

British Army 2000: The Future Army

By Colonel Phil Lilleyman MBE

In the scope of history, the perceived and well-documented threat posed by the Soviet Bloc was an aberration, as was the "layer-cake" defensive posture of NATO. The end of the Cold War returns us to military structures based on a desired capability and a desired style of fighting. This article describes the British Army's approach to the same reassessment process that is sweeping through the U.S. Army and the armies of our other major allies.

Structural Reappraisal

Work began in 1994 on "British Army 2000 (BA 2000)." This was an internal process of fundamental structural reappraisal brought about by the changing strategic environment, the pace of technological change, and the formal adoption of a maneuverist approach to operations. Wide consultation through working groups produced a Foundation Paper in 1995 that examined factors affecting future Army structures and set an agenda for subsequent work.

In 1996, another paper assessed the nature of armed conflict in the first part of the next century. This paper accepted that warfare did not lend itself to tidy classifications and did not attempt to define conflict absolutely. Instead, it developed two speculative views of conflict as a premise for further study.

View One

The first view was symmetric. It showed an extrapolation of current trends in regional conflict. The United Kingdom was an alliance or coalition partner, prosecuting a joint expeditionary campaign of high tempo and deep maneuver. This would be followed by a post-conflict period of regional support and stabilization.

View Two

This view was asymmetric. It portrayed an Army opposed by irregular forces—having few moral constraints and applying terror and coercion as a central strategy—directed by miscellaneous social entities. They would be armed with a wide variety of weapons, including limited access to weapons of mass destruction.

The Director of General Development and Doctrine was tasked to recommend adjustments to Army force structures in light of these two views, which he did in two phases. Phase one identified initial steps necessary to transform the current Army structure toward the identified requirements of future warfare. Phase two took a long-term view and outlined key principles underpinning the "future Army" operating in the full spectrum of conflict from 2010 onward. This latter work was presented to the Army Board in September 1997 and is the focus for this article.

Constraints

Western democratic armies are complex organizations subject to political constraints as well as financial limits. The United Kingdom is no exception, and future force-development planning must remain within the agreed funding of the Long-Term Costings Plan, which covers a 10-year period forward. Therefore, program adjustments within this 10-year period have a funding ceiling. An equal if not longer-term constraint is the influence of legacy equipment systems. Many of the key systems delivering our maneuver and firepower will be in service after 2020. Although our thinking may be "out of the box," the scope for action in the short- to midterm is restricted.



"...a long-term constraint is the influence of legacy equipment systems..."

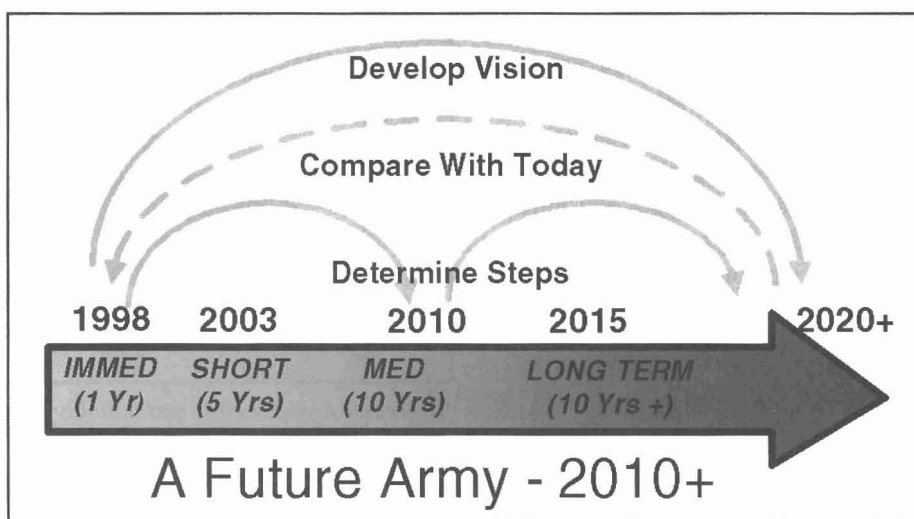


Figure 1

The work described thus far is Army-generated. The new United Kingdom government of May 1997 came to power with the promise of a far-reaching Strategic Defence Review. This ongoing review has taken full account of the future Army work, and we realistically hope that its findings in April 1998 will endorse the precepts. However, it is too early to begin “hardwiring” our future structures, so the details must be addressed later.

