newspaper story is covered. In terms of catching attention and shaping perception, a picture can be a defining image.⁵¹

Therefore, in an attempt to secure communication of messages coming from the strategic narrative over counter-narratives, the military try to incorporate the visual needs of the media into their communication activity. In this sense, images are not just used by the military to frame an activity, they also function as a vehicle for the successful communication of such an activity.⁵² With this in mind, a significant element of communication activity focuses on providing dramatic and exciting imagery; imagery which not only supports the strategic narrative but which also boosts the military's public image.

Within the military remit of providing the media with 'big pictures', images shot by Combat Camera Teams (CCTs) are disseminated directly to the media as part of special media bundles produced by military Media Production Teams (MPTs). This form of visual material is particularly useful in the sense that it is controlled by the military themselves. As we discovered in a previous chapter, the media are increasingly more likely to accept material produced by the military. Even as this may indeed challenge the sense of objectivity and credibility within media circles, the realities of complex wars, 24-hour news streams and fewer resources have made combat imagery that is sourced through military channels an attractive alternative to first-hand experiences. The notion of supplying military produced material directly to the media is also highlighted in military doctrine:

⁵¹ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 1A-2.

⁵² Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009.

Media product can either be handed directly to members of the media, electronically transmitted to the media or posted on publicly accessible military websites. Active marketing of such product, both by deployed Media Ops staffs and by the DPO/FLC Media Ops is essential to give such material a chance to being used by the media.⁵³

For these reasons, combat camera footage has been incorporated into military communication endeavours to provide the media with ‘big pictures’ and ‘action footage’.⁵⁴ During the initial phase of the Afghanistan campaign, media facilitation was thus primarily centred round such presentations. Effectively, this led the military to disseminate media material that framed international forces as superior to identified terrorist cells in the country. At the infant stage of the operation, this narrative was considered especially important to generating perceptions of capability and strength.⁵⁵ However, as we have seen, the strategic approach to communication bears only little resemblance to this early form of messaging. Demonstrating a shift in the politically generated narrative for Afghanistan, and demonstrating the effect that changes to the strategic narrative have at the tactical-military level, media facilitation within the theatre of operation has gone from focusing on ‘big pictures’ to encouraging coverage of progress and stability.

Image 7.9: *Combat Camera Team in Afghanistan.* An Army photographer with the Combat Camera Team (CCT) is pictured taking stills of members of the Afghan National Police passing out parade in Lashkar Gah, Afghanistan.

Photographer:
Sgt Tom Robinson RLC

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⁵³ Joint Doctrine Publication 3-45.1, *Media Operations* (September 2007), p. 5-6.

⁵⁴ Observational data, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Conclusions

This chapter has exemplified the extent to which the new online engagement approach, initiated by the UK military, has altered the construction of military storylines and the manner in which information is distributed by the defence community. To this end, whereas the previous chapter revealed that the military formulate strategic narratives that attract media attention so as to secure their communication, this chapter has documented the extent to which the withdrawal of British forces from Afghanistan provided a breeding ground for the development of an online engagement strategy that promoted a particular strategic narrative, separate from the official storyline examined in Chapter Six of this thesis.

Therefore, not only has the military's online engagement approach resulted in a number of changes to the manner in which defence information is distributed, it has also affected the kind of information generated by the institution. In this context, the chapter has demonstrated the extent to which the military perform set operational exercises in theatre to help generate favourable media coverage. Furthermore, through such demonstrations and exercises the military are able to tell their own story through new media channels, which are increasingly being incorporated into military communication structures.

Understood in connection with the doctrinal approaches to communication activity set out in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis and the discussion on strategic narratives in Chapter Six of the thesis, this particular chapter argues that online as well as visual storylines are employed to highlight certain aspects of the strategic narrative while obscuring other, perhaps less favourable, elements. The chapter thus argues that these visual storylines hold the potential to generate particularly positive perceptions of actual campaign activity. They narrate and simplify the story for target audiences. They link tactical-military level activity to strategic-political aims. And they reveal aspects of military affairs that would otherwise go unreported.

Whereas the strategic narrative generally failed to incorporate clear humanitarian or nation-building objectives for the Afghanistan campaign, as we discovered in the previous chapter, the visual storyline offers unambiguous and clear-cut messages.

Looking at it from this perspective it is possible to conclude that military imagery, promoted through online engagement mechanisms, functions as a means of rendering visible aspects of the military storylines that are only referred to peripherally in doctrine and policy papers. To this end, whereas such documentation, as well as constructed messaging, only allude to humanitarian aspects of the mission, online visual representation strengthens the humanitarian and peacekeeping narrative and demands discussion. Furthermore, by communicating cohesion and unity of effort, these storylines are also critical in limiting the influence of potential counter-narratives promoted through traditional media and online communication channels.

Bringing together the different lines of inquiry – the doctrinal discussions in Chapters Four and Five as well as the analysis of the strategic narrative set out in this and in the previous chapter – the final section of this thesis comprises the conclusion. It charts the core findings of the research, and critically evaluates these in relation to the main contextual and theoretical frameworks. Moreover, it explores the limitations of the study and its methodological approach.

CONCLUSIONS

Comprising the concluding chapter, this section rehearses the key findings set out in previous chapters so as to develop a coherent argument. It positions the UK *military media machine* in a wider contextual framework. In doing so, it exhibits the limitations of the study as a result of the choices made throughout the research process. The framing arguments set out in Chapter One in particular are re-evaluated in light of the discussions developed in Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven. To this end, Chapter Eight rehearses the military's approach to strategic, operational and tactical level communication in order to evaluate the core findings in light of the key theoretical and contextual frameworks. It thus examines the wider practical and theoretical applicability of the findings. Bringing together the main arguments raised through the thesis, this concluding section re-examines the questions and the approach set out in the introductory chapter. It should thus also be seen as an attempt to encourage further and wider research within the *field* of security and communications.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion: Military Media Machine

...make no mistake – there has been a certain arrogance to our ‘strat comm’ efforts. We’ve come to believe that messages are something we can launch downrange like a rocket, something we can fire for effect. They are not. Good communication runs both ways. It’s not about telling our story. We must also be better listeners.

Michael G. Mullen, Admiral U.S. Navy,
Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2009.

