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NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY
JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE
JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL



IN PURSUIT OF BRITISH PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE NEXT WAR

by

Darren J. Denning

Lieutenant Colonel, British Army

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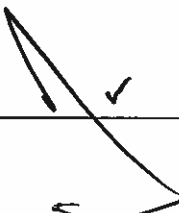
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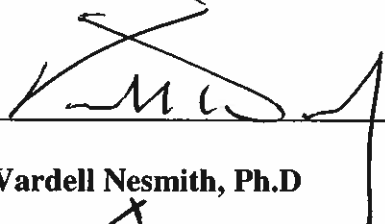
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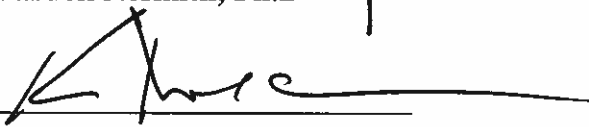
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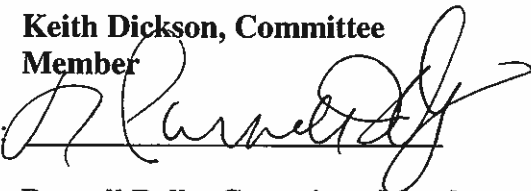
Signature: 

Vardell Nesmith, Ph.D

Approved by:

Signature: 

Keith Dickson, Committee Member

Signature: 

Purnell Delly, Committee Member

Signature: 

**Joanne M. Fish, CAPT, USN
Director, Joint Advanced Warfighting School**

ABSTRACT

Public support, as indicated by polling, for the War in Afghanistan deteriorated significantly from 2006 to 2011. This paper asks why there has been a drop in public support and what must be done to secure public support for the next war.

This paper examines the Falklands War and the War in Afghanistan as case studies to determine where public support can be won or lost and examines the effects of the National Security Strategy, the media, and combat casualties for future wars.

This paper argues that, following the UK experience in Afghanistan, the British people will no longer blindly or indefinitely support our wars and public support must be earned and managed by Her Majesty's Government. The British people will demand an understanding of the war aims, the costs in "blood and treasure,"¹ the legal basis for the war, and its duration. This paper will conclude that British society has become so averse to protracted war that, without management of public support, future wars that become protracted will no longer be practicable.

¹A phrase used to describe the cost of military casualties and the financial burden to the country.

DEDICATION

Dedicated to, my amazing wife and our beautiful children. I am eternally grateful for their love, patience and support as I pull them across oceans and continents, and back again.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My thanks to Doctor Vardell Nesmith, whose early wisdom gave structure to my research and whose personal experience guided my thinking throughout.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

War in the 21st century has been dominated by Irregular Warfare¹. Insurgencies and the efforts to counter them are commonplace. British forces serving under a NATO banner are now involved in an eleventh year of conflict in Afghanistan. As the War in Afghanistan has become protracted, public support has eroded. In November 2001, a poll indicated that seventy percent of United Kingdom (UK) adults polled supported taking action against Afghanistan.² In July 2009, a similar poll recorded that support for British involvement in Afghanistan had reduced to forty one percent.³ In February 2010 sixty-five percent of those polled believed that the War in Afghanistan was unwinnable and sixty-three percent of the same audience believed that all British forces should be withdrawn from Afghanistan as quickly as possible.⁴

The thesis of this paper is that, due principally to adversarial political commentators, the media, and combat casualties British society has become so averse to protracted war that, without management of public support, future wars will no longer be practicable.

¹Department Of Defense, *Irregular Warfare (IW) Joint Operating Concept (JOC)*. (September 11, 2007), 6, http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/dod/iw_joc.pdf (accessed 5 Jan 2011). Irregular Warfare is defined as a violent struggle among state and non-state actors for legitimacy and influence over the relevant populations.

²Ipsos MORI, "Support for War in Afghanistan – Trends 2001," (November 27, 2001) <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2399/Support-for-War-in-Afghanistan-Trends-2001.aspx?view=wide> (accessed 10 Jan 2011).

³Ipsos MORI, "Attitudes to Afghanistan campaign," (July 24, 2009) <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2414/Attitudes-to-Afghanistan-campaign.aspx> (accessed 10 Jan 2011).

⁴BBC Press Office, "Troops in Afghanistan in five years' time?" (March 3, 2010) http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2010/03_march/03/east.shtml (accessed 10 Jan 2011).

Sun Tzu warned of the dangers of allowing a war to become protracted; “for there has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefitted,”⁵ and “when the army engages in protracted campaigns the resources of the state will not suffice.”⁶ Her Majesty’s Government (HMG) has failed to identify or rectify the slide in public support for the protracted War in Afghanistan. Government failure to address this slide will make it impossible to commit the United Kingdom (UK) to future wars even if it is politically expedient to do so.

For Clausewitz, war is a combination of physical and moral elements. The moral dimension includes such forces as will, military genius, and public opinion and is fundamental to war. Whilst the physical elements involve the actual fighting, the moral dimension is considered to be the more important as Clausewitz describes, “the physical seem little more than the wooden hilt, while the moral factors are the precious metal, the real weapon, the finely-honed blade.”⁷ Therefore, a greater emphasis and weight of effort should be devoted to harnessing the support of the people.

The combined wisdom of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu dictates that a short war will be of greater benefit to the country; and the harnessing of supporting public opinion is an essential aspect of the “finely honed blade” which is vital to success.

An “opinion” is personal and is commonly defined as “a view, judgment, or

⁵ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (New York, Oxford University Press, 1971), 73.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. and ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 217.

appraisal formed in the mind about a particular matter.”⁸ Public support is synonymous with public opinion; therefore the sum of the individual positive opinions of the war equals the support base. Opinion polls will provide narrow results to a finite set of questions across a cross-section of society. A poll will never be able to account for the multitude of influencing factors upon an individual, and may also be affected by a bias within the polling agency. Equally, a poll will not identify fads in opinion (which can be as a result of fashion or feeling) and there can be a perceived disadvantage to holding the unpopular view. When an alternative opinion is considered by the individual to contain the risk of alienation the adoption of the “herd view” is the natural recourse. Therefore, an opinion poll will always be a compromise, but once published becomes de facto public opinion and representative of the sixty-two million people resident in the UK. This paper will use opinion polls and primary and secondary accounts of public support with supporting analysis of the political environment and the media output in order to make recommendations.

Chapters 2 and 3 will examine as case studies the Falklands War and the War in Afghanistan. In each case study there will be an examination of the political environment during and prior to each war. An analysis of the media response to each war and the prevailing public support will also be conducted. Chapter 4 will examine the UK National Security Strategy (NSS) to identify what HMG records as being in the UK’s national interest and the nature of the media and the impact of casualties upon public support in the 21st century Britain will be analysed. Chapter 5 will provide recommendations that may assist in the understanding and addressing of the factors that

⁸ *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged*, (Merriman-Webster Inc, Springfield Massachusetts, 2002), 1582.

cause public support to deteriorate. This paper looks towards the next war, and the British people will neither blindly or indefinitely support future war without careful management.

CHAPTER 2: THE FALKLANDS WAR

Politics and Objectives during the Falklands War

The Falklands War commenced April 2, 1982 and lasted seventy-four days until the Argentine surrender on June 14. The liberation resulted in a total of 255 British servicemen being killed.¹ Margaret Thatcher had committed to the liberation of the Falklands as early as twenty-four hours after the invasion; “If the islands were invaded, I knew exactly what we must do – we must get them back. Their people were our people. Their loyalty and devotion to Queen and Country had never faltered. As so often in politics the question was not, *what* should we do? But, *how* could it be done”²

History demonstrates that this was more than rhetoric on Thatcher’s part. That said, the “what should we do?” was not a decision that could be made in anticipation of unanimous support. The Labour Party was the party in opposition and in a ballot on May 20 to decide whether to deploy forces, thirty-three of its members opposed the sailing of the task force in favour of a diplomatic solution. Whilst Thatcher enjoyed majority support from the House of Commons there were still voices of dissent and in some cases a difference in opinion as to what the sailing of the task force signified. For some the task force was a means to return Argentina to the negotiating table and there was little expectation that the force may have to fight to regain the islands, “Some saw the task

¹ “Falkland Islands Campaign – The Falkland Islands A History of Operation Corporate – Roll of Honour, RAF,” (October 1, 2004), <http://www.raf.mod.uk/falklands/rollofhonour.html> (accessed 12 Nov 2010).

² Admiral Sandy Woodward, *One Hundred Days, The Memoirs of the Falklands Battle Group Commander*, Foreword. Margaret Thatcher (Bluejacket Books, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, Maryland, 1997), xi.

force as a purely diplomatic armada that would get the Argentinians back to the negotiating table. They never intended that it should actually fight.”³

Thatcher was realistic in her understanding of the limits of political opinion. Support could not be guaranteed in the long term and action had to be taken and quickly before a reversal became a possibility. In both the maintenance and fragility of political support for the task force, Thatcher recalled in her memoirs,

For the moment, however, it had survived. We received the agreement of the House of Commons for the strategy of sending the task force. And that was what mattered....my announcement that the Task Force was ready and about to sail was greeted with growls of approval. But I knew not everybody was cheering for the same thing....I needed their support for as long as possible, for we needed to demonstrate a united national will both to the enemy and to our allies.⁴

A historical assessment reveals that the decision for war was to receive overwhelming support. Any criticism of the deployment of the task force or the forcible removal of the Argentine forces that did occur was often given short shrift by the tabloid press. On proposing an option to evacuate the Falkland Islanders, the Labour Party MP Tony Benn and the far-left politics that he represented received the following tirade from *The Sun*:

Out of the woodwork like the political termite he is, crawls No.1 Left-winger Tony Benn to demand the evacuation of the Falkland Islanders....And of course, he immediately wins the backing from the whining namby-pamby ultra-Left, who always run scared at the first sign of a crisis.⁵

Benn was not to shrink from such criticism and consistently remained the minority anti-war voice. Even after victory had been secured, Benn was eager to press for

³ Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, (Harper Collins Publishers, Inc, New York, 1993), 184.

⁴ Ibid, 185.

⁵ Robert Harris, *Gotcha! The Media the Government and the Falklands Crisis*, (Faber and Faber, New York, 1983), 45.

information that would justify his anti-war stance and discredit the Government's decision to commit to war:

Will the Prime Minister publish the full text of all exchanges that took place with the United Nations, Argentina and the Americans so that we may see what happened and a full analysis of the costs in life, equipment and money in this tragic and unnecessary war, which the world knows well will not provide an answer to the problem of the future of the Falkland Islands?⁶

There had been considerable anger at the perceived failure of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to anticipate the Argentine invasion and the Foreign Secretary Peter Carrington was subjected to intense criticism from across the political spectrum. Carrington concluded that it was in the best interests for the Conservative Government and for the unity of the war effort for him to resign. Thatcher initially opposed this but was later to state that: "There is no doubt that Peter's resignation made it easier to unite the Party and concentrate on recovering the Falklands."⁷ Carrington reinforced this in a letter to Thatcher in which he states "The Party will now unite behind you as it should have done last Saturday."⁸ In the post-war analysis, the Franks Report⁹ was unequivocal in its affirmation that the Argentine invasion could not have been predicted. The report stated that "The invasion of the Falkland Islands on 2 April could not have been foreseen."¹⁰ Despite the vindication of Carrington that was to follow, in the pursuit of

⁶ Tony Benn, "Prime Minister's Question Time," (June 15, 1982), <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104969> (accessed 12 Oct 2010). These comments were made following the Argentine surrender.

⁷ Thatcher, 186.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The Franks Report was commissioned to investigate the background to the Falklands War and the Government's decision to go to war.

¹⁰ Max Hastings and Simon Jenkins, *The Battle for the Falklands*, (W.W. Norton & Company, New York and London, 1983), 362.

wartime political unity, Carrington and Thatcher both realised that his resignation was the only course of action.

In the weeks preceding the Falklands War there were intense efforts to illicit international support for the British position conducted principally through the United Nations (UN) but also unilaterally with the United States and other nations. Thatcher was cognisant of the requirement for as broad an international support base as possible. In achieving this Sir Anthony Parsons, the British Ambassador to the UN, conducted what was described by a UN admirer as “good old fashioned diplomatic legwork.”¹¹ Parson’s expert diplomatic skills, which contrasted with the Argentines’ lack-lustre efforts, achieved a short notice summoning of the UN Security Council and secured a Security Council presidential call for both the UK and the Argentines to demonstrate restraint. Crucially the call was made ahead of the imminent Argentine invasion. Parsons also protected the UK from having to employ its veto, by securing a majority vote for a Security Council Resolution supporting Britain’s demand for an immediate withdrawal of Argentine forces. It took considerable diplomatic prowess to ensure that the USSR abstained from using its veto, petitioning France to influence Togo in Britain’s favour and taking advantage of Thatcher’s relationship with King Hussein to secure the Jordan vote. Parsons had delivered the UK, Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 502. Margaret Thatcher was able to remark as a result of receiving UN support that “All the Argentines have to do is honour UN Security Council Resolution 502.”¹²

¹¹ Hastings and Jenkins, 99.

¹² Ibid, 101.

The diplomatic expertise displayed by Parsons was vital to the British cause. In an era where national interests may conflict with the views of international forums, such as the UN, the securing of broad international support and endorsement in law to legitimise resorting to war is an enormous advantage. The UK could have acted unilaterally, but to have done so would have attracted widespread criticism and undermined those nations that may otherwise have been sympathetic and supportive of the British position. As Max Hastings was to remark, “But no nation likes to go to war without right on its side, and even Thatcher was not averse to the banner of a Security Council resolution fluttering over her task force.”¹³ On both the domestic and international stage, political consensus is a vital ingredient for success.

