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Summary

- HMG should consider fundamental changes to the way it analyses strategic problems. These new requirements are not created by the unfolding global pandemic, but by the need for a persistent whole-of-government approach to compete, and if necessary, confront multiple adaptive opponents who have long-term strategies to remake the international order.
- HMG would be well-served to make innovation at the strategic level a priority and to resist overreliance on new technologies and efforts at the tactical and operational level to solve strategic problems. Strategic innovation requires new concepts, methods and analytical processes.
- In addition to defining “long-term strategic aims” for national security and foreign policy, HMG should consider articulating and distinguishing between theories of success and theories of victory.
- Novel strategic analytical wargaming methods hold potential for developing and testing theories of success and victory but are currently underdeveloped.
- Continuous strategic net assessment comparing evolving UK’s theories of success and victory against those of other actors in different contexts can contribute to evidence-based strategy development and implementation.

The Need for Adapting Existing Methodologies and Analytical Capabilities

1. The unfolding global health crisis will have short and long-term effects on the threats and risks to the UK. It will influence existing challenges involving “the economic and military balance of power”, “competition between states” and the “threat from non-state actors”.¹ While the COVID-19 pandemic adds uncertainty to the domestic and international security context, the findings of the 2018 Modernising Defence Programme remain increasingly relevant: “States will continue to engage in aggressive competition unless deterred from doing so. Technologies – established and novel – will continue to evolve at great speed.”²
2. The rapidly developing strategic environment creates new analytical requirements for understanding the evolving challenges to deterrence and defence, and for adapting UK strategy, doctrine and capabilities. While the pandemic creates the need for new analysis, it is not the major driver for changes to the way we do analysis. The UK and its allies need to persistently compete against, and if necessary, confront multiple adaptive opponents who have long-term revisionist strategies and capabilities that can threaten the very existence of the UK. This creates the need to adapt existing and create new methodologies and analytical capabilities.
3. While many have lamented the strategic atrophy in the West,³ Russia and China have been investing in strategic innovation⁴ across military and non-military domains. Their

¹ Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015

² Modernising Defence Programme 2018

³ Providing for the Common Defense: The Assessment and Recommendations of the National Defense Strategy Commission, November 2018

⁴ Strategic innovation is a process of developing novel and useful ideas on the means and ends of national

innovation has been disruptive; it has “reconceptualised warfare and reimagined conflict”⁵ and is resulting in the emergence of a new multipolar world order. These actors can effectively operate below the threshold of armed conflict to achieve significant strategic effects, while having the capabilities to escalate to regional and major war (including the use of nuclear weapons).

4. As HMG conducts “the most radical reassessment of [the UK’s] place in the world since the end of the Cold War,”⁶ it will consider “harnessing new technologies and ways of thinking.”⁷ It would be well-served to make innovation at the strategic level a priority and to resist overreliance on new technologies to solve strategic problems.
5. In the context of the Integrated Review, strategic innovation requires that strategy development and implementation be underpinned by new concepts, methods and analytical processes. Some examples are offered below based on my research on grey-zone crises and strategic conflict at the Centre for Science and Security Studies, King’s College London and my role as director and founder of the King’s Wargaming Network, which aims to advance wargaming as a method of inquiry and as a method for learning and teaching.

New Strategic Concepts: Theories of Success and Victory

6. In addition to defining “long-term strategic aims” for national security and foreign policy, HMG should consider articulating theories of success. To be well prepared for conflicts that are unavoidable, HMG should also consider developing theories of victory. The two sets of theories are related but distinctly different.
7. A theory is a collection of concepts and principles to describe, explain and evaluate real-world phenomena. Theories of success are the principles and logic for achieving strategic objectives in peacetime, crisis and conflict that account for interactions with other actors.⁸ Theories of victory are “plausible set of principles for overcoming an enemy” in conflicts that present zero-sum dilemmas.⁹ Both sets of theories are not strategies; they reflect a fundamental understanding of underlying phenomena in a competitive environment and their logics of interaction to allow the UK to act strategically.
8. Distinguishing between the requirements for success and victory is important.¹⁰ For example, UK strategic objectives are likely to conflict with Russia and China’s in some, but not all, circumstances, so a zero-sum relationship with competitors and adversaries cannot be assumed. However, competing, zero-sum, interests and objectives could plausibly lead to local, regional or major war, including the use of nuclear weapons.
9. UK theories of success and victory should be continuously adapted based on systematic collection and evaluation of evidence, including real-world data and subjective expert judgement in future crisis and conflict scenarios. Such theories, when tested, can inform strategic decisions in the appropriate forum to maximise the chances of achieving desirable outcomes.

security and international stability, and the implementation of these ideas.

⁵ Peter Roberts, “Designing Conceptual Failure in Warfare,” *RUSI Journal* 162 (1) (2017): 14, 23.