The military campaign in Afghanistan highlighted the challenges that the *new* media and war landscape presented for the UK armed forces. It exhibited the extent to which the British military’s shift from a combat to a ‘train and advice’ role continued to test the manner in which the military tell their story. As we have seen, the earlier media-friendly narrative of conventional military engagement was ill fitted to describe the new role of peacekeeping and humanitarianism because it did not paint a clear picture of an achievable end-state driven by military, as opposed to political, goals. The findings of this study – conducted at a strategically significant period in military history – thus challenge the status quo in relation to the military-media interdependent relationship.

Added to this, it is clear that public opinion about military activity is strategically and tactically important because people have an opinion about soldiers and the wars they are deployed to. Demonstrated throughout this thesis, the military increasingly understand that what people think about the operations they take part in is (partially) formed by media

portrayal. The media is thus a key player at both a strategic and a tactical level. How politicians finance and use military power is influenced by the media. The military are held accountable through the media. The activities of the military are increasingly performed through the media. At the same time, the military use the media to communicate with their audiences, framing their activities in particular and favourable ways. Uses of new media by serving personnel push the military to engage with alternative modes of communication. Combined, these separate but interlinked factors function as the contextual foundation for the *military media machine*.

This chapter is designed to rehearse the key findings in relation to the contextual and theoretical arguments set out at the start of the thesis. Furthermore, it examines the wider applicability of significant research findings as well as illuminating the limitations of the study and the methodological approach. This concluding chapter should thus be seen as a way of positioning the research within a wider research framework so as to lay the foundations for further studies in the area of military communication.

Revisiting the *Field*: Original Contributions

Since the end of the Cold War in general, and following the terrorists attacks of 9/11 in particular, there has been some acknowledgement within the war and media literatures that the communication of wars and the role of the media in wars has a critical impact on both the military and the media function. However, such debates have primarily concerned the effects of military practice on media activity, rather than the effects of media practice on military activity and on the internal organisational structures of the institution. This study thus began as an attempt to illuminate this particular, and largely under-researched aspect of the military-media relationship. Still, it is important to note that the mere recognition of the significance of the role of communication in modern wars testifies to an understanding of the increasingly interdependent relationship between the military and the media. Therefore, despite the emergent body of work related to the role

of information in the battlespace,¹ new forms of communication and the effect that these have on military institutions is less recognised.

Instead, existing work demonstrates a strong focus on issues of ‘propaganda’ and ‘censorship’, suggesting that the military hold the power to control the flows of information from the battlespace. This is especially true of the large body of work that focuses on the media at war, which particularly deals with accounts from journalists and analyses of media coverage pertinent to specific wars.² As a result, the military-media relationship continues to be understood as a battle between the media’s quest for the next big story and the military’s need for secrecy and deception.³ Similarly, most literatures discussing this relationship tend to approach the topic with an understanding of competing ideals between media access and defence operational security. This approach negates the fact that the simplicity of such accounts fails to acknowledge the complexities of military communication structures and the sophistication with which these are implemented.

Because military communication practices tend to be understood within conventional media academic debates – debates founded upon largely dichotomised notions of restrictions vs. cooperation – these works have failed to engage with the underlying, organisational practices of the military. Most literature dealing with military communication falls into one of two categories: communication studies that accept an outside-in approach and thus offer an examination of military influence on media practice; or expert military writings aimed at internal defence audiences. Particularly, there has been remarkably little scholarly engagement with how institutional and technological developments within the media have affected military organisational practice. This may be due to the fact that much war and media literature lacks a clear understanding of the intrinsic characteristics of military cultural and organisational systems. This is important.

¹ See for instance: Keeble, ‘Information Warfare in an Age of Hyper-Militarism’ (2009); Rowland and Tatham, ‘Strategic Communication & Influence Operations’ (2010); Tumber and Webster, *Journalists Under Fire: Information War and Journalistic Practice* (2006); and Webster ‘Information Warfare in an Age of Globalization’ (2003).

² See in particular: Allan and Zelizer, *Reporting War* (2004); Carruthers, *The Media at War* (2000); McLaughlin, *The War Correspondent* (2002); Rodgers, *Reporting Conflict* (2012); Tumber and Webster, *Journalists Under Fire* (2006); and Tumber and Palmer, *Media at War* (2004).

³ For a wider discussion on this particular perspective, see: *Rid War and Media Operations* (2007).

As this study has revealed, the paradoxical nature of the military – existing in a dynamic and constantly changing environment but reliant on a solid and largely unchanging culture – is central to any understanding of military communication structures, vehicles and discourses.

Despite the underlying appreciation of the effects of media coverage on military activity, and the potential of the omnipresent media to scrutinise military performance in wars (and ultimately to influence public perception), existing scholarly work fails to account for the processes by which the military-media relationship is played out; from inside the military. As a result, the impact of media coverage on the core of the military institution is largely ignored and remains unclear. This is particularly significant at a time when there is a heightened focus on communication activity within the military, as documented in this thesis.

The abstract nature of the effects of the media on the military organisation and its function serves as the overall framework for this study. As a way of empirically grounding the British military's communication practices and so as to examine their understanding of these effects, the study employed a framework based upon political accountability, military culture and 'war amongst the people'.⁴ To this end, the thesis has shown that the military's dealings with the media is founded upon two distinct, yet interlinked, cultures; the strategic culture of the UK⁵ as well as military culture itself. Both cultures are driven by accountability at all levels. In so doing, the thesis has illustrated that the proliferation in military media facilitation within defence, at a time when the British armed forces are concluding their 13-year campaign in Afghanistan, is driven by telling a story of success. In this context, it has revealed how strategic narratives were constructed to distance deployed personnel and the military institution from the political-strategic decision to go to war.

⁴ Smith, *Utility of Force* (2005).

⁵ For a wider discussion on the strategic culture of the UK, see: Cornish 'United Kingdom' (2013); and Miskimmon, 'Continuity in the face of upheaval – British Strategic Culture and the impact of the Blair government' (2004).

This thesis has argued that military activities, and the ways in which these are communicated, testify to the increasing conflation of military goals and political objectives. This is particularly evident in relation to the strategic narrative. By charting the official narrative for Afghanistan, set out at the strategic-political level, the thesis has revealed that the military shift from a combat to a peacekeeping role challenged the way in which the ‘story’ of Afghanistan was told; thus questioning the extent to which military instruments can be used to satisfy political objectives.