The Media and the Falklands War

During the Falklands War the opportunity for the media to undermine the war effort through the transmission of near real-time graphic television (TV) images never materialised. As a result of the remoteness and distance to the Falklands, the task force controlled who from the media made the journey to the South Atlantic. Despite many applications from media outlets to join the task force the majority were denied, although some did resort to petitioning the Prime Minister:

I believe you will be horrified to learn that the Daily Star and three other national daily newspapers, *The Times*, the *Guardian* and the *Sun*, have been excluded from sailing with the Naval Task Force on the ludicrous grounds that there is not enough room aboard the ships. Please help us to be there when Britain’s pride is restored by the armed might which you have promised the nation.¹⁴

In total, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) authorised only three TV reporters, two

¹³ Hastings and Jenkins, 99.

¹⁴ Harris, 20.

photographers, and fifteen newspaper correspondents to sail with the Task Force.

The coverage of the news was split along familiar lines. The Broadsheet newspapers such as the *Times* and *Daily Telegraph* gave a detailed coverage of the campaign.

Tabloid newspapers such as the *Sun*, focused upon human interest stories within the task force and reported interviews with the families of those that were killed. TV and radio programmes covered the war intensively and as a result broadcasts were frequent and short. As Valerie Adams, a professor at King's College London, recognises,¹⁵ the Falklands was also to see the emergence of TV and radio "talking head" commentators; while the newspapers continued to use their sources in a mostly anonymous fashion.

From the outset there was an institutional distrust between the military and the media. Regulations issued to the Task Force correspondents clearly defined the potential for a clash of interests. "The essence of successful warfare is secrecy. The essence of successful journalism is publicity."¹⁶ The distrust was compounded further when a newspaper correspondent was discovered to have discussed details of the impending British landing at San Carlos a few days prior to its launch, significantly undermining operational security. In return the media suspected they were being used by the military; "Editors became increasingly concerned that they were being used by the Ministry of Defence to channel misinformation – above all after Sir Frank Cooper assured them that there would be no 'D-Day type landing' in the Falklands twenty-four hours before the amphibious assault at San Carlos."¹⁷ The media distrust for the military was further

¹⁵ Valerie Adams, *The Media and the Falklands Campaign*, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1986), 149. Adams expands on the types and extent of the media coverage of the Falklands War.

¹⁶ Harris, 16.

¹⁷ Hastings and Jenkins, 332.

exacerbated by TV pictures not being able to reach the UK for two weeks after filming; the Royal Navy claimed that this was due to interference with electronic equipment. In the eyes of the media this explanation did not bear scrutiny, especially when considering that a U.S. carrier group, following the fall of Saigon, was able to transmit images from the South China Sea as early as 1975. The relationship between the military and the media was fraught with tension.

It is widely accepted that television and radio replaced the newspaper during the 1970s as the main source of news for the majority of the population.¹⁸ The precise point at which the public switched from print news to TV and radio is difficult to identify but what is known is that, during the Falklands War, BBC TV news bulletins reckoned to achieve an audience of ten to twelve millions for one of their bulletins.¹⁹ It was the appetite for TV news and the inability of the task force and the journalists onboard to facilitate it that was to fuel the argument between the Government and the MOD, and the media's main protagonist, the BBC.

During the post war analysis there appeared to be little sympathy for the media and its struggle to flow the news as it saw fit. The media had cried foul and accused the MOD of being undemocratic but there was little public support for the media position. The House of Commons Defence Committee (HCDC) provided an interesting perspective upon censorship, and the relationship between the media, government and the public:

It is easy to argue that to suppress the truth is inherently alien to a democratic society, but even this argument can be given exaggerated emphasis. In particular, it

¹⁸ Adams, 148. The BBC estimated that in spring 1974 nearly 60 percent of the population of Britain listened to or viewed a full news bulletin.

¹⁹ Ibid.

must be remembered that the Government's credibility may appear quite different in the eyes of the media and of the public at large. The two are closely related since public opinion is influenced by media reporting and commentary, but they are not always equal quantities. Many principles, supposedly regarded as sacred and absolute within the media are applied in a less rigid and categorical way by the public as a whole when it is judging its Government's conduct of a war.²⁰

The HCDC recognised that whilst the BBC was keen to criticise the Government, Margaret Thatcher in particular, the majority of the public did not share their view and therefore did not share their sense of outrage at claims of censorship. The Falklands War was to demonstrate that when a war is broadly popular, the public appears willing to accept some degradation in democratic principles in return for a successful conclusion; "The committee recognized the dangers, but concluded that the public was willing to accept being misled *to some extent*, if as a result the enemy were also misled and the prospects of the campaign's success thereby improved. The evidence suggests that the media do not show the same degree of acceptance."²¹ In fact the media, in the eyes of the majority of the British public, was considered an interloper in military business and there seemed little support for the cries of censorship and military foul play. In response to a MORI poll question regarding MOD censorship of reports from British reporters with the Task Force prior to publication; sixty-five percent felt it was the correct policy.²²

Despite the difficult relationship within the task force and the friction between the Editors and the MOD, the media outlets in the UK could not ignore the enormous public support for the task force. As a result, whether it was willing or contrived, a stream of

²⁰ Adams, 180.

²¹ Ibid, 181.

²² Ipsos MORI, "The Falklands War – Panel Survey," (April 14, 1982) <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=49> (accessed 13 Oct 2010). MORI interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,018 adults. The survey was conducted for The Economist.

patriotic reports would dominate the UK press. The *Times* would recite the English poet John Donne and employ some powerful rhetoric for a broadsheet newspaper read by social elites:

The national will to defend itself has to be cherished and replenished if it is to mean something in a dangerous and unpredictable world.... We are an island race, and the focus of attack is one of our islands, inhabited by our islanders. At this point of decision the words of John Donne could not be more appropriate for every man and woman anywhere in a world menaced by the forces of tyranny: 'No man is an island, entire of itself. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am not involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.' It tolls for us; it tolls for them.²³

The *Sun*, Britain's most popular tabloid, was much more direct by leading with the headline "WE'LL SMASH 'EM!(sic)" Headlines such as these were intended to raise the national ire and enthusiasm for war. However, this approach was not approved by all and such an over-enthusiastic stance attracted criticism. The *Sun*'s jingoistic approach came to be reviled by some politicians and other members of the national press²⁴ predominantly for its vitriolic editorials that reported acts of treason. In a May 7, 1982 editorial "Dare call it Treason" the author, Ronald Spark, spoke of "traitors in our midst" stating that Margaret Thatcher had referred to "newspapers and commentators on radio and TV who are not properly conveying Britain's case over the Falklands.... The Prime Minister did not speak of treason. The Sun does not hesitate to use the word."²⁵ The dominant view espoused by the media was that the task force must sail and, if necessary, the Argentine invaders should be forcibly removed from British sovereign territory.

²³ Harris, 38.

²⁴ Ibid, 50 to 52. The critics included the National Union of Journalists calling it 'odious and hysterical', the Guardian and the Daily Mirror. Michael Foot as Leader of the Labour Party was to refer to The Sun's coverage of the Falklands War as 'hysterical bloodlust.'

²⁵ Ibid, 50.

United Kingdom Public Support and the Falklands War

The levels of public support for the Falklands War were consistently high and are in contrast with the diminishing support for the War in Afghanistan. The table below from an Ipsos MORI poll demonstrates the levels of pre, and post, war support. The same survey also concluded that seventy-six percent of those questioned felt that even in the face of high financial costs and 255 killed, that it was correct to send the task force.

Table 1: Should Britain take/have taken the following measures over the Falklands Islands situation? Land troops on the Falklands.

	14 Apr 1982	20-21 Apr 1982	23-24 Apr 1982	3-5 May 1982	25-26 May 1982
	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	67	65	65	72	89
No	24	25	26	22	10
Don't know	9	10	9	6	1

Source: Data from Ipsos MORI poll 'Falklands Panel'²⁶

In order to understand the basis for popular public support for the Falklands War, the concept of Britain in decline in the preceding decade requires analysis. Margaret Thatcher described the Britain of 1982 and the significance of the Falklands War:

The significance of the Falklands War was enormous, both for Britain's self-confidence and for our standing in the world. Since the Suez fiasco in 1956, British foreign policy had been one of long retreat. The tacit assumption made by British and foreign governments alike was that our world role was doomed steadily to diminish. We had come to be seen by both friends and enemies as a nation which lacked the will and the capability to defend its interests in peace, let alone in war. Victory in the Falklands changed that. Everywhere I went after the war, Britain's name meant something more than it had.²⁷

Conservative Party Member of Parliament (MP) Alan Clark echoed the sentiments of Thatcher with regard to Britain's withdrawal from the colonies. But Clark recognised a more altruistic opportunity to atone for what he considered to be an

²⁶ Ipsos MORI, "The Falklands War - Panel Survey."

²⁷ Thatcher, 173.

abandonment of the colonies rather than Thatcher's vision of putting Britain back on the map. In a speech on April 7, 1982 Clark said "I believe that this is the last chance, for us to redeem much of our history over the last 25 years, of which we may be ashamed and from which we may have averted our gaze."²⁸

A total of forty-nine territories were released from British control in the period 1957 to 1982.²⁹ British decolonization often resulted in significant difficulties for the fledgling independent state; this was apparent in Rhodesia where colonial withdrawal was followed by racial tension and civil war as a result of the black majority's expectation of emancipation and self-determination and the white settlers' insistence on minority control in government.³⁰

With Africa effectively decolonized by 1968, in the January of the same year Prime Minister Harold Wilson announced that the UK would withdraw from the Far East (less Hong Kong) and the Gulf region within three years. This policy decision principally centred UK ambitions on Europe and in doing so greatly upset the United States who would feel obliged to fill the vacuum. The American Secretary of State, Dean Rusk was so annoyed by the UK policy he "could not believe that free aspirins and false teeth were more important than Britain's role in the world" and urged "for God's sake be

²⁸ Nora A. Femenia, *National Identity in Times of Crises: The Scripts of the Falklands/Malvinas War*. (Nova Service Publishers, New York: Inc, 1996), 123.

²⁹ William Jackson, *Withdrawal from Empire: A Military View*, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1986), 265.

³⁰ British withdrawal from the southern and eastern parts of Africa was complicated by the region's white settler populations, particularly in Rhodesia, where racial tensions had led Ian Smith, the Prime Minister, to a Unilateral Declaration of Independence from the British Empire in 1965. Rhodesia remained in a state of civil war between its black and white populations until the Lancaster House Agreement of 1979. This agreement temporarily returned Rhodesia to British colonial rule until elections could be held under British supervision. The elections were held the following year and won by Robert Mugabe, who became the Prime Minister of the newly independent state of Zimbabwe.

Britain.”³¹ UK membership of the EEC was to follow in 1973 and although endorsed by a national referendum in 1975 was seen by some as the surrendering of economic autonomy.

A reasonable hypothesis is that Britain’s withdrawal from the colonies had, as Thatcher had surmised, damaged Britain’s self-confidence and negatively impacted the national psyche. A further surrender of British sovereignty, whether that was to the EEC or the Falkland Islands, would signal the end of any lingering notion of Empire that may have been harboured in some corners of society. The demise of Britain on the world stage would inevitably erode national confidence in the UK’s position as an independent world power.

In addition to shrinking autonomy over economic matters in Europe and in world influence, there were significant domestic troubles which were primarily linked to widespread unemployment, and a perceived breakdown in the sense of community.³² The notion of British society being close to ruin coupled with a national perception of the UK as a non-player on the world stage was to be prominent in the 1979 Conservative Party election campaign and manifesto. Margaret Thatcher summarises,

Together with the threat to freedom there has been a feeling of helplessness, that we are a once great nation that has somehow fallen behind and that it is too late now to turn things round.... What has happened to our country, to the values we used to share, to the success and prosperity we once took for granted?....During the industrial strife of last winter, confidence, self-respect, common sense, and

³¹ Piers Brendon, *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire 1781-1997*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 515. Rusk was annoyed at what he perceived to be the British Government focus upon UK domestic issues, such as the National Health Service, rather than foreign policy and Rusk’s assessment of post colonial responsibilities.

³² Conservative Party Manifesto, (1979), <http://www.conservativemanifesto.com/1979/1979-conservative-manifesto.shtml> (accessed 14 Jan 2011).

even our sense of common humanity were shaken. At times this society seemed on the brink of disintegration.³³

On coming to power in May 1979 the Conservative Party was to activate its “5 Task Plan” as envisaged in the party manifesto. On implementation it was defined by a lack of immediate results and the commencement of a process of painful economic reform that resulted in the continuation of “hard times” into the period from 1979 to 1982. Unemployment was still greater than three million, public spending had been reduced and interest rates had been raised in order to check inflation. Therefore, following Thatcher’s election to government in 1979 with a substantial majority, it was against a backdrop of economic depression and a perception of dwindling international influence that the UK was to embark on a path to war in April 1982.

It would seem logical that, during periods when the economy is deflated, the expense of a war in the opposite hemisphere would be unpopular; however, whilst there was an anti-war voice in political circles there was very little evidence of public unpopularity. Protest marches, demonstrations and petitions were prominent by their absence. By contrast, there is substantial evidence indicating a national mobilisation in support of the Falklands War. The UK industrial base was quick to respond positively to the war effort, which is all the more remarkable given the climate of unemployment and redundancies:

³³ Conservative Party Manifesto, (1979). The 5 Tasks Plan, (1). To restore the health of our economic and social life, by controlling inflation and striking a fair balance between the rights and duties of the trade union movement. (2) To restore incentives so that hard work pays, success is rewarded and genuine new jobs are created in an expanding economy. (3) To uphold Parliament and the rule of law. (4) To support family life, by helping people to become home-owners, raising the standards of their children's education, and concentrating welfare services on the effective support of the old, the sick, the disabled and those who are in real need. (5) To strengthen Britain's defences and work with our allies to protect our interests in an increasingly threatening world.