The Fundamental Vision

Military concepts will always be constrained by legacy systems and funding limitations, so we must accept evolutionary development rather than a step change. However, that evolutionary development will be guided by an ultimate vision stated as follows:

VISION 2010(+) **A Very Useable Army**

The British Army will be:

- World class for its size.
- [Play a] leading role throughout the future security environment—making a difference.
- Core structure based on warfighting in alliance/coalition operations—generating full-spectrum utility.
- Capability based, doctrinally coherent, modular, and robust.
- Top rate people, modern, innovative, outward looking.

Each word of this vision is carefully chosen to guide the progressive development of the Army. Note that it will be “a very useable Army,” outward looking, doctrinally coherent, modular, and deployable throughout the spectrum of future conflict. Further work is being done to compare the vision

with what we have, weigh the various influencing factors, establish priorities, and hopefully gain a glimpse of how the future Army will be structured (see Figure 1).

Influencing Factors

The following factors will help determine the structure of our future Army:

Strategic Dimension

Strategic guidance will flow from the Strategic Defence Review. Informed assessment suggests that our primary geographic interest for View One types of conflict will remain in Europe, the Mediterranean and its littoral, and the Persian Gulf. However, the wider world cannot be ignored, particularly for View Two types of situations. The United Kingdom exports a higher proportion of its gross domestic product than the United States, Japan, France, or Germany. Overseas investments form a higher proportion of United Kingdom wealth than in any other country in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. In addition, a far greater proportion of our 60 million citizens live and work abroad than that of any other developed nation. Therefore, the international rule of law and stability throughout the world is of fundamental importance to the United Kingdom. A recent influential study set the British Army's endorsed mission types in the following order of importance:

- Security of the United Kingdom and its citizens in peacetime.
- Security of the dependent territories.
- Defence support to wider British interests.
- Support of international order and humanitarian principles.
- Regional conflict outside the NATO area.
- NATO (Article V) regional crisis.
- General war.

Clearly multinational/multiagency operations will become increasingly the norm. Also increasing international interdependence will give the United Kingdom little real choice about its involvement in the full spectrum of future crisis and conflict. It is critical, therefore, that the future Army is postured for warfighting in a multinational context and that it has the modularity to tailor force packages and military contributions to specific theatres or tasks. In addition, it must maintain doctrinal coherence with its principal allies and potential partners, at least at the operational level.

Future Conflict

Warfighting, with all its complex challenges, will remain the ultimate requirement. However, the future Army will be required to operate across the spectrum of conflict from prevention and preconflict to post-conflict activities. The two views of warfare may characterize conspicuous facets of symmetric and asymmetric conflicts, but actual deployments will meet a confusing kaleidoscope of these two views. Often there will be no clear enemy, and victory will be unattainable in traditional terms, with success being measured by the achievement of a desired endstate. Therefore, our small Army (currently 112,000 soldiers) cannot be structured, equipped, and trained for only a limited range of capabilities. The entire Army must have maximum utility throughout the complete spectrum of its possible use.

Doctrinal Principles and Operational Trends

The maneuverist approach to warfare will remain a valid cornerstone of British doctrine—the central theme being to strike at the enemy's will and cohesion rather than match force directly. Therefore, the future Army must maintain superior tempo, agility, and lethality, and it must cultivate the command principles that allow prompt and simultaneous action. Improved technology will be critical in achieving this, but there is concern about overreliance on technology and the possibility of centralized control. Improved technologies should be used to empower the commander's decision-making process and thus support and not supplant the decentralized command philosophy of the British Army.

The identification of an opponent's center of gravity and the decisive points that lead to it will remain critical. Often these vulnerabilities will be in the depth of an opponent's battle space, requiring deep surveillance, maneuver, and firepower. This may require a shift of command emphasis from close to deep operations. Nevertheless, forces must retain the capability for aggressive close combat in order to continue the fight, not only in asymmetric conflict but also in situations where the impact of technology is blunted by urban or close terrain.



"...greater tempo, agility and lethality ...and deep maneuver..."