Furthermore, the thesis has documented a growing presence of media theory at the heart of military doctrine, and a rapidly emerging sensitivity towards media activity. To this end, the study has revealed how the British military engaged large resources to managing the story as part of their Afghanistan exit strategy, and so as to construct effective themes and messages for target audiences. Through the research process, the thesis has identified five target audience groups around which military communication activity is centred. Findings suggest that the underlying reasoning for the development of new communication initiatives should be found in the UK military’s reliance on influence activities as a core feature of their communication strategy. They indicate that the purpose of such initiatives is to influence target audiences through the means of the media. They thus paint a picture of an organisation that, because of the increasing omnipresence of the media, is engaged in catering to, and producing material for, this media.

The consequences of these arguments are threefold. First, the fact that communication activity has moved up the military agenda and into the heart of military operations indicates that the media has a profound effect on defence organisational practice. Traditionally driven by hierarchical structures and a top-down approach, the organisation of military communication activity has adopted a more flexible structure. To this end, the function of the new media environment has imposed significant change at the heart of the military institution. Ultimately, the workings and the function of the media have thus forced change at the core of military culture. So this thesis suggests.

Second, as a result of the military's engagement in communication activity at a strategic, operational and tactical level, the ways in which campaign operations are planned and executed is influenced by the presence of the media in the battlespace. Because this media presence has created a 'relentless and unforgiving trend towards an ever greater transparency'⁶ the military's ability to control information flows has largely diminished. Consequently, as the findings of this study show, the military have incorporated an extensive communication and information driven apparatus purposefully aimed at catering to the needs of the media. This apparatus centres round Media Production Teams (MPTs), Joint Media Operations Teams (JMOTs) and Combat Camera Teams (CCTs), all of which are put in place to exercise particular tactical level communication components. These measures thus only exist because of the rapidly expanding information system which 1) demands accountability at all levels, 2) enables the media to access 'hidden' information and 3) influences audiences' perception of military activity.

Finally, as a consequence of the omnipresence of the media in the battlespace, and the military's understanding of the media's ability to determine campaign success or failure, the argument of this thesis acknowledges the importance of the 'audience' within military communication doctrine. It is with audiences in mind that the British military conduct communication activity; it is with audiences in mind that they engage in influence activities; and it is with audiences in mind that they construct strategic narratives. Audiences are a critical aspect of military communication activity. It is thus surprising that most media academic literatures discussing the military-media relationship have paid only little attention to this significant aspect of military communication. In contrast, this study has demonstrated how the military understand, define and conceptualise their audiences for which themes, messages and narratives are constructed.

Against this backdrop, the empirically driven and contextually founded approach to military communication activity employed in this study, sets out a noticeably new direction in researching the military-media relationship; one that is grounded in the organisational and cultural structures of the military institution. This study thus argues

⁶ Gowing, *'Skyful of Lies' and Black Swans* (2009), p. 1.

that the battlespace is increasingly formed by the military's communication of their actions. It also testifies to the significance of information and communication in the future character of war. Thesis findings thus bear witness to the idea that military activity, from the strategic justification of the use of armed force to tactical level campaign action, is influenced by its communication. In the outline that follows, such findings are examined in greater detail in order to demonstrate the wider applicability of the study and the questions it set out to answer. In particular, these questions centre round the understanding of *how the British military tell Afghanistan at home*. To this end, subsequent discussions explore the broader pertinence of the strategic rationale for implementing communication as a core principle of military doctrine and organisational structure. It also establishes a broader framework within which the vehicles and discourses employed by the UK military to explain their Afghanistan campaign in a UK domestic context can be explored. These questions are investigated in the context of, and with reference to, the broader understandings of the military-media relationship in modern wars.

Military Communication Research and its Wider Applicability

In this section, the concepts outlined in the thesis are explored in relation to current understandings of the military-media relationship. In doing so, the aim is to understand the findings presented in this thesis in relation to existing preconceptions of the role of the military in information management from the battlespace. Furthermore, this concluding discussion pays particular attention to the role of the audience in war amongst the people.

The Military-Media Relationship

As we have discovered, one of the overall reasons behind the military's communication strategy should be found in their approach to influence. The themes and messages used to influence audience behaviour through the strategic narrative are constructed so as to meet institutional objectives. In this context, the study has revealed that the key objective for the military is to generate and uphold public support for their actions so as to secure the future of the organisation. It is thus with audiences in mind – local, regional, national and

international audiences – that the military conduct media operations as a means of managing the information available to the media.

The UK military's reliance on influence activity (which this thesis has shown to be at the heart of military communication doctrine) does not prevent the military from resorting to censorship, information concealment and outright secrecy. Indeed, many authors contend that these terms are still central to military communication efforts.⁷ On the other hand, some commentators argue that the military are now driven by complete media cooperation and open information policy.⁸ The present study and its findings incorporate both of such schools of thought. In fact, *military media machine* does not preclude these assertions. It does, however, negate the one-dimensional perspective inherent in such dichotomised scholarly positions. Rather, thesis findings suggest that the military's communication structure, and its relationship with the media, is much more subtle than that presented in most media and war literatures.

The subtlety with which communication activity and media engagement have been incorporated into military organisational structures is not a small matter to the military. Indeed, this thesis has demonstrated that the military increasingly recognise the strategic and tactical importance of the communication of their activities. This is seen in their progressive incorporation of communication and influence activity into the core of campaign planning and execution. Some authors would contend that this tendency reflects the requirement of the military to adapt to the changing media and communication landscape⁹ - to transform to meet external pressures. However, thesis findings emphasise the extent to which the military themselves contribute to the changing media and war landscape; thus supporting the transformation processes facilitating their communication activity. They do so by proactively (as opposed to reactively) engaging with the media. In particular, they do so by producing material for the media, by putting in place media

⁷ See, for instance: Thrall, *War in the Media Age* (2000).

⁸ See, for instance: Badsey, 'Media War and Media Management' (2010); Dandeker, 'The United Kingdom: The Overstretched Military' (2000); and Taylor, 'The Military and the Media' (2000).

⁹ Badsey, 'The influence of the media on recent British military operations' (1996); and Moskos, 'Towards a Postmodern Military' (2000).

embedding policies through the Green Book,¹⁰ and by actively engaging with online media product.