In Portsmouth, where the first redundancy (layoff) notices had been issued on the very day of the invasion, one of the workmen was spending Sunday visiting HMS *Victory* with his wife. When he saw others working he just handed his camera to his wife, joined his fellows, and arrived home 36 hours later. In Devonport, forklift truck drivers worked 36- and 48-hour shifts willingly. Outside the Dockyards, industry gave the same response.³⁴

Admiral Sandy Woodward, the commander of the Falklands Battle Group, was surprised by the breadth of support across British society recalling that “every few days we received bundles of clippings- a couple of weeks late- which I thought showed a remarkable breadth of support for this military action, resisted only by the more left wing leaders. Even the trade unions seemed solid behind us.”³⁵

Decades of shrinking national influence was a significant factor in generating the substantial public support for the Falklands War. The occupation of one of a greatly reduced number of overseas territories and resulting indignation of a far off piece of Britain being invaded was an obvious spur to generating the public support for war. Argentina had not only insulted national pride but had presented an opportunity for the public to be occupied with a righteous national cause rather than domestic troubles. The allure that victory would reassert Great Britain’s power and standing as a member of the upper echelons of the world order is understandable. Public support was near universal and to such an extent that Margaret Thatcher was able to later remark that “our policy was one which the people understood and endorsed. Public interest and commitment remained strong throughout.”³⁶

³⁴ R. Villars, *Merchant Ships at War: The Falklands Experience*, (Annapolis; Naval Institute Press, 1984), 26 to 27.

³⁵ Woodward, 311.

³⁶ Thatcher, 181.

The Falklands War was centred upon the recapture and liberation of British sovereign territory and was victoriously concluded in a little more than two months, although it did cost the lives of 255 servicemen and a significant proportion of the Royal Navy fleet. By comparison the current War in Afghanistan, to be considered in the next chapter, has been fought in a NATO coalition and originated principally as a result of the 9/11 attack in the USA. The War in Afghanistan is in its eleventh year and has cost the lives of over 360 British servicemen and many more from within the coalition.

CHAPTER 3: THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN

Politics and Objectives during the War in Afghanistan

Prime Minister Blair was in no doubt that the attacks on 9/11 had changed the world irrevocably. “We had to stand together. We had to understand the scale of the challenge and rise to meet it. We could not give up until it was done. Unchecked and unchallenged, this could threaten our way of life to its fundamentals. There was no other course; no other option; no alternative path. It was war. It had to be fought and won.”¹ The UK had suffered casualties also with sixty-seven of the 3500 lost being British citizens. The extent of UK support for the USA was substantial. The British held a palpable desire to stand in solidarity with their American allies:

Hardly an hour went by but that some image of Britain was televised world-wide, from Blair's "shoulder to shoulder" speech to Bush's "no truer friend" response, from the Guards Band playing the Star Spangled Banner outside Buckingham Palace to the Queen and Royal Family at the St Paul's memorial service. The British Establishment was on full parade behind America's sense of loss and desire for retribution.²

On the announcement of attacks against Afghanistan, UK political support was uniform. The leader of the opposition Ian Duncan-Smith declared, “no one should doubt the determination of the British people to see this through to a successful conclusion. Our future security and well being will require no less.”³ The leader of the Liberal Democrats George Kennedy was to say “the military strikes of the last 24 hours are sad.

¹ Tony Blair, *A Journey My Political Life*, (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2010), 345.

² Sir Robert Worcester, “Shoulder to Shoulder,” Ipsos MORI, (December 1, 2001), <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/newsevents/ca/ca.aspx?oItemId=160> (accessed 16 Nov 2010).

³ Douglas Kriner and Graham Wilson, “Elites, Events and British Support for the War in Afghanistan,” (American Political Science Association, Washington D.C., September 2-5, 2010), 9. <http://www.britannica.com/blogs/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/kriner-and-wilson-apsa-2010.pdf> (accessed 1 Feb 2011).

Indeed, we all consider them tragic but they are none the less inevitable.... We are correct to pursue military action but unlike the terrorists, we will continue to display mercy.”⁴

Britain has long been a believer of the need for collective security, with its alliances in NATO and relationship with the USA as the cornerstones. In November 2010, the UK Minister for International Security Strategy, Mr Gerald Howarth said that “NATO remains the cornerstone of our Defence, made up of inviolable sovereign nations.”⁵ The attack of 9/11 was to witness the first occasion of Article 5 of the NATO treaty being evoked with the attack on one (the USA) constituting an attack on all. If there had been doubts in Europe,⁶ for Britain it was clear, the USA had been attacked, the conditions for Article 5 had been met, United Nations Security Council Resolutions supported action,⁷ and the War in Afghanistan and the Global War on Terror, would be supported.

Throughout, political consensus from the principal political parties has remained broadly supportive of British military involvement in Afghanistan. The 2010 Labour Party Manifesto argued that “If Afghanistan fell to the Taliban, Al Qaeda would regroup

⁴ Kriner and Wilson, 9.

⁵ Gerald Howarth, “UK Perspective: Shared Security Challenges and Shared Solutions,” (November 20, 2010) [http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/People/Speeches/MinISD/20101120Uk PerspectiveSharedSecurityChallengesAndSharedSolutionsincluding GermanTranslation.htm](http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/People/Speeches/MinISD/20101120Uk%20PerspectiveSharedSecurityChallengesAndSharedSolutionsincludingGermanTranslation.htm) (accessed 15 Feb 2011).

⁶ Blair, *A Journey My Political Life*, 351 to 352. Blair was to speak with all the major European leaders in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attack. Initially Putin (Russia), Schroder (Germany), Chirac (France) and Berlusconi (Italy) were fully supportive. When more direct action in Afghanistan was being discussed Chirac began to urge caution.

⁷ United Nations, *United Nations Security Council Resolutions, (2001)*, <http://www.un.org/Docs/scres/2001/sc2001.htm> (accessed 13 Mar 2011). UN SCR, 1368, 1378, 1383 and 1386 supported action.

and Pakistan's stability and our national security would be threatened.”⁸ In September 2009, Liam Fox, the Conservative Party Shadow Foreign Secretary declared that “we are in Afghanistan out of necessity, not out of choice.”⁹ The Liberal Democrats refused to remove the option of being critical of government strategy in Afghanistan but did declare in their manifesto that their party members were “critical supporters of the Afghanistan mission.”¹⁰

Despite a broad cross-party support base, political support has not been unanimous. As “critical supporters” the Liberal Democrats have used Afghanistan as a means of attacking the Government. Campaigning for the 2010 General Election they argued the loss of too much “blood and treasure” and that the military were doing an incredible job whilst coping with the wrong equipment, the wrong mission in the wrong timeframe. Liberal Democrats leader Nick Clegg declared “We now need to ask whether the Government has the will, strategy or tactics to do the job properly. Our young men and women's lives are being thrown away because our politicians won't get their act together....I am appalled that so many of our soldiers have been killed because of inadequate equipment.”¹¹ Liam Fox, the Conservative Shadow Defence Secretary, was to echo Clegg's attack on equipment deficiencies stating, “There are real questions about whether the Government has fulfilled the pledge to give the armed forces everything they need to do the job. The bottom line from our troops is they don't have enough armoured

⁸ The Labour Party, “The Labour Party Manifesto 2010 A Future Fair for All,” (2010), 10:2, <http://www.labour.org.uk/uploads/TheLabourPartyManifesto-2010.pdf> (accessed 23 Jan 2011).

⁹ Kriner and Wilson, 10.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Andrew Porter, “Nick Clegg urges government to rethink Afghanistan mission,” *The Telegraph*, (July 9, 2009). <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/politics/defence/5781195/Clegg-Were-throwing-lives-away-in-Afghanistan.html> (accessed 10 Feb 2011).

vehicles and they don't have enough helicopters. The Government needs to act.”¹² This campaign theme was popular with the voters who had been rallying behind the forces.

Tony Blair wrote, “If I had known then that a decade later we would still be fighting in Afghanistan, I would have been profoundly perturbed and alarmed.”¹³ There exists today a majority who are perturbed and alarmed at the continuation of the War in Afghanistan. During a House of Commons debate the Labour MP Paul Flynn declared that....

Our terrorist threats have come from Yorkshire and Pakistan, not from the Taliban and not from Afghanistan at all. That threat is an utter myth and a scare story that has been put out.....Our soldiers are being killed because they are present. The answer is not to send more soldiers to act as targets for Taliban bombs, but to bring our soldiers out of Afghanistan.¹⁴

This line of argument is at the heart of the anti-war protest rhetoric and is gaining traction because “more than half (53 percent) say they don't really understand why Britain is still in Afghanistan.”¹⁵ It is remarkable that after nearly a decade of British military involvement in Afghanistan that a survey, taken in 2010, could return a result indicating such a clear lack of understanding of British objectives. The British people have long required a consistent and coherent war aim but in its place have received reworked and reworded lists of objectives that appear to haphazardly re-order priorities in an attempt to articulate a strategy. Tony Blair recognised this and attempted to counter

¹² Andrew Porter, “Nick Clegg urges government to rethink Afghanistan mission.”

¹³ Blair, *A Journey My Political Life*, 347.

¹⁴ Paul Flynn, “Afghanistan Strategy,” *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, (December 8, 2009). Col. 6WH, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm091208/halltext/91208h0001.htm> (accessed 6 Feb 2011).

¹⁵ Nigel Morris, “Afghan war is unwinnable and we should not be there, say voters,” *The Independent*, (April 21, 2010). <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/afghan-war-is-unwinnable-and-we-should-not-be-there-say-voters-1949621.html> (accessed 6 Feb 2011).

the public confusion when he wrote,

Now, years later, people say: But the mission isn't clear, or it's confused. It isn't, and it wasn't. To us then, and I believe this to be true now, there is no neat distinction between a campaign to exorcise al-Qaeda, or to prevent Taliban re-emergence, or to build democracy, or to ensure there is proper, not a narco, economy.¹⁶

Tony Blair has failed to appreciate that the overwhelming majority of the population do not have the time, motivation or academic acumen to study the issues, but are being exposed to criticisms by the media on a daily basis. Those few citizens with an appreciation of the difficulties of operating in Afghanistan and the challenges involved will better appreciate Blair's view. Unfortunately, the interwoven challenges opposing progress in Afghanistan are rarely delivered to the public. The strategies are often contradictory and the media expose perceived inconsistencies as an incoherent strategy.

In the last decade there have been multiple definitions of the UK strategy released at the ministerial level. With every new definition it is probable that the public becomes further confused at the reason for UK involvement and the justification for loss of life and money becomes less convincing. In March 2006, Defence Secretary John Reid, on committing British forces to Helmand Province, said he hoped British forces would leave without "a single shot being fired."¹⁷ Statements such as Reid's will encourage the public to demand explanations, particularly when the original prognosis for the war is so wildly wrong.

To demonstrate the potential for confusion; the definitions of UK war aims have

¹⁶ Blair, *A Journey My Political Life*, 362.

¹⁷ John Reid, quoted in Richard Osley, "War in Afghanistan: So, just what are we fighting for?" *The Independent*, (July 12, 2009), <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/war-in-afghanistan-so-just-what-are-we-fighting-for-1742749.html> (accessed 23 Nov 2010).

included counter-narcotics,¹⁸ to create an Afghan democracy, to initiate free and fair elections, to bolster Afghan government, to improve the lives of Afghans, to promote economic development, to tackle the border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan,¹⁹ to stop the Taliban and Al-Qaeda returning because of the threat to the Afghan people and to Europe,²⁰ to safeguard national security, to enable “Afghanisation,” to reduce corruption, and to reconcile those Taliban who renounce violence.²¹ In addition, Defence Secretary Des Browne in February 2007, was to give an entirely humanitarian rationale for the war, “NATO must respond to this request, or we will put at risk everything we have achieved across Afghanistan in the last five years: the stability which has brought five million refugees home, the advances in democracy, the economy, human rights and women’s rights.”²² Perhaps the most dangerous to maintaining public support, and therefore the least proffered, is as counter-insurgency expert John Mackinlay says, “Being in Helmand is the price we pay for being at the top strategic table with the Americans.”²³ The notion of being involved in a war to gain credit with the USA is unlikely to be well received by

¹⁸ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “Global Issues, Counter Narcotics,” <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/global-issues/conflict-prevention/afghanistan21/counter-narcotics> (accessed 6 Feb 2011).

¹⁹ John Lunn and Ben Smith, “The AfPak policy: Origins and Evolution,” (March 19, 2010). <http://www.parliament.uk/briefingpapers/commons/lib/research/briefings/snua-05411.pdf> (accessed 3 Feb 2011). Gordon Brown listed these elements in the British Response to US AfPak policy.

²⁰ Gordon Brown, “PM urges more help in Afghanistan,” *BBC News*, (July 2, 2008) http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/7485478.stm (accessed 11 Feb 2011).

²¹ Ivan Lewis, “Afghanistan Strategy,” *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, (December 8, 2009), cols. 21WH to 22WH, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm091208/halltext/91208h0001.htm> (accessed 6 Feb 2011).

²² Des Browne, “Des Browne’s Statement on Troops for Afghanistan,” *The Guardian*, (February 23, 2007), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/feb/23/afghanistan.military> (accessed 3 Feb 2011)

²³ James Macintyre, “Like it or not, Brown’s a war leader,” *New Statesman*, (November 23, 2009), 16, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?index=10&did=1909302301&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=3&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1284577044&clientId=3921> (accessed 23 Nov 2010)

the majority of British people.