Challenges of Command

With increased maneuverability and the potency of modern weapon systems, small, self-contained force groupings are likely to exert a much greater influence over wider battlespace areas. Therefore, operational-level thinking and action will be drawn down to lower levels of command. This must be encouraged and not stifled by formulaic approaches that deny open-minded creativity. Similarly, commanders must be trained to develop an appreciation of the operational art in preference to tactical science. This will be extremely important as the following trends develop:

Battlespace. Future battlespace will be multidimensional, including the complex interplay of various national forces and nongovernment agencies. There will be yet greater ground-air integration and a heavy reliance at all command levels on space-delivered information. Commanders will be bombarded with information, and their training and support systems must ensure that a balance is kept between the flow of information and the capability to exploit it.

Balance. The desired balance of acceptability between ends, ways, and means will exercise the minds of commanders at all levels, particularly as the moral dimension cannot—or will not—be defined by political authorities in a timely fashion. Commanders at higher levels must be prepared to take an active and responsible role in shaping public perceptions and opinions at home. Equally, there will be increasing pressure to achieve success for the minimum cost in "blood and treasure." Commanders must weigh the balance between the operational paralysis that results from excessive avoidance of casualties and the consequences of imprudent risk taking.

Changing Society

The profession of arms will remain highly competitive, requiring a fighting spirit and a will to win. However, the Army will need to take account of liberal social attitudes and

legislative trends that run counter to this ethos. It will be necessary to articulate a vision of a disciplined, professional, educated, and meritocratic military society, in impartial harmony with the nation it serves and trained to work at the edge of advancing technology.

It may be necessary to develop a contract that recognizes the unique nature of military service and sets out required individual standards. Military technology and sociological trends may make it necessary to review the recruiting, selection, and career paths of officers and soldiers as their relative responsibilities evolve.

Technology

Technology offers exciting possibilities, which are well known in the United States. However, the United Kingdom sees no panacea in pure technology, particularly in an asymmetric conflict. Also, the British government could not support the high cost of pursuing the most advanced technology on a broad front. It would be disproportionate to the military requirement. However, weapons proliferation demands that the United Kingdom retain a qualitative advantage in key capabilities, and it is essential to have continued interoperability with our principal allies in Europe and the United States. With these thoughts, our priorities will be—

- Digitization.
- Robust, improved surveillance target attack radar systems (ISTARS).
- Long-range precision attack.
- Command and control warfare.
- Improved lethality.
- Nonlethal weapon systems.
- Increasingly agile and versatile platforms.
- Logistic improvements.
- Protective systems, including protection against weapons of mass destruction.

Future Army Structures

Early work in the BA 2000 process demonstrated the need for a truly modular Army that can assemble timely force packages tailored for specific operations. Whereas these packages need not be self-contained, they must be capable of generating the tempo, agility, and lethality necessary to dominate future battlespace. Coordination of these force packages in a particular theatre is perceived to be at three levels:

Force (either multinational or national). The force is the level of command needed to synchronize the simultaneous execution of deep, close, and rear operations.

Its capabilities and responsibilities will place it at the operational level, and it will be organized functionally with subordinate tactical operations centers to coordinate deep, close, and rear operations separately.

Formation (national). Formations will provide the primary focus for tactical warfighting. They will be the minimum size of coherent, all-arms, national contributions that can be deployed within a multinational joint force. They will be largely self-contained and formulated according to functional purpose.

Unit (national). The unit represents the lowest level at which the tactical maneuver battle can be effectively directed and combined arms fully integrated.

In addition to this highly useable, modular Army, a framework will be needed for force regeneration in times of severe crisis or general war. However, regeneration is increasingly difficult as we become more dependent on small professional forces that operate limited stocks of complex and sophisticated equipment.

Combat service support will be particularly difficult. Its structure must be sufficiently flexible and modular to meet the demands of an Army operating throughout the spectrum of conflict in a variety of force packages. A balanced logistic posture must be achieved in peacetime as a springboard for unforeseen operational requirements. Equally, a pragmatic convergence of national and joint logistic systems, as well as a sure asset-tracking capability to deliver the required equipment in a timely fashion, should be pursued wherever possible. Increased opportunities will be explored for using civilian contractors if their contributions release military resources. Despite their limited personal liability, such contractors bring heightened expertise in logistic planning, complex equipment maintenance, and infrastructure support. Their early involvement may facilitate military withdrawal and a more seamless transition to post-conflict activities.