These separate features of the military communication approach are critical to the transformation of the war and media environment itself. The analysis of the structures and vehicles of military communication set out in this thesis indicates that the military are increasingly aware of the role of the media in wars; ‘the global theatre of war, with audience participation’ to use Smith’s analogy.¹¹ With reference to the central positioning of communication activity within doctrine, the military increasingly organise campaign activity according to their inherent potential to influence audience perceptions and to meet the needs of the media. The significance of the military’s proactive approach to information provision is critical to the development of the military-media relationship, and to the transformation processes characterising the war and media landscape. It is also demonstrative of how the military and the media engage in an interdependent relationship, which both informs and responds to the setting in which it is enacted. To this end, the discussion presented here maintains that both internal as well as external pressures are needed for transformation procedures to alter the core of military organisational structures – and ultimately have an impact at the heart of military culture.

Indeed, the vehicles and discourses of military communication activity are predominantly designed to include the gathering needs of the media and they conform to media standards. This relates to both the content and the form of military constructed media material. In order to secure their coverage, and so as to exert maximum influence, military generated media products include visual as well as textual material. To this end, influence activity aimed at the media is constructed to suit existing media institutional structures and conventions. As we have seen, the military see this approach as the best way to secure the communication of their key messages central to their strategic narrative. Therefore, whilst the military use the media to influence target audiences, they gradually come to incorporate media-specific features into the core of their organisation. Consequently, the

¹⁰ MOD, *The Green Book* (October 2010).

¹¹ Smith, *Utility of Force* (2005), p. 285.

military's communication structure increasingly resemble that of the media;¹² thus actively transforming the battlespace.

As this thesis suggests, the main reason for the incorporation of traditional and new media conventions into military structures should be found in the military's attempt to manage the portrayal of campaign activity. It also explains the construction of campaign narratives through simplified storylines. As we have seen, symbolic and value-laden messages were increasingly used to describe the Afghanistan mission in favourable terms. Phrases such as 'protect the Afghan people,' 'create a better future for the Afghan people' and 'we do not seek a perfect Afghanistan, but a stable Afghanistan', were reiterated as key messages in the UK military's approach to Afghanistan exit and were reproduced in the mainstream media, in some form or the other. Such storylines reflect the relationship that exists between the media demand for strong and easily digestible messages and the military need for legitimisation and support. Against this backdrop, the thesis suggests that the military incorporate modes of organisation that meet those of the media, whilst the media are increasingly reliant on the military for information from the battlespace.

The interdependent relationship between the military and the media can, as this thesis has revealed, influence the core of the military institution. It has shown how the military attempt to compete with the speed of the media by seeking to become the prime definer of particular military activity. Indeed, the study has set out the key vehicles employed by the military to be the 'first with the story'. Findings thus suggest that the omnipresence of the media, as well as the military's willingness to jeopardise factual representations if it means that they become the prime definer of a situation, critically breaks with traditional hierarchical structures of the military organisation. Whilst existing knowledge contends that military culture rests upon a stable top-down structure, this thesis suggests that the military's symbiotic relationship with the media challenges military culture itself. It does so by allowing the media to engage in interactions with the military at the strategic, the operational and the tactical level; thus circumventing traditional top-down structures. This

¹² For a brief discussion on the mediatisation of the military see the last section of this chapter which sets out the limitations of the study and its theoretical approach.

indicates that certain aspects of the media function hold the ability to affect the core of the military institution.

Moreover, it also highlights an important underlying factor – namely that the military are able to exploit the media to legitimise their actions as well as trying to provoke favourable responses and behaviour among their target audiences. In light of this, it is clear that the media themselves are as much part of the battlespace as the military organisation. This is important, as any study on the relationship between the military and the media, which disregards the media's involvement in the theatre of war, also disregards the impact of media processes on the military institution. The framework presented in this study allows for a nuanced understanding of these processes. It does so by positioning the discussion within a framework that is sympathetic to military culture and to the nature of war amongst the people.

To this end, terms such as 'propaganda' and 'deception' do nothing to explain the complexities of the military-media relationship, which rests upon interdependent interactions between both military and media actors. In fact, such terms obscure the discussion on military communication activity as they fail to acknowledge the role of the media in wars and the ability of the media to affect the conflict landscape and the core of the military institution. As a result, discussions which position their arguments within these frameworks do not adequately account for the role of this relationship in the conduct of wars.

Audiences

Military communication work is ultimately carried out with audiences in mind. This study has strengthened this view by showing the importance of constructing coherent messages that define a situation in a way that encourages these audiences to behave (and ultimately act) in a way that meets military institutional objectives. These audiences are thus also key to understanding military communication and the effect that it has on the institution. With this in mind, the discussion presented explores this particular aspect of

communication research; how the presence of the audience might have an impact on the military organisational structure and on the conduct of wars.

Although, as has been established in this thesis, the military have no clear understanding of the composition of their target audiences (they constitute a distanced and an imagined audience), their communication activity is organised in accordance with the expectations of such audiences. This is particularly evident when considering the military justification for maintaining a strong media presence; the need to secure political and public support for military personnel and the military institution. In a UK context, for example, this means that the military need the support of the political leadership to secure the future of the institution (this is particularly relevant in terms of financial support), they need the support of the internal and the dependent audience who are both critical to morale as well as general wellbeing and welfare, and they require the support of the domestic UK audience. To this end, strategic narratives are constructed according to the values and attitudes of these broader target audiences. In Afghanistan, the storyline centred round overt notions of democratic and humanitarian values, as a means of meeting wider public expectations and mobilising support within diverse groups of audiences.

Although audiences feature high on the military's influence agenda, very rarely do they have any direct involvement in military work. However, because of the omnipresence of the media in the battlespace, audiences are now more than ever in a position where they can have front row seats to operations. And it is because of this unique position, and through these mediated processes, that the audience holds the potential to influence core military organisational structures as well as campaign planning and execution. In spite of this, and because of their distanced relationship with their target audience, military communication is based on anticipated audience responses. Because they cannot determine the effect of their communication efforts on audience behaviour, as this audience has access to a diverse range of sources and information about military activity, the audience (and their likely responses) must be taken into account when devising any military operation. As a result, in a defence and security context, the audience can no longer be seen as only an observer of campaign activity. Rather, the audience has come

to play a key role in the ways in which campaigns are planned, executed and communicated.