The multiplication of war aims has prevented the levels of understanding that would have generated greater support for the war. In comparing Afghanistan with the Falklands War, Michael Codner, the Director of Military Science at London's esteemed Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), argued "the Falklands War was very clear in its objective, the reasons for the war were pretty straightforward. Afghanistan is very different because there is not a clear political mission or military set of objectives."²⁴

Peter Beaumont of the *Observer* newspaper reported his frustrations at the lack of a coherent war aim for Afghanistan:

Why are we fighting in Afghanistan? I ask because I am no longer sure. And not being sure, like a majority of Britons, I cannot conceive what victory might look like. That makes me think we should not be there. Once, I recall, the idea was to help create the beginnings of a modern, democratic state where the lives of ordinary people would be improved. Women's rights would be supported and a free press encouraged. War lords trundled off the scene. What are our aims in Afghanistan right now?.....the terms for what would be a satisfactory and honourable conclusion to the conflict but also what purpose our continuing war serves there have become so ill-defined as to be almost indecipherable.²⁵

In April 2009, David Cameron, asked Prime Minister Gordon Brown,

Last month President Obama set out a new US strategy, which he summed up in a single sentence 'to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future.' Is it not essential that our strategy is as tightly defined, as hard-headed and as realistic as that?²⁶
There was to be no redefining of UK strategy by the Labour Government. On

²⁴ Michael Holden, "UK Afghan death toll matches Falklands loss," *Reuters*, (February 8, 2010). <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE61725720100208> (accessed 7 Feb 2011).

²⁵ Peter Beaumont and Jason Burke, "The Observer debate: Should we bring our troops home from Afghanistan?" *The Observer*, (November 8, 2009) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/nov/08/observer-debate-afghanistan> (accessed 2 Feb 2011)

²⁶ Mail Foreign Service, "700 extra British troops on their way Afghanistan as Brown outlines new strategy to win war that has lasted SEVEN years," *Mail Online*, (April 30, 2009), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1175036/700-extra-British-troops-way-Afghanistan-Brown-outlines-new-strategy-win-war-lasted-SEVEN-years.html#ixzz1HC4khO1Q> (accessed 3 Feb 2011).

coming into office, David Cameron addressed what he perceived to be shortcomings in the UK strategy through the release of a new National Security Strategy (NSS) and a Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) in October 2010. Anchored in the NSS, at the policy level, there flows now a coherent and consistent message regarding the UK strategy in Afghanistan.²⁷ Importantly, the strategy delivered in the NSS is reinforced in the MOD definition.²⁸ Crucially, the core meaning of each release is consistent and supportive of the other.

The Media and the War in Afghanistan

There are few better examples of the way in which the media can change its views than in the example of the War in Afghanistan. UK television news programmes consistently adopt an apolitical approach to the presentation of news and, while some BBC documentary programmes are criticised for being politically biased, the government funded BBC is mandated, by law, to maintain broadcast neutrality. Neutrality is not required within the print media and it is here that the diversity (or otherwise) of political views to the War in Afghanistan can be found. The tabloid newspapers are the most strident in their viewpoint and it is these media giants, the *Sun* and *Mirror* have a combined daily circulation of circa 4.25 million, who have moved to a position in opposition to the Government and its policies in Afghanistan. The shift in support was most apparent as the Labour Party hold on power became increasingly unlikely ahead of

²⁷ HM Government, *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy*, (London, The Stationery Office, October, 2010), 13.

²⁸ MOD, "Operations in Afghanistan: Our Strategy - Defence Factsheet," <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/FactSheets/OperationsFactsheets/OperationsInAfghanistanOurStrategy.htm> (accessed 15 Feb 2011).

the May 2010 General Election and the cost in “blood and treasure” continued to rise and be used to attack the government.

The UK population was collectively outraged by the 9/11 attacks and a widespread display of solidarity with the USA was in evidence. The media quickly recognised the public mood and a media enthusiasm for U.S. President George Bush’s Global War on Terror was to be extensive. The media call for action was widespread and, although inconsistent as to what should happen next, stated in broad terms that something had to be done in the wake of the atrocities of 9/11. Tony Blair captured the prevailing mood when he wrote, “The British newspapers the next day were typical of those around the globe: ‘AT WAR(sic),’ they proclaimed. The most common analogy was Pearl Harbour.”²⁹

The anti-war voice was small in comparison and was often the preserve of editorials and opinion pieces within broadsheet newspapers, journals and from political commentators. Luke Harding of the *Guardian*, a broadsheet newspaper that writes for the educated middle classes and leans to the left of the political spectrum, cautioned against the Coalition underestimating the Taliban: “All the signs are, meanwhile, that the Taliban are digging in for the long haul....Bombing from the sky on its own will not be enough to dislodge them....Nobody knows what Mr. Bush's legacy in Afghanistan will be, except perhaps further devastation in a country that has already been ruined.”³⁰ Harding’s presentiment was to become remarkably accurate.

²⁹ Blair, *A Journey My Political Life* 342.

³⁰ Luke Harding, “A war that’s never been won,” *The Guardian*, (September 18, 2001), <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/sep/18/afghanistan.september11?INTCMP=SRCH>, (accessed 10 Mar 2011).

David Millar, a professor at Stirling University, criticised the media for selecting opinion poll results or commissioning polls with limited question sets in order to inflate or distort the levels of public support. Millar stated that “in the media almost every poll has been interpreted to indicate popular support for the war...the Sunday Mail showed only five percent support for bombing and sixty-nine percent favouring conflict resolution. Nevertheless the closest they got to this in their headline was that Scots were 'split' on bombing.”³¹

Those that urged caution or patience were drowned out by the shouts from the tabloid press and subjected to fierce criticism. John Kay of the *Sun* was quick to attack those opposed to the bombing of the Taliban in Afghanistan and even drew parallels to those who opposed the NATO bombing campaign and eventual liberation of Kosovo: “WOBBLERS (sic) having second thoughts about the war on terrorism sound like those who doubted bombing would lead to the liberation of Kosovo....Today the wobblers are out in force again calling for a halt to bombing in Afghanistan.”³²

Sue Carroll, writing for the UK's second most popular tabloid, the *Mirror*, took the opposite view to those who considered an attack upon Afghanistan as an act of vengeance unworthy of consideration by the USA and UK. Carroll had no difficulty in justifying revenge:

Even so retribution and retaliation are to many of us –after watching scenes of human destruction and hearing heartbreaking personal stories over the past week – the most obvious and yes, necessary reaction....But there is a feeling that vengeance is a dirty word. And those who use it have been subjected to whispered

³¹ David Miller, “World Opinion opposes the attack on Afghanistan,” *Religion- Online*, (November 21, 2001), <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1772> (accessed 11 Mar 2011).

³² John Kay, “Return of the Wobblers,” *The Sun*, (November 1, 2001), <http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/142473/Return-of-the-wobblers.html>, (accessed 10 Mar 2011).

condemnations of being warmongers, no better than the fanatical psychopaths who took out the vast gleaming hub of New York and left a sickening pit of rubble and bodies in its place.³³

When the rout of the Taliban regime had been completed there was wide acclaim at the speed and extent of the success of the campaign. It was a time to congratulate the efficiency of the military, casualties had been a non-issue, and determined leadership with little thought of the next step or an articulation of a longer term strategy. Mark Steyn of the *Telegraph*, a broadsheet newspaper marketed at the educated middle classes with a political bias to the right of the political spectrum, was ebullient in his praise declaring, “Two months after the bloody attacks on American cities, the Government that supported the men who did it has been overthrown and its troops are corpses in the dust. It's early days, but that alone is cause for all Americans — and Britons — to rejoice. Even journalists....Last week, President Bush said, ‘Let's roll.’ We're rolling.”³⁴

However, widespread media support was not to last and over the following nine years the view for many media outlets would change significantly.

For many years the War in Afghanistan was the sideshow to larger military efforts in Iraq. As the NATO mission in Afghanistan expanded in 2006 the UK efforts in Iraq diminished, concluding in a complete withdrawal by April 2009. Afghanistan had been drawn into the media spotlight because it was the only war left to cover but also as a result of increased casualty statistics as the British military moved into Helmand Province. As the reduction in public support for the War in Afghanistan emerged, fuelled

³³ Sue Carroll, “Tell the Liberals there is nothing shameful in vengeance,” *The Mirror*, (September 19, 2001), <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/columnists/sue-carroll/2001/09/19/tell-the-liberals-there-is-nothing-shameful-in-vengeance-115875-11312995/>, (accessed 10 Mar 2011).

³⁴ Mark Steyn, “We are at war with the Losers,” *The Telegraph*, (November 17, 2001), <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/4266824/We-are-at-war-with-the-losers.html>, (accessed 9 Mar 2011)

by the media or otherwise, the UK print media, led by the tabloids, began their attack on the Prime Minister, Government and the MOD. The sources of criticism were to focus upon accusations of insufficient forces and equipment, incoherent war aims and an exponential rise in casualty statistics. In a Reuters report, John Curtice, politics professor at Strathclyde University said of the War in Afghanistan that “This is the war we stumbled into as opposed to the war we were told we were fighting, it does nothing for people’s belief that this is a competent government.”³⁵

Prime Minister Gordon Brown also became the subject of ferocious individual criticism. The media portrayal of Brown altered from being the talented, but ambitious, Chancellor of the Exchequer who had expertly navigated the UK into economic boom, to being an uncharismatic and incompetent leader who lacked the communication skills required to transmit his vision to the population. Much of the criticism was vitriolic:

THE (sic) 207 faces of our Afghanistan dead are stark reminders of the bloody war we are fighting. Each represents a sacrifice made for democracy and freedom in the name of Britain. Yet, to its shame, our Government doesn't seem to want to face up to the fact we are in the middle of a savage conflict. Our leaders are pretending the war isn't happening. Today, The Sun asks the Government and Gordon Brown: Where is your leadership? As the hearses carrying our heroes are saluted in silent Wiltshire streets, Mr Brown and his ministers are missing in action.³⁶

The *Sun* has a tradition of celebrating Britain’s war-time leaders. For example, Margaret Thatcher received hugely positive coverage for her leadership during the Falklands War and Winston Churchill is still highly regarded for his leadership during World War Two. Gordon Brown has received far harsher treatment. In late 2009, as

³⁵ Michael Holden, “UK Afghan death toll matches Falklands loss,” *Reuters*, (February 8, 2010) <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE61725720100208> (accessed 16 Sep 2010).

³⁶ “The Sun Says, Don’t you know there’s a bloody war on?” *The Sun*, (August 28, 2009) http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/campaigns/our_boys/2611351/Dont-you-know-theres-a-bloody-war-on.html (accessed 15 Sep 2010).

casualty figures had spiked that summer, Brown was to receive the brunt of the blame:

“Mr Brown has taken the country to war but is ducking responsibility for the conduct of it. The tradition of our country is that in wartime, the Prime Minister takes charge.”³⁷

The Secretary for Defence Bob Ainsworth was to fare little better when the *Sun* declared “While Our Boys are dying, a fool who is out of his depth and with little experience is in charge of defence.”³⁸ Brown was to receive withering criticism for his handling of a correspondence with the mother of a young soldier killed in Afghanistan and for being disrespectful at the annual Remembrance Parade. The *Sun* announced,

GORDON (sic) Brown was accused of disrespecting our war dead yesterday with TWO (sic) shameful blunders. He got a dead soldier's name WRONG (sic) in a letter to the hero's mum - and FAILED (sic) to bow at the Cenotaph. His gaffes came despite The Sun's campaign to remind him there is a bloody war on.³⁹

The character of the criticism could be seen to have changed, no longer are policy decisions the focus of attention, but Brown himself is under attack. In the same series of articles by the *Sun*, the Prime Minister's handwriting is analysed with the assessment “shoddy...Pm's (sic) scrawled, barely legible letter with errors highlighted.”⁴⁰

Following the May 2010 General Election and the change in government, the ferocity of personal criticism of the UK leadership has almost disappeared, but the overall feeling of dissatisfaction with UK national leadership for the conduct or the objectives of War in Afghanistan remains.

³⁷ “The Sun Says, Don't you know there's a bloody war on?” *The Sun* .

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Tom Newton Dunn, “PM Couldn't even get our name right,” *The Sun*, (November 9, 2009), http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/campaigns/our_boys/2720283/Prime-Minister-Gordon-Brown-couldnt-even-get-our-name-right.html (accessed 15 Sep 2010).

⁴⁰ Ibid.

United Kingdom Public Support and the War in Afghanistan

The aim of the War in Afghanistan is thought by many to be unclear. Casualties are an almost daily drain upon the remaining support base as each new casualty is manipulated and evaluated by the media in terms of a cost-benefit analysis. The War in Afghanistan struggles for support while conversely the military appears to be enjoying a level of popularity that has not been seen since the Falklands War.

On October 24, 2009 a “Stop the War Coalition” demonstration numbering in excess of 10,000 participants marched through the centre of London. The protestors claimed that the War in Afghanistan is unwinnable, that life is getting worse for most Afghans under occupation, that the war is spreading to Pakistan and that the majority of Afghans do not support the war and occupation.⁴¹ Also, in a November 2009 poll for the BBC's Politics Show, forty- two percent of the 1,009 adults surveyed said they did not understand the purpose of Britain's mission in Afghanistan. Some sixty-three percent of those surveyed felt UK troops should be withdrawn as soon as possible, and fifty-two percent agreed that levels of corruption in Afghanistan's government meant the war was not worth fighting for. As the mission became more complicated over time, that confidence has plummeted:

⁴¹ Robin Beste, “Landmark Afghanistan Demonstration - The Stop the War Coalition,” (October 25, 2009), <http://www.stopwar.org.uk/content/view/1561/1/> (accessed 23 Dec 2010). Also cites six other reasons for the protest as; the death rate is rising on both sides, Gordon Brown claims the war is about combating terrorism when there was no threat prior to UK involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, that Afghanistan will be a 30 year war, that Britain has spent \$4.6 billion on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq every year, that more troops or helicopters won't help and that we were told that the War in Afghanistan was to liberate women and women's lives have not improved.