⁶ Boris Johnson, <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/lln-2020-0028/>

⁷ Boris Johnson, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-outlines-new-review-to-define-britains-place-in-the-world>

⁸ See also: Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Free Press 2002), 33, 177. Frank G. Hoffman, “The Missing Element in Crafting National Strategy: a Theory of Success,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 97 (2nd Quarter 2020): 55-64.

⁹ Brad Roberts, “On Theories of Victory, Red and Blue”, Livermore Paper, forthcoming.

¹⁰ Ivanka Barzashka and Brad Roberts, “Victory and Success in Strategic Theory,” forthcoming.

10. Theories of success and victory are needed to address the full set of challenges in an integrated way. They are essential for the fusion of cross-government activities, and the effective and efficient advancement of national interests and allocation of resources in a competitive environment over the long-term.

New Methods: Analytical Strategic Wargaming

11. To develop and test theories of success and victory, HMG can leverage emerging analytical methods in combination with proven approaches. Here, novel analytical wargaming methods that aggregate subjective expert judgement on strategic decisions and the outcomes of these decisions in synthetic environments hold potential. However, analytical wargaming at the strategic level remains underdeveloped.
12. Wargaming is not an established academic discipline. It has been practiced more as an art than a science mostly for the purpose of operational and tactical military training. However, the theory and practice of wargaming need to be more scientific if wargames are to underpin strategy development and aid strategic decision making.¹¹ This entails a more rigorous and systematic approach to wargaming that is also subject to peer-review.
13. The Ministry of Defence has an “intention [...] to reinvigorate wargaming [...], at all levels and continuously develop it”.¹² The creation of a Defence Wargaming Centre within DSTL in Jan 2020 is a step in this direction, but more needs to be done to ensure analytical wargaming is “supported by technology to the fullest extent, [has] proper analysis and exploitation of results.”¹³
14. Most strategic wargaming at the Cabinet level now takes the form of one-off table-top exercises. According to senior UK officials, these exercises create “visceral experiences” for participants and are thus useful tools for increasing strategic fluency.¹⁴ However, these events are missed opportunities for strategic analysis, as they are not designed nor intended for this purpose.
15. UK allies are increasingly using wargames to improve “understanding of complex, uncertain environments and the changing character of warfare” and “identify how to exploit new opportunities, hedge against discontinuities and craft long-term strategies.”¹⁵ Universities and think tanks are conducting a growing number of strategic wargames with current and former officials and subject matter experts. The lack of shared methods and datasets make cumulative learning across games and across institutions difficult.
16. Wargaming data from outside of government could be leveraged for both long and short-term assessments. Near real-time crowdsourcing of both expert and non-expert judgement to map out the possibility space in evolving crises is technologically feasible and could be leveraged to inform strategic decisions.

New Analytical Processes: Strategic Net Assessment

¹¹ Ivanka Barzashka, “Wargaming: How to Turn Vouge into Science”, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 15 March 2019, <https://thebulletin.org/2019/03/wargaming-how-to-turn-vogue-into-science/>

¹² Edward Stringer, “Advancing the UK’s Analytical Tools to Address Strategic Competition and Modern Deterrence.” 2 April 2019, King’s College London, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0hUvsvhdQ>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Out-Thinking Competitors through Strategic Wargaming: Assessing the Contributions of Analytical Wargaming to Address Strategic Competition and Modern Deterrence,” 21 May 2019, Workshop, King’s College London

¹⁵ Memo to Pentagon Leadership on Wargaming, 9 Feb 2015, <https://news.usni.org/2015/03/18/document-memo-to-pentagon-leadership-on-wargaming>

17. To effectively and efficiently develop and implement strategic objectives in the context of state competition, HMG should engage in continuous strategic net assessment to understand what we are competing over and under what circumstances competition could transition to war. This analytical process should be based not on comparing military balances but on comparing evolving UK's theories of success and victory against those of other actors in different contexts.
18. The MOD has created a Strategic Net Assessment Unit intended to “[look] across all dimensions of competition,”¹⁶ but this capability remains underfunded and underutilised for strategy development. To effectively integrate the non-military and military considerations necessary for understanding strategic competition, grey-zone crises and modern war, SNA activities may be better situated at the Cabinet level.
19. NATO has created a new net assessment capability intended to look at competition with Russia in the Euro-Atlantic region. Although this initiative is still in its infancy and has not been officially endorsed by allies, it could provide a future platform for sharing concepts, methods and organisational best practices.
20. Cumulative learning across government departments and with allies and partners would be required to enable the development of integrated strategy. This would involve an increased effort in systematically comparing classified and unclassified data and analysis.

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¹⁶ Gavin Williamson, Modernising Defence Programme – Update, 19 July 2018, <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-07-19/HCWS883/>;