Combined with the military's desire to generate particular audience behaviour, the ability of the audience to observe campaign activity is the key underlying factor of the military's communication strategy. The structures, vehicles and discourses of defence communication are driven by the assumption that they will generate certain audience perceptions of campaign activity. To this end, the media become the 'means' through which audiences can be influenced. Again, this testifies to the central positioning of the audience in military communication efforts, and their relations with the media.

In addition to this, an underlying argument of this thesis has been that the military need for popular support for their actions; political and public support. The mobilisation of support has been a recurring theme developing throughout the research process and along with the emerging thesis structure. Within the framework of war amongst the people, the mobilisation of popular support becomes increasingly significant, and yet it is primarily reliant on the distribution of information through the media.

As noted by Smith, a separate military sphere no longer exists. Conflicts are no longer activities that take place outside of the media. Rather, the media as well as their audiences have become an integrated part of the battlespace and a critical aspect of the organisation of conflicts. It functions as a weapon of persuasion and a legitimisation tool. Coupled with this, the proliferation of media and information outlets as well as communication technologies has created an environment of global media scrutiny in which military and campaign activity, and the consequences of this activity, is open to view on a mass public scale. In recognition of this, and in the knowledge that the media can be harnessed for political outcomes, all those involved in wars – including militaries, insurgent forces and civilians – attempt to mobilise the media in order to generate or sustain power.

If we broaden the argument above in relation to the active role of audiences in military affairs, and reject the understanding that audiences represent passive observers of military

activity,¹³ we discover that the mobilisation of support is increasingly exerted through media channels. Furthermore, thesis findings have highlighted that the key to influential mobilisation is to demonstrate success on operations. Similarly, mobilising public backing is also dependent on the military's ability to meet the expectations of this public, so as to secure desired responses and behavioural change. Yet because of their distanced relationship with their audience, and because of the nature of war amongst the people, communication activity require the incorporation of storylines that have a meaning at a domestic, political and diplomatic level. This is particularly important so as to meet the strategic and tactical level objectives set out in military doctrine. Indeed, the strategic narrative constructed for Afghanistan demonstrated this aspect of the communication strategy. The narrative of 'protecting British national security by helping the Afghans take control of theirs' serves as a good example of how the military, and the political establishment, have attempted to generate support for military intervention at a domestic, political and diplomatic level.

However, the demanding task of targeting diverse groups of people simultaneously, during periods of strategic pressure requires a sophisticated understanding of audience, as noted above. Yet at the same time, processes of communication are messier and more complex than ever before. Notions of *mediatisation* are being eagerly discussed among scholars and practitioners.¹⁴ Access to information about military activity can be obtained through multiple platforms. Advances in communication technology allow for information to be distributed simultaneously throughout the information system, and communication exists through non-linear channels. Strategic communication processes thus rely on increasingly uncontrollable communication systems.

¹³ See, for instance: Tumber and Webster, *Journalists under Fire* (2006).

¹⁴ Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict* (2006); Hjarvard, 'The mediatisation of society' (2008); Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society* (2013); and Hoskins and O'Loughlin, *War and Media* (2010).

With the changes to the war and media landscape following the attacks of 9/11 in particular, distinctions between the manner in which military operations are executed and how they are communicated have become more and more interdependent. This also demonstrates the military, and the political, need to explain and define their actions through the media so as to maintain both public and economic support. To this extent, the media – from mainstream media such as television and newspapers to new communications technologies such as social media and blogs – become a critical factor and a useful resource for the military.

Limitations of the *Military Media Machine*

The remaining pages of the thesis rehearses the limitations of the study, which are a result of the theoretical and methodological choices made from the outset of the research. It does so by setting out three key areas that had a particular impact on the research process and the thesis findings. These key areas all relate, in some way or the other, to the perspective from which this study makes its arguments – the British military.

An institutional account

This study is driven by an institutional approach. Although this approach has enabled the research to illuminate the organisational structures, vehicles and discourses of military communication, it also means that the study understands the military to have a unified approach to communication activity. Whilst the discussion on culture outlined at the start of the thesis stresses that the military institution is not a monoculture, and that speaking with one voice is as difficult in the military as in any other human organisation, the institutional perspective adopted for this research understands communication activity as ‘joint activity’. In effect, this means that even as the research process examined the strategic, operational and tactical levels of military media work, it relied on an institutionally unified attitude toward communication and influence activity. It thus assumes a certain form of cohesion amongst serving personnel in the three Services and within the Ministry of Defence in relation to communication doctrine.

Because the military is a large, diverse human organisation, the assumption that it is driven by a unified approach to communication and information management risks concealing the accountability and responsibilities present throughout the military chain of command. This is particularly pertinent at the tactical level where commanders may attach certain meanings to their communication function. It is thus important to note that, although the findings of the thesis have demonstrated the validity of an institutional approach to military research, by rendering visible the core organisational structures, vehicles and discourse of the military and their engagement with the media, doctrine does not always dictate action. In line with this, individual action in the military does not always match the institutional perspective, and vice versa. This is particularly evident in both the informal and formal aspects of military culture, explored in Chapter One of this thesis.

Against this backdrop, and because of the institutional perspective, thesis findings emanate predominantly from official accounts. More specifically, they comprise official military documentation. Furthermore, Chapter Three sets out the overall limitations and difficulties involved in conducting participatory research whilst being part of the setting itself. As also set out in Chapter Three of this thesis, the study was predominantly carried out in a field setting aimed at training military personnel with a communication function. As a result, this form of training was arranged to test the extent to which the military are able to successfully manage the communication of military activity as well as media portrayal of military activity. To this end, the information collected as part of observational settings were in the form of guidelines for how media and information operations should be carried out, rather than how they are actually carried out. Hence, it is important to recognise that any training scenario is remarkably different to the campaign setting in which communication activity is enacted.

Lastly, understanding the British military as a collective is strengthened and supported by the training and socialisation processes critical to military culture. This is especially significant in the context of military-media relations as well as the themes and messages generated for each military campaign as part of the strategic narrative. During media and

communication training all military personnel rehearse the key themes and messages and invoke the unified institutional perspective. This becomes particularly important in the military-media relationship as the individual, when confronted with the media, will be speaking on behalf of the military institution as a whole. Hence, although military culture relies on responsibility and accountability at an individual level, the military discourse presents the institution as a united entity.