Table 2. How effective, if at all, do you think the current military campaign in Afghanistan will be in achieving its aims?

	October 01	July 09
	%	%
Very effective	18	7
Fairly effective	38	31
Not very effective	22	39
Not at all effective	11	18
Don't know	11	7
Very/fairly effective	56	38
Not very/at all effective	33	57
NET effective	+23	-19

Source: Data from Ipsos MORI poll considering 'Attitudes to Afghanistan.' Poll results from a base of 1000+ British adults.⁴²

Substantial public discontent has emerged during what has been a lengthy, bloody and expensive campaign. By mid-2006 British support for the war had fallen to below forty percent in most polls.⁴³ The public perception of the War in Afghanistan has altered considerably since its commencement in 2001 when the majority of the population understood the aims of the war, and believed that the military would be capable of achieving them.

The "Attitudes to Afghanistan" poll also asked, "Do you support or oppose Britain's continuing military campaign in Afghanistan?"⁴⁴ Only forty-one percent said they did support the war. An explanation for the drop in support could be related to the public's perception of the threat. Over time, as the world moves further away from 9/11, the threat has become diluted. Arguably, the Al-Qaeda inspired 7/7 Underground attacks in

⁴²Ipsos MORI, "Attitudes to Afghanistan campaign," (July 24, 2009), <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2414/Attitudes-to-Afghanistan-campaign.aspx> (accessed 10 Jan 2011).

⁴³ Charles A. Miller, "Endgame for the West in Afghanistan? Explaining the Decline in Support for the War in Afghanistan in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia, France and Germany," *Letort Papers*, (The U.S. Army War College, Carlisle, June 2010), 53, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdffiles/PUB994.pdf> (accessed 5 Jan 2011). Since 2006 support has flat-lined at a level just below 40 percent, although at times it has dropped below 30 percent.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

London served to briefly refocus the population to the threat, however, opinion polls have returned to the status quo of circa forty percent and below in support of the war. Tony Blair identified the reduction in the British belief of a threat when he stated,

But as time passed, people wondered whether maybe its consequences hadn't been exaggerated; perhaps it really was just a one-off, in which case, the argument developed, should we just try to manage this situation, maybe evolve it over time, but above all tranquilise it? As the mission became more painful and the will of the enemy to keep on fighting grew clearer, such an argument became increasingly attractive.⁴⁵

Public support is further undermined by those who argue that continued presence in Afghanistan will decrease security at home by encouraging retaliation in the form of terrorist attacks in the UK.⁴⁶ Claims made by 7/7 London Underground bomber Shehzad Tanweer only serve to strengthen the argument: "What you have witnessed now is only the beginning of a string of attacks that will continue and become stronger until you pull your forces out of Afghanistan and Iraq."⁴⁷

The British military is now better supported than at any other time since the Falklands War. Numerous charitable organisations have emerged since 2007 in response to the increase in deaths and life changing injuries from operations in Afghanistan. Help for Heroes (H4H) has grown to be one of the largest and most readily identified charities in the UK and since its inception has raised nearly eighty-seven million pounds.⁴⁸ The

⁴⁵ Blair, *A Journey My Political Life* 368.

⁴⁶ Sir Robert, Worcester, "Shoulder to Shoulder," *Ipsos MORI*, 59 percent of Britons accepted that terrorist attacks are more likely as a result of British participation in military strikes. 63 percent worried that terrorists would retaliate against the UK using chemical and biological weapons.

⁴⁷ Adam Fresco, Daniel McGrory and Andrew Norfolk, "Video of London Suicide Bomber Released," *Times Online*, (July 6, 2006), <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article683824.ece> (accessed 11 Mar 2011).

⁴⁸ Help for Heroes, "Money In," *H4H Website*, (March 9, 2011), <http://www.helpforheroes.org.uk/>, (accessed 9 Mar 2011).

once small charities, such as British Limbless Ex Service Men's Association (BLESMA) and the Army Benevolent Fund (ABF), who were largely supported from within the military community, are now in receipt of monies from large-scale nationwide fund raising activities.

The growth of charities and public support for the military has been identified and capitalised upon by the media.⁴⁹ Since 2008, the *Sun* newspaper has sponsored a military awards programme called the “Millies.” The programme highlights the actions of individual and unit nominees and presents awards for acts of valour or other good deeds. The programme is attended by sporting and show business personalities, championed by royalty, and then screened on prime time television. Viewing figures are recorded at 4.97 million viewers in 2010, an increase of 410 thousand over 2009 figures.⁵⁰ This level of military exposure to the public was unheard of for decades as the military, forced by the threat of Irish terrorism, was cautious of revealing itself outside of well organised events. Large media events such as the “Millies,” which expose the population to the heroism and honour of military service, will encourage growth in public support for the military.

The public has, of its own volition, taken responsibility for honouring the return of the war dead from Afghanistan. In April 2007 the people of the small Wiltshire town of Wootton Bassett spontaneously lined the streets to honour those killed in the War in Afghanistan. The event was widely reported by the media and captured the imagination of the population. The return of the war dead is now received by thousands of members

⁴⁹ The tabloids have launched a number of campaigns to include; the *Sun Stress S.O.S*, the *Sun Jobs For Heroes* and the *Mirror Pensions Fit For Heroes* campaigns.

⁵⁰ A Night Of Heroes, “The Sun's Military Awards, The Millies,” (December 18 2010), <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0239185/news?year=2010>, (accessed 9 Mar 2011).

of the public who often line the streets for several miles.⁵¹ It was announced by the MOD March 16, 2011 that the return of war dead would move to a new location and would no longer pass through Wootton Bassett. To recognise the people of the town, Her Majesty the Queen has announced that the title “Royal” will be given to the town. In addition, Defence Secretary Liam Fox announced,

I would also like to record publicly my thanks to the people of Wootton Bassett who have chosen to pay their respects in a unique and special way. It is such spontaneous public support that captures the spirit of the British people, and I am very grateful for those who have participated; such gestures do not go unnoticed by those deployed on operations.⁵²

In November 2010, *Wikileaks* released documents criticising UK military efforts in Afghanistan. The releases were summarised in the *Guardian*: “Devastating criticism of the UK’s military operations in Afghanistan by US commanders, the Afghan president and local officials in Helmand. The dispatches reveal particular contempt for the failure to impose security around Sangin.”⁵³ To believe that the efforts of your nation’s military are not being appreciated will have a negative effect upon public support. The effect is magnified when linked to emotive deployments such as Sangin which has witnessed the most UK casualties and been the focus of intense media coverage.

The British public take comfort and pride in the international regard given to the professionalism of its armed forces. The British military today is comparatively small

⁵¹ Marcus Dunk, “Tribute to the town that cared: Armed Forces put on parade to thank residents for honouring fallen heroes,” *Mail Online* (October 13, 2008), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1076878/Tribute-town-cared-Armed-forces-parade-thank-residents-honouring-fallen-heroes.html>, (accessed 9 Mar 2011).

⁵² MOD, “Relocation of Repatriation Ceremonies to RAF Brize Norton—Defence Internal Brief 2011DIB/20,” (March 16, 2011).

⁵³ David Leigh, “US embassy cables leak sparks global diplomatic crisis,” *The Guardian* (November 28, 2010), <http://m.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/28/us-embassy-cable-leak-diplomacy-crisis?cat=world&type=article>, (accessed 16 Jan 2011).

but a widespread belief that they rank amongst the best is a mitigating factor. Where British military efforts in Afghanistan are criticised, the public are presented with two conclusions that may lead to a desire to see the withdrawal of forces. Firstly, from less ardent supporters, that the reports are true and the military should withdraw or secondly, that the reports are untrue and the British contribution is not appreciated and should also therefore withdraw. In either case, while difficult to qualify, the conclusion is that criticism of the military from within the alliance will undermine public support for the war.

The casualty statistics for the War in Afghanistan now far exceeds the losses of the Falklands War⁵⁴ and has been subject to unrelenting exposure by the media. A question to Prime Minister Brown by Conservative MP Sir Peter Tapsell asked if the Prime Minister's "bleak message to the country was that for years to come he and his successors would be paying tribute to the soldiers killed in Afghanistan the previous week fighting an unwinnable and deeply unpopular war."⁵⁵ Tapsell's question captures the ongoing debate concerning casualties in Afghanistan which will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁵⁴ UK casualties stand at 362 at the time of writing. The Falklands War ended with 255 servicemen killed.

⁵⁵ "PM urges more help in Afghanistan," *BBC News online*, (July 2, 2008), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/7485478.stm (accessed 16 Jan 2011).

CHAPTER 4: KEY FACTORS IN PREPARING FOR THE NEXT WAR

The Impact of Casualties on Public Support

The often delayed release of casualty numbers in previous wars, as seen in the Falklands War, has been replaced by breaking news often released within hours, with full details of the dead following twenty-four hours later. The media will aggressively search for family connections, push for interviews and seek out grievances. A grieving family can expect to be approached many times over in what has become a highly competitive media environment. The War in Afghanistan provides the strongest example of how casualties may be received by the public in the future. What will remain consistent is the media appetite to report on casualties.

The U.S. Army military scholar Charles Miller, supported by polling evidence, argues that levels of support are not conclusively affected by casualties alone, stating that “The data on British public opinion and the Afghanistan War show that British public opinion, like its American and Australian counterpart, is not reflexively determined by casualties alone. Other factors come into play.”¹ Miller has concluded that public support cannot be defined in terms of casualties alone. Agreed, however, in the example of Afghanistan, it is counter-intuitive to place casualties as an equal amongst the contributing factors that erode public support. The significance of combat casualties, dead and wounded, on the British people and the media focus it has received makes it far more prominent.

The news of casualties will invoke a response that can potentially cover the full range of emotions to include sadness, despair, anger, or perhaps even pride. For the War

¹ Miller, “Endgame for the West in Afghanistan?” 55.

in Afghanistan, the British losses are now in excess of 360 and the running total has been etched into the national psyche by the media since 2006. Landmarks are sought by the media and have included reaching the Falklands War and Iraq War totals, as well as each passing fifty or one hundred casualties. The War in Afghanistan is over a decade old and mounting casualties over time are taking their toll. In a protracted war where casualties are sustained in single figures the public receives the news of casualties over and over again; and although the numbers are small, the impact of repetition multiplies their effect. The overwhelming majority of the public will hold a natural inclination to not welcome news of casualties. While that same public may be energised to support the war in the early stages, when the war is still short and casualty numbers are low, but as the war becomes protracted and the casualty numbers rise, a call for the end of the war is a more likely outcome.

In addition to the servicemen killed there are an ever growing number of wounded veterans. The Improvised Explosive Device (IED)² is the preferred method of attack in Afghanistan and it is designed to cause catastrophic blast injuries that will remove limbs. The quality of frontline medical care in Afghanistan is exceptional and casualties with traumatic amputations are surviving the move to hospitals containing excellent surgical expertise. As a result, hundreds of young soldiers are returning to the UK with “life changing injuries” — a term adopted to describe maiming and disfigurement. The heroism and tragedy of each of these victims is emblazoned upon the pages of the local and national press and their ordeal is often portrayed on television. Media coverage of the wounded is hard-hitting and its effect cannot be ignored. But, for how much longer,

² The author served in Sangin in Helmand Province, Afghanistan from March to October 2010. During the deployment his unit encountered 445 IEDs and suffered 24 killed as a result of IED attacks.

will even the most ardent supporter of the War in Afghanistan be able to stomach the continuing coming home of dead and wounded? What is apparent is that the media appetite to report on casualties remains undiminished. Bill Cathcart argued,

The sheer weight of such coverage of wounded veterans, while the conflicts continue, is surely unprecedented, and for all the patriotism it must, as the First World War generals used to say, sap the will to fight. As Robin Day might have asked: if the public are prepared to put up with it once, how long before they will do so again?³

Tabloid reporters and papers continue to sell in huge numbers and have not received public criticism of their emotionally charged, sensationalist and graphic coverage of the casualties of the War in Afghanistan. For as long as the public, largely disillusioned with the war, continues to have an appetite for this style of media coverage it will undoubtedly continue. The media will continue to dedicate column inches and TV coverage to casualties. The cycle of public exposure to casualties and increased risk of greater disillusionment of the public will continue. To date, the British people have been exposed to a steady flow of casualties since 2006 and, as a result, public support has been subjected to a metaphorical “death by a thousand cuts.” Without a substantial change in the UK military mission in Afghanistan, casualties are inevitable and the anti-war media will seek opportunities to denounce government efforts to care for casualties. The Government’s care for the wounded and families of the dead must be beyond reproach if any prospect for continued public support, however limited, is to be maintained.

The United Kingdom’s National Security Strategy (NSS)

Predicting future wars or even the course of the current war is fraught with danger. Inevitably, there are elements of fog, friction and chance but that does not excuse the

³ Bill Cathcart, “An unprecedented focus on the wounded,” *The New Statesman* (April 24, 2008) <http://www.newstatesman.com/media/2008/04/vietnam-afghanistan-wounded> (accessed 11 Nov 2010).

requirement for a strategy. The security environment is complex and ever-evolving and understanding that environment is challenging. It is difficult, but the nation that decides against having a national security strategy reduces its ability to adapt and shape the world to its own advantage. To forgo a national security strategy is to be irresponsible. The UK's National Security Strategy (NSS) *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty* was published on 18 Oct 2010 and is the first of its kind undertaken by HM Government. The NSS was followed 24 hours later by The Strategic Defence and Security Review *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty*.

The NSS lists the UK's national interests, "our strategy reflects the country that we want to be: a prosperous, secure, modern and outward looking nation, confident in its values and ideas. Our national interest comprises our security, prosperity and freedom."⁴ Therefore as a straightforward extrapolation; if the UK's prosperity, security, ability to act on the global stage and within global markets and its ability to act as a liberal democracy are threatened, it constitutes a threat to UK national interests and a reason for war.