Engineering Function

Even though it is too early to hardwire force structures, let alone take a definitive view of engineer involvement, the broad function of maneuver support will continue with undiminished importance. How much of that will remain within the Engineer Branch may be questioned. Indeed, it is unclear how the boundaries between established Army branches should be perceived, and it is more logical to take an altruistic view of battlespace functions. There is historical precedent for engineers to develop ideas that are then taken forward in other branches, so some infrastructure support functions might lie elsewhere in the long run. However, a strong engineer belief is that the

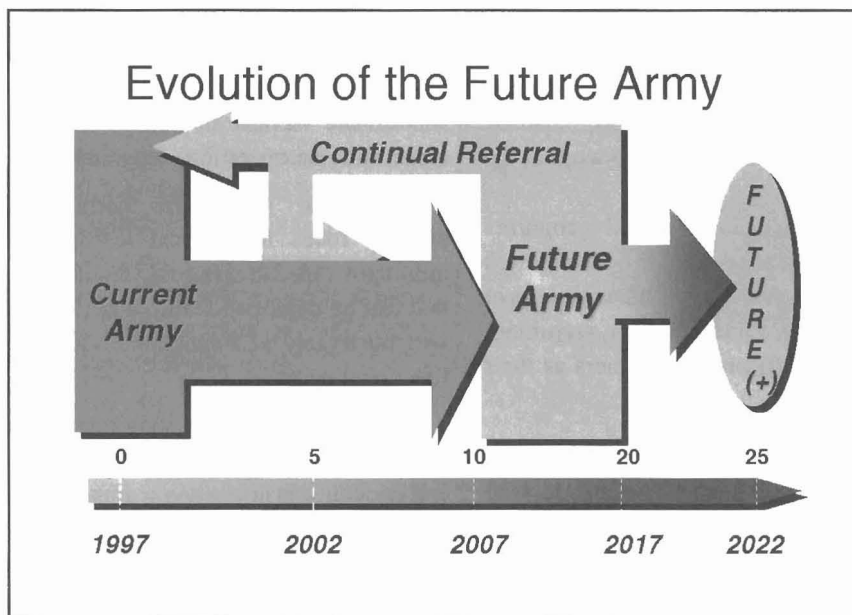


Figure 2

ingenuity of engineering must not be easily subordinated when Army functional responsibilities are rationalized and command structures designed.

The two views of future conflict lead to a polarization of engineer support that runs contrary to the Army policy of maximum utility. On one hand, sophisticated combat engineer skills are required to support tactical maneuver. On the other hand, more general—but equally sophisticated—engineer skills are required to support operational deployment and force sustainment. The broad utility of engineer units may have to accept individual specialties that are more restricting, and the balance of combat and general skills in units will need careful management. Also the demands of supporting theatre entry, in-theatre infrastructure, and post-conflict activities (such as battlefield clearance and reconstruction) reinforce the continuing need for specialized engineer units and advice at the force level.

Equally, tactical agility and operational tempo will demand more integral engineer support to formations and units than before, including the fusing of command and planning functions into all-arms groupings. Again, the policy of maximum utility will require a careful balance between integration and broader utility. This may lead to a continuing need for modularity and force packaging of engineer assets at much lower command levels than occurs in other arms.

The Way Forward

The British Army recognizes the need for change in order to match the evolving nature of conflict. However, change must be balanced, progressive, and coherent, being aware of short-term risks as well as the long-term vision. Technology will support this change but not

drive it. Equally, the rate of change will be carefully managed to take full account of necessary interoperability with our principal allies and the preservation of public and political support at home.

Change will be managed through a coherent campaign plan, but not all questions have answers today. There will be a process of continual referrals as implementation exposes new opportunities (see Figure 2). The following design factors will remain central in determining the balance, shape, and size of the future British Army:

- Maximum utility throughout the spectrum of conflict.
- Superior tempo overall.
- Physical and mental agility.
- Structural adaptability and adaptable soldiers.
- Increased lethality through precision, range, and timeliness.
- Protection against the full spectrum of attacks.
- Robustness in all situations and in the articulation of our values and views.

Much of the detail of the change will hinge on how well the Strategic Defence Review supports BA 2000. Whatever the detail, however, change is inescapable.



Colonel Lilleyman is the British Liaison Officer to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, based at Fort Leonard Wood. Previous assignments include United Kingdom engineer, doctrine and combat developments, and chief instructor, Command Wing, at the Royal School of Military Engineering. He has served in Northern Ireland, the Falkland Islands, and Bosnia with the United Nations. Colonel Lilleyman was awarded the MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) in 1987.