Unexplored frameworks

In developing the contextual, historical and theoretical frameworks for the thesis, a number of choices were made which also add to the limitations of the study. This particularly concerns four key areas – mediatisation, media and democracy, political economy and audience studies. These should be understood in addition to the wider applicability of the research findings discussed above.

First, the notion of ‘mediatised wars’¹⁵ is widely recognised in the media and war literatures. In his much cited article *The Mediatization of Society* Stig Hjarvard describes mediatisation as a process that transforms institutions to adapt to the growing influence of the media.¹⁶ Therefore, applying this concept to the military might allow for a better understanding of the institutional practices that have led to increasing military concerns about the role of the media in conflicts. Indeed, the mediatisation of military practice matters because public perceptions – local, national and intra-military perceptions – of campaigns matter to military success. Yet this perspective was not explored in detail in the analysis of the data.

Similarly, and second, the extensive body of work exploring the relationship between media and democracy was not developed in this thesis. Instead, it focused on the military’s position within a democracy of scrutiny, by progressing the notion of political

¹⁵ For a broader discussion on *mediatised wars* and the *mediatisation* of military activity see, for instance: Cottle, *Mediatized Conflict* (2006); Hjarvard, ‘The mediatisation of society’ (2008); and Hoskins and O’Loughlin, *War and Media* (2010).

¹⁶ Hjarvard, ‘The mediatisation of society’ (2008); see also: Hjarvard, *The Mediatization of Culture and Society* (2013).

accountability as a central tenet of UK strategic culture. However, this particular decision should not be understood as an unwillingness to engage with this body of work.¹⁷ Rather, it emphasises the choices made at the start of the research; the intention to situate the research within a comprehensive contextual setting driven by military cultural traits. The exclusion of this body of work thus reflects the chosen perspective, which rests more on the military than on the media.

Third, given that one of the key elements of military communication efforts is the mobilising of political support and the generation of coherent messages, the study could have incorporated aspects of political economy in the context of media related research. Indeed, this theoretical framework would have served as an appropriate framework to explain the underlying factors of the increasing mediatisation of military activity. Furthermore, given that this study suggests that the primary audience for military communication activity is the political leadership, aspects of political economy could have provided an underlying understanding of the military's need to secure financial support through the mobilisation of political backing.¹⁸

Finally, the notion of *audience* became a key aspect of the research framework. In particular, the role of the distanced audience, and the imagined audience, became an increasingly important finding, which proved critical to the generation of themes and messages as part of the strategic narrative. Yet because the study was driven by an institutional approach, with the aim of rendering visible and exploring the organisational structures, vehicles and discourses of military communication, the *audience* occupied only an implicit presence in the study and was not subject to separate analysis. In relation to this, the aim of the thesis was not to understand the extent to which audiences were receptive to military communication efforts. As a result, no attempt was made to examine

¹⁷ See, for instance: Curran, *Media and Democracy* (2011); Curran and Seaton, *Power without Responsibility* (2010).

¹⁸ For a wider discussion on the political economy of the mass media see, for instance: Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent* (2008); McChesney, *The Political Economy of Media* (2008); and Klaehn, *The Political Economy of Media and Power* (2010).

the effectiveness of the strategic narrative, or the incorporated themes and messages. Similarly, the study did not investigate media material itself.

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The thesis has made use of a wide range of official military doctrinal and policy papers. Most of such documents come in the form of Joint Discussion Note (JDN), Joint Warfare Publication (JWP) and Joint Doctrine Publication (JDP), which are official documents that demonstrate current thoughts on best practice in relation to specific defence issues. Other official documents used here are strategic doctrinal texts such as the Defence Communication Strategy and the Information Strategy as well as Top Level Messages, which set out the official military line towards relevant issues affecting military operations. Most of the official sources have been issued either by the British Government, the Ministry of Defence or the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre (DCDC), which is a Ministry of Defence think-tank. Some of the documents have been obtained during data collection in the field, while others are available through official military channels.

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Speeches by MOD Ministers, Chiefs of Staff and Senior Officials:

During the research period, a number of high-level official speeches were made that shed light on a range of issues concerning the British military mission in Afghanistan. These speeches also helped pinpoint specific developments in the Afghanistan campaign, throughout the research.

- Hammond MP, Rt Hon Philip, 'Afghanistan Statement', Speech delivered by Secretary of State for Defence at the House of Commons, 26 April 2012.
- Richards, General Sir David, '12th Annual Chief of Defence Staff Lecture', Speech delivered by Chief of Defence Staff at the Royal United Services Institute, London, 14 December 2011.
- Hammond MP, Rt Hon Philip, 'Delivering on the Frontline: Operational Success and Sustainable Armed Forces', Speech delivered by Secretary of State for Defence at the Royal United Services Institute, London, 8 December 2011.
- Hammond MP, Rt Hon Philip, 'Quarterly Statement on Afghanistan', Speech delivered by Secretary of State for Defence to the House of Commons, 18 October 2011.
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- Fox MP, Rt Hon Dr Liam, 'The Strategy on Afghanistan', Speech delivered by Secretary of State for Defence at the 8th International Institute for Strategic Studies Global Strategic Review in Geneva, 11 September 2010.
- Richards, General David, 'Chatham House Defence Lecture: 21st Century Armed Forces: Agile, Useable, Relevant', Speech delivered by Chief of General Staff at Chatham House, London, 17 September 2009.

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- INF 12/1430: The Falklands & the Media
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Conferences & Seminars:

During the research period, I attended a number of conferences, seminars and workshops, which informed the research.

- 'Insight with David Loyn: Afghanistan – 200 Years of Intervention' talk, The Frontline Club, 9 October 2008.
- 'John Morris in Conversation with BBC's David Loyn on Robert Capa: The Concerned Photographer', The Barbican, 11 December 2008.
- War Studies, King's College
- 'The Orwell Prize – Afghanistan', The Sunday Times Oxford Literary Festival, 29 March – 5 April 2009.
- Rupert Smith talk, King's College, 5 October 2009.
- 'The Politics of the Defence Review' one-day seminar, The Political Quarterly and King's College, 22 February 2010.
- 'Global Media and the war on terror' conference, University of Westminster, 13-14 September 2010.
- 'Army Families Federation' conference, AFF, 29 September 2010.
- 'The Work of a Government Press Officer' talk, Philip Treloar, International Communications and Media Handling training programme for Chinese officials, 14 April 2011.
- 'The relationship between the British military and British broadcasting' talk, Jon Williams (BBC World News Editor), International Communications and Media Handling training programme for Chinese officials, 15 April 2011.
- 'Exit Strategies and Lessons Learned: From the Balkans to Afghanistan' talk, Professor Richard Copland (Oxford University), London School of Economics, 4 October 2011.
- 'The Fundamental Problems of Afghanistan' seminar, King's College, 2 May 2012.