The UK greatly values its position as an outward looking nation which is deeply entwined in the global market. The establishing of national interests around the globe, for example; energy from middle east oil or annual exports of over 230,000 million pounds and imports of over 313,000 million pounds,⁵ negates the option of a much safer policy of isolationism. Both the greatest facilitator and threat to UK national interests is its position as a "global player" and whilst the benefits are plentiful they come with

⁴ HM Government, *The National Security Strategy*, 10.

⁵ "UK Releases First Quarter 2010 Regional Trade Estimates," *Govmonitor*, (June 10, 2010), http://www.thegovmonitor.com/world_news/britain/uk-releases-first-quarter-2010-regional-trade-estimates-33244.html (accessed 1 Mar 2011).

security risks and challenges. It is because of an inevitable failure to continuously harmonise and synchronise all global players — nation-states or otherwise — that creates unavoidable friction and collisions of national (and non-nation-state actors) interests. It is these frictions and collisions that will create the next war.

The NSS also provides two complementary strategic objectives deemed vital to securing UK national interests: “ensuring a secure and resilient UK” and “shaping a stable world.”⁶ The NSS describes how the resilience of the UK is directly linked to the security of its people, economy, infrastructure, territory and way of life. The threat is broad and does not discount terrorist organizations or military attack by another state. In shaping a stable world, the NSS describes the application of national power (Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic) to tackle potential risks at the source and demonstrates that the UK will not shy away from interventionist approaches if it is necessary and justified.⁷ Prime Minister David Cameron was likely cognisant of criticism of recent wars that the UK has become embroiled in when he stated that “Britain’s armed forces would be deployed only where key UK national interests are at stake, where we have a viable exit strategy; and where justifiable under international law.”⁸ In the SDSR Cameron states that Britain will not be a passive bystander but insists upon greater consideration prior to commitment: “We have a proud history of standing up for the values we believe in....But we need to be more thoughtful, more

⁶ HM Government, *The National Security Strategy*, 22.

⁷ Ibid, 30. Recent history has seen major commitments of British forces to military operations in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan. In each case the Government judged that our national interests or our international responsibilities were at stake.....Our strategic interests and responsibilities overseas could, in some circumstances, justify the threat or use of military force.

⁸ David Cameron, “A retreat, but not a rout,” *The Economist* (October 23 to 29, 2010), 69.

strategic and more coordinated in the way we advance our interests and protect our national security.”⁹ The influence of recent wars cannot be ignored and the UK will be mindful of its laid down caveats and need for careful consideration before acting, but as Tony Blair makes clear, to do nothing is no longer enough if the UK wants to be a global player: “We are all internationalists now, whether we like it or not we cannot refuse to participate in global markets if we want to prosper. We cannot ignore new political ideas in other countries if we want to innovate. We cannot turn our backs on conflicts and the violation of human rights within other countries if we want still to be secure.”¹⁰

The NSS and SDSR are not tools for gathering public support but they do provide a clear explanation of what the Government considers vital to national security. The strategies are pragmatic, using uncomplicated language and are not so esoteric as to be un-actionable. The NSS defines the objectives and goals (Ends) sought in sufficient detail to allow the SDSR to identify the methods (Ways) and resources (Means) to meet the requirement.

The NSS will need to be continuously challenged and updated to account for the dynamic nature of the security environment. The NSS defines the strategic environment, provides context, contains assessments of threats to national security and describes triggers to conflict. For a public largely ignorant of the threats to national security, these triggers are especially useful. The highlighted triggers include; globalisation, population growth, climate change, greater demand for scarce natural resources, state on state

⁹ HM Government, *Securing Britain in an Age of Uncertainty, The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, (London, The Stationery Office, October, 2010), 3.

¹⁰ Tony Blair in The Security, Strategy, and Forces Faculty National Security Decision Making Department, *Naval War College, Strategy and Force Planning – Fourth Edition*, (Naval War College Press, 2004), 571.

conflict and terrorism.¹¹ The NSS lacks a definitive recognition of the possibility of a “Wildcard Event,” but as Britain’s recent history demonstrates the shift from peace to war can occur rapidly; for example, in 1982 few anticipated that the UK would be at war with Argentina in the South Atlantic.

The NSS also highlights a vital component in the UK national security apparatus: “Our relationship with the US will continue to be essential to delivering the security and prosperity we need.”¹² There is an obvious *quid pro quo* to this relationship and the United States will expect the UK to be supportive in its endeavours to secure U.S. national interests. This will often involve shared interests, but not exclusively so, and will undeniably link Britain to the next U.S. led coalition, wherever that may be.

The NSS provides the articulation of the analysis of the security environment and of UK national interests and strategic objectives. If the NSS is explained to the public and read by the media and politicians, it will explain the reason for actions taken ahead of the event and the prospect of the emergence of a common understanding. The intended five-year refresh schedule, in keeping with length of terms in office, is broadly appropriate but the development of the NSS must be apolitical and enduring. Ideally the NSS is developed by a group drawn from across the political spectrum and the SDSR (a shorter vision) becomes the method by which the party in power can assign priorities. The development of an NSS that is unbiased and enduring is difficult. The major political parties must first agree, supported by a House of Commons vote, that a strategy that divorces party politics from national strategy is required. If agreement is met then the

¹¹ HM Government, *The National Security Strategy*, 15 to 18.

¹² *Ibid*, 15.

civil service supported by the military, and other appropriate non-aligned bodies such as think-tanks and academics, should convene to develop the strategy. At pre-determined stages of development political leaders could be invited to contribute. The finished strategy should take a long term view (20 years +) that is focused on genuine vital national interests, is separated from political campaigning and provides a roadmap that successive governments can refer to. The strategy should list objectives (Ends) and methods (Ways) in detail and examine threats and vulnerabilities in a manner that the NSS, intended for public consumption, is unable to. The strategy would be maintained by the civil service, likely to be the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, would be classified for release at carefully defined political, civil service and military leadership level only, and be protected from disclosure by law.

Even in its current incarnation the NSS provides levels of communication and accountability concerning national security matters that is unprecedented in the UK. The NSS may contribute to mitigating sensationalist press and political discord and as result may even positively affect public support. Conversely, the NSS can also be used to hold the Government to account if it were to embark upon a course of action that does not protect national interests previously identified in the NSS.

The Media

The media is seemingly everywhere and it is quick. From blogs to broadsheet, the outlets are numerous and the influence and reach of the media is extensive. The importance of the media and public opinion is stated in the UK NSS which acknowledges

that “our actions will be subject to scrutiny in the media and the courts and by society at large.”¹³

Media influence is often credited with the power to determine the outcome of wars. It is a widely held view that the media was responsible for the United States losing the Vietnam War. “For the first time in modern history the outcome of a war was determined not on the battlefield, but on the printed page and, above all, on the television screen.”¹⁴ The media is accused of poisoning public opinion and that exposure to media images “was critical in shifting the emphasis from fact to emotion.”¹⁵

Worthy of consideration, as a contributor to public support for our wars, is whether the media creates public opinion or reflects it? Neutral media sources are rare therefore a level of bias consistent with the media outlet’s charter is inevitably going to be presented to the public. The media will often report in a manner that is motivated by an affiliation or opposition to a political party. The media may also be motivated by a journalistic sense of duty that the public has the “right to know.” Valerie Adams argued that “The role of the media in a democracy is not merely to pass on information for information’s sake, but to enable the people to know, understand and *judge* the actions undertaken by their government on their behalf.”¹⁶ A sense of duty is noble, but the media is a business and needs to generate profits. The media will run stories based upon a judgment of what it thinks the public wants in order to generate sales. The relationship between the media and the public is therefore symbiotic. The media cannot function without funds and must

¹³ HM Government, *The National Security Strategy*, 17.

¹⁴ Adams, 37.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid, 181.

provide what the public wants to buy. That said, the media will incorporate its bias, overtly or otherwise, into its reporting. As a result the media is influenced by public demand, what the public will buy, and influences the public through the bias of the reporting it delivers.

An analysis of the language being used by the media is often an indicator of the position being taken by the media outlet. This is most clearly demonstrated in how the media refer to the enemy. Newspaper headlines catch the media mood and often, very little analysis of media bias is required when being presented with headlines such as, “Root out this Cancer of Evil”¹⁷ referring to UK Al Qaeda suicide bombers, and “Americans Cleared Out Rats’ Nest in Afghanistan”¹⁸ referring to the Taliban and Al Qaeda. This type of language need not be the reserve of the tabloids as can be seen by “Spare us the Righteous Tears at the Death of Another Monster”¹⁹ being printed in the broadsheet the *Telegraph* following the death of a Hamas leader.

¹⁷ Media, War and Conflict Volume 3 Number 2, eds. Andrew Hoskins, Barry Richards and Phillip Seib, “The vermin have struck again, dehumanizing the enemy in post 9/11 media representations,” Erin Steuter and Deborah Wills, (SAGE, Los Angeles, London, August 2010), 162. Headline from the News of the World, London, 13 August 2006, in response to a letter written by British Muslims to Prime Minister Blair blaming domestic policy for inflaming suicide bombers. The News of the World stated “What a pity the writers didn't devote their 179 words to urge decent, law abiding Muslims to rid their societies of the hate-mongers who form an insidious cancer in their midst.” The News of the World is amongst the most popular Sunday tabloids sold in the UK.

¹⁸ Ibid, 159. Headline from the Irish News, Belfast, 7 June 2005. This newspaper is a tabloid daily printed for Northern Ireland. Afghanistan is referred to as a rats' nest of Islamic fanatics, who were cleared out. Stating that “No reasonable person could have sympathy for the inhuman Taliban and the even more savage al-Qaida madmen who had set up headquarters in Afghanistan.” That the subject has column space in Northern Ireland, which is ordinarily dominated by its own internal politics, emphasizes the traction of the subject matter.

¹⁹ Ibid, 158. Headline from the Daily Telegraph, London, 19 April 200. Refers to the death of Dr Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, who replaced the assassinated Hamas leader, Sheikh Yassin, and had been in post less than a month before Israel's targeted killing removed him. The Telegraph newspaper is amongst the most popular daily broadsheet newspapers sold in the UK. It is marketed for a professional, educated audience.

Sensationalist coverage and headlines are intended to sell newspapers and the media will use the language necessary to attract the maximum public attention. The images of casualties, combatant or otherwise, are no longer shielded from the public and are transmitted into the home and printed on national and local newspapers in near real-time. The bereaved are interviewed and the opinions of those still stricken by grief are spread widely. It is impossible to quantify the effect of media coverage but it cannot be dismissed.

Following the Vietnam War, it was widely advocated that, in the presence of advanced media outlets, nations would be unable to generate the public support to successfully prosecute a war. British political commentator Sir Robin Day famously argued “One wonders if in future a democracy which has uninhibited television coverage in every home will ever be able to fight a war, however just.”²⁰ Of course, democracies have managed to prosecute a number of wars in the presence of modern TV coverage. That said, the power of TV images and the accompanying commentary cannot be underestimated and they will have an impact, however uncertain that impact will be, on public opinion. If a media outlet takes an anti-war stance it will invariably attack the government and military leadership. Tom Newton-Dunn, a well known and popular defence journalist for the *Sun* newspaper, received a journalism prize for the coverage of casualties in the War in Afghanistan. The series of articles exposed scandals relating to treatment of returning wounded, treatment in the field, compensation payments, long term care, and insufficient support from the Government: “Newton Dunn and his

²⁰ Robin Day, quoted in Bill Cathcart, “An unprecedented focus on the wounded,” *New Statesman*, (April 24, 2008), <http://www.newstatesman.com/media/2008/04/vietnam-afghanistan-wounded>, (accessed 11 Nov 2010).

colleagues have turned up scandal after scandal.”²¹ The *Sun* has a daily readership of approximately three million. The impact of Newton-Dunn’s campaign was, in all likelihood, hugely damaging to the maintenance of public support.

There are journalistic realities that cannot be ignored. Whilst a journalist may be willing to curb the release of a story that might endanger military operations the same journalist will always make an assessment regarding the intentions of the competition. This will be done to protect profits and the reputation of both the journalist and his employer. Jon Connell, a reporter with the *Sunday Times*, commented “You would want to be sure that your rivals weren’t going to publish it — if they were, then why should I hang back. Not to publish a story when other people were would undermine my credibility as a journalist with my readers.”²²

The media often employ Subject Matter Experts or “Talking Heads.” This technique has been used extensively to criticise the conduct of the War in Afghanistan. Talking heads are almost always controversial and will often seek to validate the view being presented by their employers. The expertise of talking heads can vary, however those of senior military or diplomatic rank can be extremely damaging to government and influential to the average viewer. Lord Charles Guthrie, a former Chief of Defence Staff and Four Star General, wrote in the *Sun* that “Defence Ministers sit frozen in indecision – nervous of mistakes, unwilling to delegate....The military feels its requirements are not understood and its views unwelcome.”²³ This is especially damning of senior leadership

²¹Bill Cathcart, “An unprecedented focus on the wounded,” *The New Statesman*, (April 24, 2008) <http://www.newstatesman.com/media/2008/04/vietnam-afghanistan-wounded> (accessed 11 Nov 2010)

²² Adams, 162.

²³ Ibid.

and is written in the most popular newspaper in the UK. The *Sun*'s readership, which is principally from the working classes, will probably not read widely and is likely to form opinions based on such commentaries. It is highly likely that elite-level commentators, given a voice by the media, have done much to reduce levels of public support for the War in Afghanistan. An absence of effective counter-messages, or strategic communication, weakens the Government's position. As argued by Charles Miller,

Men such as Hastings or Stewart (a former Army officer who served in a senior position in the British occupation authorities in Iraq and has travelled widely in Afghanistan) are more knowledgeable about the region and may carry more clout with the general public in Britain than the various figures in the Labour Government who have sought to defend the intervention....they have used their detailed knowledge of the area to argue that the current strategy will not work.²⁴

Experts, employed as talking heads, have in all likelihood successfully undermined public support. This has been achieved not through the exposition of proof but through the insertion of credible opinion left largely uncontested by the government.

²⁴ Miller, 58.

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS

Protect and Support the Military

Chapter 3 revealed that insufficient protective equipment for the military can be used by the media and political opposition to criticise the government. The *Independent* newspaper reported that “there is overwhelming agreement — by 75 percent to 16 percent — that British troops in Afghanistan lack the equipment they require to perform their role safely.”¹ Protecting the military has become vitally important in an era in which the military is being held in unusually high public regard. Whilst a military commander may decide to operate without protective equipment, the Government must ensure the protected option was available. In the event of casualties, the public is unlikely to understand or even be exposed to the military decision making process. What will most likely be presented by the media is government unwillingness to invest in life-saving equipment and accusations of neglecting the military.

The issue of protection has been identified by the current government. To maintain public support they must stay true to their pledge that, “there will as now be extra resources to meet the full costs of that campaign....Our Armed Forces — admired across the world — have been overstretched, deployed too often without appropriate planning, with the wrong equipment.”² This admission of poor support is as a result of the presented opportunity to blame the previous government and start afresh. However, to highlight such failings in the SDSR will make the Government accountable for equipping the military for the type of war they are fighting or risk losing public support.

¹ Nigel Morris and Kim Sengupta, “Voters turn against War in Afghanistan,” *The Independent* (July 28, 2009). <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/voters-turn-against-war-in-afghanistan-1763227.html> (accessed 23 Feb 2011).

² HM Government, *The Strategic Defence and Security Review*, 4.

The surge in public support for the military, as demonstrated in the emergence of numerous charities and media support, have made it vital that the government is comprehensive in its support for the military. This is particularly important in the event of casualties.

The Military Covenant represents a contract between the Government, the people of the UK and the military. To summarise: the Armed Forces put the needs of the country ahead of their own and forgo some rights enjoyed by those outside of the Armed Forces. In doing so, servicemen and women should expect the Nation and their chain of command, to include the Government, to treat them fairly, value and trust them, and to sustain them and their families.

The Military Covenant lay dormant for the majority of the post-Second World War era and aside from a brief resurgence during the Falklands War it was to take the sustained and graphic casualties of the War in Afghanistan to cement the Military Covenant within the UK social and political consciousness. Prime Minister Cameron has been vocal in his support for the Military Covenant and astute in commissioning a task force to make recommendations for formalising its construct. Cameron has identified that although the War in Afghanistan has become increasingly unpopular, support for the military has increased exponentially. The Minister of Defence, Dr Liam Fox reinforced this recognition by announcing that the Government was “committed to strengthening the bonds between this country and the Armed Forces that do so much to defend it.”³ The Task Force report recommends improvements in support to families, housing, reducing service mobility, support for the wounded and bereaved, care of Reservists and the

³Ministry of Defence, Defence Internal Brief 2010DIB/92, (December 8, 2010).

transition to civilian life. The findings have been universally welcomed by the military and public.⁴

As a result of damaging criticism of the Labour government for poor support for the military, future governments must fully invest in the Military Covenant or become targets for widespread criticism.⁵ Prime Minister Cameron has indicated that the Covenant should be captured in law, yet progress on this issue has not materialised.⁶ A failure to pursue this policy will be viewed as another example of a lack of support for the Armed Forces. The Prime Minister's procrastination has already been met with criticism, with the *Mirror* declaring "David Cameron today stands accused by Labour of breaking 10 crucial election pledges to Britain's armed forces....Top of his list of empty promises is his failure to make law the Military Covenant, the historic pact setting out Britain's duty to its fighting men and women."⁷

The media will continue in both the current war and future wars to use unfulfilled pledges and promises of greater support to the military as a means of attacking government and its policies. The Government must meet its obligations to support the military. Care for the wounded and the families of the fallen are the priority.

⁴ "Task Force on The Military Covenant, Report of the Task Force on The Military Covenant," (September, 2010), 3. <http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/3C6A501D-5A85-47C9-9D89-B99C5E428061/0/militarycovenanttaskforcerpt.pdf> (accessed 14 Nov 2010).

⁵ In 2008 the Royal British Legion launched the 'Honour the Covenant' campaign and the charity 'Help for Heroes' was established. Both organizations were critical of lack of support from government for dead and wounded principally from the War in Afghanistan.

⁶ "David Cameron accused of U-turn over military covenant," *BBC News*, (February 9, 2011), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-12399345> (accessed 23 Feb 2011). In June 2010, Cameon stated "I want all these things refreshed and renewed and written down in a new military covenant that's written into the law of the land," (June 25, 2010).

⁷ Greig Box Turnbull and Tom McTague, "David Cameron 'broke 10 pledges to troops,'" *Mirror*, (February 10, 2011), <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/2011/02/10/david-cameron-broke-10-pledges-to-troops-115875-22911549/>, (accessed 9 Mar 2011).

Understand the Media

The media cannot be ignored or disregarded due to perceived difficulties in media handling or an ignorance of media influence. Carl Von Clausewitz described a 'Trinity' of the Government, Military and the People, with each as a crucial element in the successful prosecution of war. The Government establishes the political purpose; the Military provides one of the means for achieving the political end; and the People provide the will. Clausewitz emphasised the importance of the people and the role of national will to commit to war by declaring "The passions that are to be kindled in war must already be inherent in the people."⁸ To have one element of the Trinity absent, or for the Trinity to be out of balance, the war effort is jeopardised. The media in the 21st century is able to affect public opinion and strengthen or diminish the national will to commit to war. Metaphorically, the modern media is capable of driving a 'wedge' in the trinity between the government and the people with a rapidity that would have been alien to Clausewitz and the pre-industrial era.

An understanding of whether the media is reflecting or creating public opinion is required as a factor in understanding the symbiotic relationship between the public and the media. The effect of media coverage, negative or otherwise, cannot be assumed particularly when considering the breadth of potential individual responses.

The modern media operates at an extremely high tempo and if the government is to have any hope of competing in the modern media environment it must have an understanding and the apparatus to match or better the media's tempo. The response must

⁸ Clausewitz, 101.

include an ability to effectively rebut or counter the adverse opinions of ‘talking heads’ that enjoy widespread present-day use.

As was present in the Falklands and Afghanistan wars the media will use sensationalist and emotive language to capture public attention. The media must be understood in the context of a business that has to make sales to survive. To maintain sales, often by supporting the dominant public mood, statistics can be used selectively, as was seen in the context of public support for war following 9/11, or coverage is written or broadcast in a manner that fits their agenda. The media is not adverse to attacking individuals, such as Tony Benn during the Falklands War and more recently Gordon Brown over his leadership of the War in Afghanistan. The leadership must take care to not needlessly expose itself to personal media attack. Examples of potential pitfalls are numerous amongst the tabloid press and merit study.

The Government and the MOD (the leadership) should not expect an exclusively supportive press, even in a time of war. The media has multiple motivators and national loyalty may not be one of them. In 1982 the leadership was naive to expect an exclusively supportive press and Thatcher’s dissatisfaction was apparent when she said “I also became very unhappy at the attempted ‘even-handedness’ of some of the comment, and the chilling use of the third-person – talk of ‘the British’ and ‘the Argentinians’ on our news programmes.”⁹ Support from independent media bodies cannot be assumed and the censorship made possible in the Falklands War due to limited technology and distance will not be possible again. The prospect of overt censorship occurring again in a modern democracy seems implausible. The media has become increasingly autonomous

⁹ Thatcher, 181.

and mobile and while it can be excluded from government or military support on the front line, this will no longer guarantee media exclusion. The media must be worked with and its business requires a broader understanding by leadership interlocutors. The media may be supportive or not but regardless of media position it must not preclude a relationship that allows the leadership to coherently communicate, reiterate and defend their message. To exclude the media is to exclude oneself from the principal means of communication with the public. Tony Blair was critical of the media when he argued,

The fact that the media now works by impact, which leads to sensation, crowds out a sensible debate about policy or ideas. What's more, the media is 24/7, incredibly powerful and yet without any proper accountability....they are also, partly through the presence of competition, highly partisan in order either to get maximum impact or to put across the views of their proprietors or editors.'¹⁰

So what? The media is not bound by a strict code of conduct. Priorities and loyalties can vary from the pursuit of individual journalistic advancement, sensationalism to promote sales, supporting a political bias leading to an attack upon individuals, to a moralistic view regarding the role of the media in a democracy. Following the Falklands War, the *Times* opined "the first, indeed, the paramount interest in a democracy must be to inform the public as soon as possible about what is happening on its behalf."¹¹ There are media outlets that purport to stand by this philosophy. The media response in the reporting of war is difficult to predict. An appreciation of potential media responses, driven by analysis, must be available to the leadership in order to respond effectively to criticism of the war and its aims. Only through striving to understand the media and developing a relationship with it, will the government have an opportunity of preventing

¹⁰ Blair, *A Journey My Political Life*, 639.

¹¹ Adams, 181.

the media from “driving a wedge” between the leadership and the support base. The government cannot automatically expect the media to support a war; it must work with it to present its own view and secure a means of communication with the public.

Establish Political Consensus

Whilst a political majority is not a pre-requisite to commit the UK to war,¹² it is enormously advantageous to secure the approval of Parliament because political discord will hamper government efforts to secure public support. The voices of the political elite are key opinion formers for the public and the media and will influence public opinion.

As was seen in the example of the Falklands War, Margaret Thatcher stressed the importance of a united national will as a means to influence the enemy and allies. An enemy that sees a lack of support for a war is likely to be emboldened and an ally may be understandably slow to support an ally who appeared to be divided or to lack conviction.

To secure formal political consensus it is advantageous to put the decision to the vote. In the context of Afghanistan, Labour MP David Drew argued “At the time of a fundamental change in mission—when we went into Helmand—this Parliament should have had a vote. We were allowed to vote on the Iraq situation, but we were not allowed

¹² “Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor, War powers and treaties: Limiting Executive powers, The Governance of Britain,” (The Stationery Office, October, 2007), 9. <http://www.justice.gov.uk/docs/cp2607a-cover.pdf>, (accessed 10 Jan 2011). The power to commit the country to international obligations through the conclusion of treaties, and the power to send armed forces into conflict situations are two of the most important powers a government can wield. But there is presently no legal requirement for the people’s representatives in the House of Commons in Parliament, which sustains the Government and which is the supreme body in our constitution, to have any particular role in either decision. In practice no government these days would seek to commit troops to a substantial overseas deployment without giving Parliament the opportunity to debate it. But the terms of that debate are very much set by the Government. In particular, it has been rare in the past for Parliament to have a substantive vote on a proposed deployment before the troops are committed.

a vote on Afghanistan.”¹³ It is necessary that dissenting voices are given a formal opportunity to declare their opposition. The government sets the agenda and has the final say, the decision may not be altered, but democratic principles are upheld. The associated danger is a revelation of widespread opposition to the decision of government which may make the commitment to war difficult.

Once committed to war the establishment of a war cabinet, or similar forum, is required. Margaret Thatcher was to establish her steering group titled the Overseas and Defence Committee South Atlantic (OD(SA)), which included a communications group, whose mission it was ensure the leadership held a shared understanding of the issues. Cameron has echoed the Thatcher approach in establishing his war cabinet for the War in Afghanistan. The Labour Government under Blair and Brown never established a war cabinet and it could be for this reason that the national leadership frequently altered its language and portrayed a seemingly inconsistent approach.

The UK retains the fourth biggest defence budget in the world and will be one of only a few NATO countries to meet the required two percent spending of GDP on defence. The UK military may appear small (in comparison to the U.S. contribution) but it holds a wide range of capabilities and is attractive for inclusion in NATO missions. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton recognised Britain’s as “the most capable partner for our forces as we seek to mitigate the shared threats of the 21st Century.”¹⁴ The UK’s military is small but capable and the USA and UK have shared threats. Understandably,

¹³ David Drew, “Afghanistan Strategy,” *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, (December 8, 2009), col. 5WH, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm091208/halltext/91208h0001.htm> (accessed 6 Feb 2011).

¹⁴ U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, “A retreat, but not a rout,” *The Economist*, (October 29, 2010), 69.

it is likely that the UK will be petitioned each time the USA acts in defence of its vital interests, as they will probably be shared. While this is an uncomfortable position for many, it cannot be ignored that the UK's relationship with the USA is the envy of many other nations in the world and must be protected.

In a coalition context the contribution that each member commits require scrutiny. Each nation will have national caveats, some prohibitive some not, but it is these caveats that often dictates which nations fight and therefore take casualties. The War in Afghanistan is an excellent example of relatively few nations doing the majority of the fighting. Non-combat roles are important, and somebody has to do them, but in doing so a large number of nations (some like Germany and France have highly capable forces) are able to avoid the erosive effect of casualties upon public support whilst retaining the political benefits of being a contributor to the war. It is crucial that it is understood from the outset what each coalition partner will be willing to do, engendering a broad understanding of who will commit to combat and in turn moderate political and public expectations at the commencement of war. In July 2008, Prime Minister Brown was pressed by Liberal MP Bob Russell as to whether it was "time our European allies did more to send their troops to the front line and not rely on Britain to take the brunt."¹⁵ Gordon Brown replied that "I agree with him that every country who has signed up to the coalition forces should make a contribution and in some cases a bigger contribution than they are making at the moment."¹⁶ More needs to be done to spread combat responsibilities so that the U.S. and the UK are not perpetually at the "point of the

¹⁵ "PM urges more help in Afghanistan," *BBC News online*, (July 2, 2008), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/7485478.stm, (accessed 5 Feb 2011).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

(NATO) spear.” In coalitions where there is a high rate of casualties the public will expect that the pain is evenly spread. Any inequalities perceived or otherwise, will fuel the anti-war argument.