Field Settings, Personal Interviews, Email correspondence:

Anonymity was offered to all participants, as requested by the University Ethics Sub-Committee (see the Introduction for an explanation of the ethical concerns). Therefore, names and titles of informants have only been included, where this has been agreed beforehand. In relation to observations work, which took place in operational military settings, all participants and informants are only referred to by rank and position.

Field Setting, Loyal Ledger/Loyal Mariner '09, 1-15 March 2009.

Field Setting, PJHQ Northwood, NATO exercise, 7-14 April 2010.

Interview, British NATO Officer engaged in Information Operations, March 2009.

Interview, Frank Ledwidge, Author of *Losing Small Wars*, August 2011.

Interview, Mark Wenham, Chief Instructor, DSMC, March 2009.

Interview, Media Advisor to the UK Military, March 2010.

Interview, MOD Chief Press Officer, April 2011.

Interview, Rupert Nichol, Lt Commander Instructor, August 2011.

Interview, Media Operations Branch Press Officer, March 2009.

Interview, UK Commanding Officer, Helmand, Afghanistan, March 2009.

Interview, UK Commanding Officer, Basra, Iraq, March 2009.

Interview, US Commanding Officer in Iraq & Afghanistan, March 2009.

Interview, US NATO Officer, Rheindahlen, March 2009.

Email correspondence, ex-Media Operations Branch Press Officer, April-May 2011.

Email correspondence, UK Intelligence Officer in Helmand, Afghanistan, January-February 2009.

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Director: Kasper Torsting, TV2, 31 January 2010.

Appendix A

Defence Online Engagement Strategy: Objectives

Definitions and Examples

	Official Channels	Unofficial Channels
Authorised Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official websites • Official briefings by Service/MOD staff • FOI and other official releases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Official postings on unofficial bulletin boards and blogs • Posting our videos on YouTube • Official presences on social networks • Official contributions to online communities (wikipedia, games)
Unauthorised Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using footage shot unofficially by Service personnel • Syndicating material from other news sources • Allowing comments on official blogs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postings by our people on unofficial bulletin boards • Our people having their own their own blogs etc. • Personal, Non-work-related use of the internet by our people • The rest of the internet

Defence Online Engagement Strategy (August 2007), p. C-1.

Components of a defence online engagement strategy

	Official Channels	Unofficial Channels
Authorised Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Official websites Official press releases Official press briefings Official press conferences Official press releases <p>TIGHTER, BETTER OFFICIAL WEB PRESENCE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Official postings on unofficial bulletin boards Posting our videos on YouTube Official press releases on social networks Official contributions to online communities (wikipedia, games) <p>ASSERTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH NEW CHANNELS</p>
Unauthorised Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using footage shot unofficially by Service personnel Systematically identifying other news sources Allowing comments on official blogs <p>USE MATERIAL FROM OTHER PEOPLE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Postings by our people on unofficial bulletin boards Our people having their own thesauri, blogs, etc. Personal, non-work-related use of the Internet by our people The rest of the Internet <p>CLEARER RULES FOR OUR PEOPLE</p>

Defence Online Engagement Strategy (August 2007), p. C-2.

Outcomes of a defence online engagement strategy

	Official Channels	Unofficial Channels
Authorised Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Official websites Official press releases Official press briefings Official press conferences Official press releases <p>BETTER COMMUNICATION</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Official postings on unofficial bulletin boards Posting our videos on YouTube Official press releases on social networks Official contributions to online communities (wikipedia, games) <p>NEW AUDIENCES, BETTER REBUTTAL</p>
Unauthorised Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using footage shot unofficially by Service personnel Systematically identifying other news sources Allowing comments on official blogs <p>MORE DEPTH AND CREDIBILITY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Postings by our people on unofficial bulletin boards Our people having their own thesauri, blogs, etc. Personal, non-work-related use of the Internet by our people The rest of the Internet <p>BETTER SUPPORT AND DISCIPLINE, FEWER LEAKS,</p>

Defence Online Engagement Strategy (August 2007), p. C-3.

Appendix B

Additional *Defence Images*

The Human(e) Soldier



Soldier Talks with Local Children in Afghanistan (27 December 2010)

Afghan children talk with a soldier from 23 Pioneer Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps, during a patrol near Lashkar Gah, Helmand, Afghanistan.

A significant offensive operation, which takes the independence and self-sufficiency of British-trained Afghan forces to a new level, has begun in central Helmand.

As the new year was seen in around the world, Afghan troops were opening a new chapter which sets the scene for their future autonomy and long-term role in the defence of their nation against extremism and terror.

Operation OMID PANJ ('Hope Five' in English) follows on from the successful Operation OMID CHAR which, at the time, was the largest operation in size, number of soldiers and duration to have been planned, led and conducted by the Afghan National Army.

But OMID PANJ takes things a step further, with the Afghans relying on even less support from British troops, who are present only in a supporting role. One of the key areas where significant development of Afghan capability is being demonstrated is their growing ability to find and render safe improvised explosive devices, the indiscriminate weapon of choice for the insurgency.

Being conducted in the Green Zone, north of the Helmand River, the operation is pushing the Afghan government's influence and security bubble further out. By the time of its conclusion, it will see a new patrol base established east of Gereshk between the River Helmand and the Bandi Barq Road. This rural area, filled with irrigation ditches, canals and small farm plots, interspersed with residential compounds, has suffered from significant insurgent intimidation due to its proximity to smuggling routes into Gereshk city.

Photographer: Sgt Rupert Frere RLC
© Crown copyright 2010



○ **Soldier Talks to Children While on Patrol in Afghanistan (26 March 2011)**

A soldier with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 5th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, talks to local children while carrying out searches on compounds in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

B Company of the Canterbury based Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, 5th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland, known as 5 SCOTS, have recently conducted an operation codenamed Operation Cobra Braveheart in the Nahr-e Saraj district of Helmand Province to target known insurgent firing points, meeting locations and weapon caches.

The force of forty-five Jocks from B Company 5 SCOTS, supported by a team of fifteen Paras from 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment (2 PARA) and twenty warriors of the Afghan National Army (ANA) heavy weapons company surged into the Malgir area of southern Nahr-e Saraj on Thursday 24 March and remained in the area until Saturday 26 March. The troops were commanded by Major Will Horridge of 5 SCOTS.

The intent of the operation was to surprise the insurgent fighters in the area by inserting at dawn from the desert to the west of the 'Green Zone' of Malgir. The green zone is the heavily irrigated area which straddles the Helmand River. Once on the ground Major Horridge intended to target a number of compounds confirmed by various intelligence sources to be meeting locations for Taliban commanders to discuss operations against the British troops as well as compounds which have been used to launch attacks on previous B Company patrols in the area.

This image was a winner in the Army Photographic Competition 2011.
Photographer: Sgt Rupert Frere RLC

© Crown copyright 2011

Royal Marine 'High Fives' an Afghan Child in the Sangin Area (7 January 2008)



Royal Marines from D Company, 40 Commando, greet a local boy in Sangin, Helmand Province during a joint ANA-ISAF operation to clear insurgents from a Taliban stronghold.

Photographer: Sarah Yuen, DMOC
© Crown copyright 2008



Soldier from 3rd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland (21 November 2011)

A soldier from 3rd Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Scotland (The Black Watch) greets children on a foot patrol near check point Kalang in Nad 'Ali district, Helmand, Afghanistan.

Photographer:
Sgt Wes Calder RLC

© Crown copyright 2011



A Royal Navy Servicewoman Comforts an Afghan Civilian (1 July 2011)

A Royal Navy servicewoman reassures an Afghan civilian during an engagement operation. The Female Engagement Team Operator (FETO) is one of several currently working with 42 Commando Royal Marines in Nadi-e Ali North, Afghanistan.

Photographer:
LA(Phot) Dave Hillhouse

© Crown copyright 2011

Soldier With Afghan Child (14 May 2010)

An officer of C Squadron, Royal Dragoon Guards, lets an Afghan child look through the SUSAT optical sight of his L85A2 rifle, whilst on patrol in the area of Gorup-e Shalsh Kalay, near Checkpoint Shamal Storrai.

Photographer:
Cpl Barry Lloyd RLC

© Crown copyright 2010



Soldier from 1 RIFLES Talks with Afghan Locals During Operation Omid Haft (26 May 2011)



A soldier from A Company, 1 Rifles takes notes during a conversation with an Afghan village Elder during a Helicopter Assault Force (HAF) Operation in Helmand province.

The troops were tasked with taking over a local compound in the Taliban strong hold and setting up an Operational Check Point (CP ZARAWAR).

Photographer: PO (PHOT) Hamish Burke
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**Sergeant with the Military Stabilisation Support Team (MSST) Visits an Afghan School
(24 November 2010)**

An Army sergeant of the Military Stabilisation Support Team (MSST) during a visit to Abbazhan School in Gereshk, Helmand. The MSST helped sink three wells and supplied books and desks for the students

The MSST is a joint service team of men and women who are responsible for identifying, initiating and monitoring military projects. These projects can range from small scale quick impact such as provision of a well to a community for drinking water to large scale health initiatives, building schools and hydro-power plants.

Photographer:
POA(Phot) Sean Clee

© Crown copyright 2010



**A Sergeant with the Military Stabilisation Support Team (MSST) Visits an Afghan School
(24 November 2010)**

An Army sergeant of the Military Stabilisation Support Team (MSST) during a visit to Abbazhan School in Gereshk, Helmand. The MSST helped sink three wells and supplied books and desks for the students.

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Photographer:
POA(Phot) Sean Clee

© Crown copyright 2010



Afghan Girl with British Soldier (9 December 2011)

An Afghan girl pokes her tongue out at the camera.

British Soldiers from Delta Company, 5th Battalion The Rifles (5 Rifles) known as The Delta Dogs who were based at Patrol Base 4 , took part in multiple foot patrols in order to find, feel and understand insurgent activities in the southern part of the Nahr-e Saraj district, Afghanistan.

Photographer:
Sgt Wes Calder RLC

© Crown copyright 2010

Unity of Effort



Afghanistan Flag During Hand Over of Lashkar Gah to Afghan Forces (20 July 2011)

The flag of Afghanistan flies [sic] over the Afghan National Army on parade as British troops formally hand over the lead responsibility for security to Afghan Forces in Lashkar Gah in July 2011.

This was a significant milestone in a process of transition that will continue to 2014 and beyond.

Photographer: POA(Phot) Hamish Burke

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Afghan and British Soldier (24 March 2010)

An Afghan soldier shares a joke with his British counterpart from 1st Battalion The Royal Welsh (Royal Welch Fusiliers 23rd Foot) prior to Operation Moshtarak in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

Photographer:
Sgt Mark Jones RLC

© Crown copyright 2010



ANA Soldier on Patrol with British Soldier in Operation Omid Char (17 October 2010)

This image shows an Afghan soldier patrolling with ISAF troops in the village of Saidan near Gereshk on day one of Op Omid Char.

Members of the Afghan National Army in Helmand have launched their most significant operation yet. Operation OMID CHAR ("Hope Four" in English) is a major operation, building on previous Afghan National Security Force operations which have been carried out in conjunction with International Security Assistance Force troops

Photographer: Cpl Mark Webster
© Crown copyright 2010



Soldier and Afghan National Policeman (14 May 2010)

A Guardsman of the 1st Battalion the Coldstream Guards shares a joke with a member of the Afghan National Police (ANP).

In the Babaji region, the 1st Battalion the Coldstream Guards had been taking part in joint patrols with the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the ANP to provide security for the local population.

Photographer:
Cpl Barry Lloyd RLC
© Crown copyright 2010



Soldiers and Afghans Join Forces to Build New Road in Helmand (9 November 2010)

Members of 9 Squadron Royal Engineers and 23 Engineer Regiment are pictured building a road with the assistance of local Afghans. The road will link to a bridge across the Loy Mandeh Wadi. The bridge will then be rebuilt to enable access for heavy goods vehicles, opening supply routes across the area.

B Company, 2 Scots are providing security with the assistance of Afghan National Army and Afghan Police, on the 9th November 2010.

Photographer: Corporal Mark Webster
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