To take the UK to war is relatively straightforward. It is a decision of the Government with no requirement for recourse to Parliamentary agreement or national referendum. Beyond the political machinations there is a requirement for legitimacy if the Government in power is to stay in power beyond the next General election. The perception of legitimacy when considering public support is defined emotionally and legally. The national sense of outrage at the Argentine invasion prior to the Falklands War and the attack of 9/11 as a pre-cursor to the War in Afghanistan acted as powerful drivers in legitimising military action. Support based upon emotion can be finite; therefore greater justification in the form of a firm legal basis for war is required. In the examples of the Falklands War and the War in Afghanistan the securing a United Nations Security Council Resolution proved vital in legitimising military action, home and abroad. Margaret Thatcher emphasised the importance of legal support when she said, “We were in the happy position of having almost perfect backing for our position, in the form of UNSCR 502.”¹⁷

The government must seek political consensus for the war in as many spheres as possible. Although the decision to go to war does not require the backing of the House of Commons, it is advantageous to have it. In a protracted war, which is limited in character, even with a consistent casualty rate, it is understandable that focus may drift. A forum to discuss the conduct of the war must be conducted at regular intervals to

¹⁷ Thatcher, 203.

ensure consistency of approach and the fullest understanding of the war's aims. The government must seek to understand early who our allies will be and the extent of their commitment. Uneven burden sharing, especially the taking of casualties, will be identified quickly by the media and public. A legal basis for the war is essential, without it the anti-war voice has a powerful means of attacking the basis for war.

Maintain a Consistent War Aim

The majority of the British public will be unable to appreciate the complexity of strategy development, but the word "strategy" is used by politician and layman alike to describe what the UK is doing – or should be doing – in Afghanistan. The public does not need to understand the strategy in its entirety in order to support the war, but they do need to understand, in accessible terms, the reason why the country is at war. The public must be given every opportunity to understand and then believe in the war aims. If the objectives are not understood and supportable on an enduring basis, then as David Bercuson argued: "the ultimate conclusion must be that if the citizens of democracies do not themselves believe in ultimate objectives (no matter what their leaders might pronounce), then long-term struggle, or winning through no matter what, is illusory."¹⁸

The maintenance of the public's belief in the war is paramount. The public requires constant reminding to ensure that the original rationale behind British involvement is not forgotten and to guard against being drawn to the myriad of alternative and distracting issues. In September 2010 General Sir David Richards stated that he believed that the British people no longer understood why the military was still in Afghanistan and as a

¹⁸ David Bercuson, "The War where public opinion marched out the door," *The Globe and Mail Canada*, (August 13, 2010), <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/opinions/the-war-where-public-opinion-marched-out-the-door/article1671237/>, (accessed 2 Feb 2011).

result that “we must warn ourselves that we are in danger of losing public support.”¹⁹ As was discussed in the context of Afghanistan, multiple war aims delivered by a variety of high-level government officials have conspired to confuse the public with regards to the War in Afghanistan. The protracted nature of this war has meant that understanding and continuity of the war aims, even at the leadership level, has diminished. War is dynamic and the aims may alter over time. However, when a change may be required it is the responsibility of the government to pre-empt criticism of wandering war aims and declare the change and the reason for it in formal manner. Prime Minister’s Questions and parliamentary public broadcasts are two such opportunities.²⁰

In the military it is considered best practice to deliver your priorities in a succinct shortlist using straightforward language. By doing so the message is understood by all and can be communicated downward in a consistent fashion by the chain of command. The author does not advocate a simplification of policy or strategy, but does advocate a means by which the war aims are better understood by a greater percentage of the population. The war aim must be clear, consistent and easily understood. A description that is long and uses complicated language will miss its intended target.

Obtaining public understanding is the first obstacle; once the aims of the war are understood there is a much greater likelihood that they will be believed, supported and deemed worthy of the cost.

¹⁹ General Sir David Richards, “Public support for War in Afghanistan waning warns General,” *Mail Online* (September 12, 2010), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1311279/Public-support-war-Afghanistan-waning-warns-General.html> (accessed 2 Feb 2011).

²⁰ The Prime Minister answers questions in the House of Commons at 12:00 noon for half an hour every Wednesday when Parliament is in session. Questions is a chance for backbench MPs and the opposition to ask questions, usually pre-arranged, of the Prime Minister on matters of policy.

Communicate Effectively

Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague was entirely accurate when he backed calls for a better communications strategy that advertised military success in Afghanistan: “Public support would not be sustained for a campaign of that length in which we could not show really clear military and political progress in Afghanistan.”²¹ The Chief of Defence Staff Sir Jock Stirrup stated that it was “incredibly important that we do better at explaining the successes we are having.”²² Unless the population are informed regularly that progress is being made, then the war aim will be subject to condemnation.

Media outlets are the finest exponents of rapid information dissemination through the use of the very latest technology. Unfortunately, for the Governments of democracies, the media is not subject to governmental control. Agreements may be made with the media but they are never binding; the media is affected by multiple (and shifting) motivators and loyalties. The Government and military leaders must understand what the chosen “message” is and present it quickly, clearly and consistently if there is to be any hope of countering adversarial media sources, our enemies or third parties.

Effective strategic communications is about the development and delivery of a clear and consistent message, often at short notice, to all audiences. It must not include the deception or coercion of the public; because to do so, and be discovered, will quickly remove any trust that has been established with potentially far reaching consequences. There is no formalised strategic communications bureau in government, although the MOD does maintain a small Strategic Communications department headed by a Major

²¹ William Hague, “UK ‘not convinced’ by Afghan goal,” *BBC News*, (November 8, 2009), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8348942.stm (accessed 12 Feb 2011).

²² Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Jock Stirrup, “UK ‘not convinced’ by Afghan goal,” *BBC News* (November 8, 2009), http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/8348942.stm (accessed 12 Feb 2011).

General. Strategic communications at the cabinet level is left to principals or more often an individual Director of Communications with varying degrees of success.

Tony Blair employed Alistair Campbell as his Director of Communications and Strategy from 1997 to 2003. Campbell was indispensable in his ability to communicate (although some would say manipulate) with the media. As the Blair government matured, Campbell came to be ridiculed by the UK press as a “Spin Doctor.”²³ The Director of Strategic Communications is only as effective as his reputation allows him to be. Once he is perceived to be “persona non grata” by the media community then he has lost his ability to influence his audience and is ineffective. The appointee must have access at the cabinet level and a mandate to develop the most effective message. The Daily Mirror's Kevin Maguire says, “The prime minister's communications chief must be dedicated, analytical and authoritative. They need somebody who's cool under fire.”²⁴

Regular engagement with the media and the public is important in exposing the day to day challenges and progress made that impact upon the strategy. A regular debate in parliament is one such method of generating exposure and keeping the war in the public consciousness. Conservative MP Tobias Ellwood, argued that it would be beneficial “to the nation if we had regular updates — quarterly updates — from the Prime Minister on

²³ In public relations, “spin” is a form of propaganda, achieved through providing an interpretation of an event or campaign to persuade public opinion in favour or against a certain organization or public figure. While traditional public relations may also rely on creative presentation of the facts, “spin” often, though not always, implies disingenuous, deceptive and/or highly manipulative tactics. A “Spin Doctor” is a skilled practitioner of “spin.”

²⁴ Brigitt Hauck, “Who will replace Andy Coulson?” *BBC News*, (January 25, 2011), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-12274133> (accessed 26 Jan 2011).

what is happening in Afghanistan, to ensure that we keep the British nation on side in understanding why we are there and the progress that is being made.’’²⁵

In the run up to the May 2010 General Election, television debates between the three party leaders were broadcast for the first time. It is widely acknowledged that Prime Minister Brown fared well, in the face of extensive previous media criticism, when the debate centred upon the War in Afghanistan. The political leadership must seek to formalise TV exposure. Politicians do appear on numerous current affairs programmes, but who is to appear and for what reason seem haphazard and often as a reaction to the most recent crisis. A quarterly arrangement with television channels to discuss the progress of the War in Afghanistan at the right level (Prime Minister, Defence Secretary and Foreign Secretary), may provide the solution.

What is also required is a common lexicon. At the ministerial level the language must be consistent. The public is unlikely to dissect statements but may identify differences in the language and emphasis used. For example, it may appear insignificant at first glance, but in describing the strategy for the War in Afghanistan, the MOD does not mention Al Qaeda in its strategy factsheet whereas the National Security Strategy does. These documents detail the reason why the UK is committed to the War in Afghanistan and such inconsistencies provide a lack of consistency that can be exploited.

²⁵ Tobias Ellwood, “Afghanistan Strategy,” *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, (December 8, 2009), col. 19WH, <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmhansrd/cm091208/halltext/91208h0001.htm> (accessed 6 Feb 2011).

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated that British society has become so averse to protracted war that, without management of public support, future wars will no longer be practicable. The paper has described how political commentators undermine the war aims, how the media can instantly, and sometimes graphically, bring a far-away war into the homes of Britons and how the seemingly unrelenting flow of casualties, year after year, has critically undermined the public appetite for a protracted war. Conversely, this paper also demonstrates, as was seen in the Falklands War, that a short war, with clearly defined aims that ends in victory, was supported and is likely to be supported in the future. Tony Blair captured the extent of the challenge when he argued,

The trouble is that the enemy we are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan have discovered one very important facet of the modern western psyche: we want our battles short and successful. If they turn out to be bloody, protracted and uncertain, our will weakens. In particular, the loss of our soldiers demoralises and depresses us....And of course in the media age of today, it is played out in real time, in real life-and in real life, war has never, not from the first to the last, been anything other than horrible.¹

The continuing War in Afghanistan has led a growing majority of British people, as indicated by opinion polls, to question “is this war worth the cost?” This question will, in all likelihood, re-emerge for the next war. The War in Afghanistan has also demonstrated that even where public support exists in the early stages of a war, this is no guarantee of lasting support.

HMG must proactively seek to manage public support and adopt an approach that will give the prospect of enduring public support its best chance. To achieve this aim, this paper has highlighted that HMG must take action in a number of areas.

¹ Blair, *A Journey My Political Life*, 390.

Firstly, the military must be equipped for the war it is engaged in and readily available protective equipment is paramount. The UK military is at the height of its popularity, so broad, quantifiable support must be provided and then made public knowledge. Support priorities lie principally in the care for the wounded and the families of the dead, but thereafter, must incorporate all the recommendations, including legal recognition, as put forward by the task force investigating the Military Covenant.

Secondly, HMG must conduct a historical analysis to prepare for potential media responses. An understanding of the media business is required and relationships developed within it to prevent, or minimise, the effect of the media driving a “wedge” between the leadership and the public. The media owes no allegiance to the state and none should be expected.

Thirdly, HMG must secure political consensus for the war in as many spheres as possible. Consensus must start within British politics, because a powerful anti-war voice at the political level will heavily influence the public. International consensus from organisations such as the UN is required alongside a legal mandate justifying military action. The anti-war voice will be energised if there is not a sound legal basis for war. Coalitions must be drawn up carefully and the pain of war should be shared equitably where possible.

Fourthly, the war aims must be clear, consistent and easily understood by the public. Where there is a necessity for change, then this must be delivered in a forthright manner and the reasons why explained to prevent media criticism and wider accusations of confused aims.

Finally, HMG must deliver its message far more effectively. HMG must speak with

one voice at the leadership level and this will require empowered strategic communications representation within the Cabinet. Good news and progress in the conduct of the war must be delivered to the public; therefore regular engagement with the public, focused upon the war and delivered by the right members of the leadership, is required. A common lexicon is required to ensure that the message delivered uses the right language and remains coherent regardless of the messenger. HMG must strive to routinely counter “Talking Heads,” as inaccuracies or expert opinion, that undermines public support, must not stand unchallenged.

To gain and maintain public support is not an exact science, but for HMG to remain passive in the competition for public support is foolhardy. This thesis offers a number of recommendations that will increase the likelihood of success in gaining and maintaining public support in a time of war. Following the UK experience in Afghanistan, the British people will no longer blindly or indefinitely support our wars and public support must be earned and managed. The British people will demand an understanding of the war aims, the costs in terms of “blood and treasure,” the legal basis for the war and its duration. HMG must deliver on each of these demands and keep delivering, or future wars, especially when protracted, will no longer be practicable.

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Lieutenant Colonel Darren J. Denning

Most recently Lieutenant Colonel Denning was the Second in Command of the 2nd Battalion The Rifles based in Ballykinler, Northern Ireland. In this appointment he deployed to Afghanistan as the Chief of Staff of the 2 Rifles Battle Group based in Sangin, Helmand Province.

Lieutenant Colonel Denning was commissioned into the Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Regiment (RGBW) in 1995. Early regimental duty was spent in the Light and Air Assault Infantry roles where he served as an Infantry Platoon Commander, Anti-tank Platoon Commander, Company Second in Command, on operations in Northern Ireland, and Regimental Signals Officer. In 2003 he deployed as the Chief of Staff to the UK element of the Iraq Survey Group in Baghdad. On his return to the UK he assumed command of a Rifle Company, with which he deployed on operations in Kosovo and the Falkland Islands, and completed a period of ceremonial public duties in London. In 2005 he was appointed as an operations planner in Headquarters Allied Rapid Reaction Corps in Rheindahlen, Germany. In this appointment he deployed to Headquarters International Security Assistance Force in Kabul, Afghanistan. Lieutenant Colonel Denning also spent a year commanding The Rifles recruit training company at the Infantry Training Centre prior to assuming his appointment with 2 Rifles.